

# MEMOIRS AND CONJECTURES

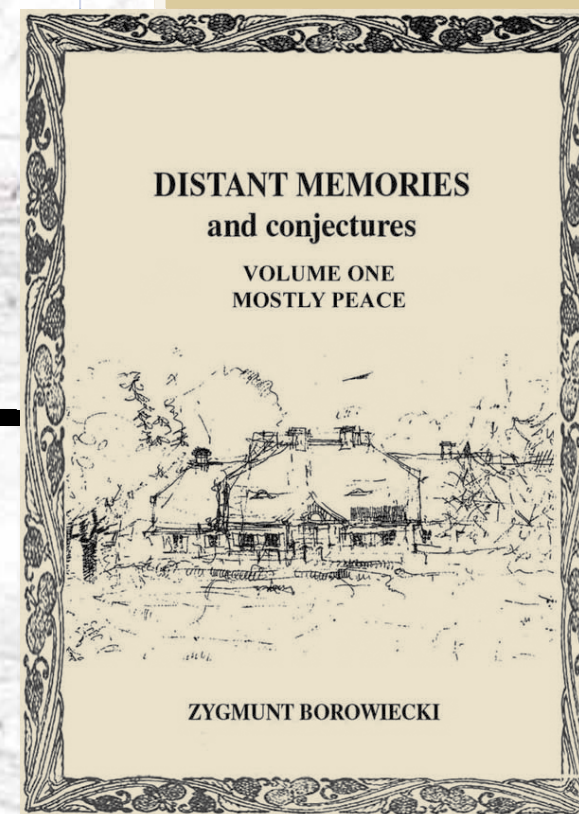
(extracts)

## MEMOIR OF PEACE AND WAR IN POLAND

By Zygmunt Borowiecki



Drawing of St Paul's Cathedral, London By Zygmunt Borowiecki 1947



*...After graduation my father **WACLAW GERWAZY BOROWIECKI** started his architectural career in Riga where he ultimately became a partner of a German architect von Friezendorff. With the beginning of the 1st world war, thanks to his additional engineering qualifications, he was called up and made the C.O. of an “Autokolumna”, a motorised transport unit of the Russian Army.*





*My mother and father*

I have to mention, with full respect to the old Russian Army, that his rank was so elevated that he never had to drive a car and consequently never learned how to do it.

He had met my mother a few years before in Riga. She was staying at the time with her German cousins called GUENTHER von HEIDELSHEIM in Riga and often with the family of her uncle, a retired Russian general von TENBERG, at his family estate in Finland.

My parents married in 1910. When the war started, my mother joined the Russian army as a Red Cross sister attached to my father's unit. She was already pregnant, and I was born in Moscow, in transit from the evacuated fortress of Grodno to the Caucasian front.

All three of us were together right through the war. When my parents were quartered in Tyflis (Tbilisi), a town in Georgia, I had a male nanny-bodyguard, a hired Kurdish highlander. My parents had a photo of him dressed in dark long caftan, with ivory bandoliers across his chest, a fur hat, a rifle in his hand and me on his arm. I was then over two years old and already talking. He picked up some Polish words from me. His name was Abbas Bakir Bek Bekov.

A year after the outbreak of the 1917 revolution, the „Autokolumna“, consisting almost entirely of Polish drivers and mechanics totally indifferent to either „Bolshevik“ or „white“ politics made a dash across the Caucasian Mountains to the embarkation port of Poti and then by sea to Odessa and by train to Poland.

They escaped as a lorry-mounted unit under the command of my father. The lorries, all on solid rubber tyres were obviously quite capable of tackling the mountain passes of the old „Caucasian War Road“ and ultimately all three of us reached Poland.

After the war my father after spending some time in Ciechanow, was for a few years the county architect of Kielce, the capital of a district in central Poland. After a



*Zygmunt and Wacek as children*

few years he took over the private practice of a deceased architect W. Nowakowski and ran it for the rest of his life. He died of a heart attack in 1952 at the age of 74.

Mt Father's older Sister was MARIA, „aunt Manusia“, mathematician, teacher and author of several mathematical textbooks and books on pedagogy and adult education. Several of her books can still be found in the British Library in London.

An adult education activist and a socialist she was a most intense, „committed“ and saintly person with very little sense of humor; not for lack of trying of course. Although quite good looking she never married.

She suffered a mild paralytic stroke in the third year of the last war, from which she almost completely recovered while compelled to take quite an active part in the Warsaw insurrection at the age of well over seventy. She lived for several years after the war, much respected and very busy in the Adult Education Institute in Warsaw.

The youngest was my uncle STEFAN JOZEF who was undoubtedly the intellectual of the family. He was a doctor, psychiatrist and a university professor. He ultimately became a rector of Poznan University.

After the last war in London, my friends recommended an eminently good Jewish dentist, Dr.Wandstein. On seeing my name he asked me whether I was related to a psychiatrist Professor Stefan Borowiecki. When I told him that I was his nephew he told me that, when he had been badly wounded in 1920 while fighting in the Polish war against Soviet Russia, my uncle, who had been treating him as an army doctor, not only saved his life but also cured his paralysed right arm by hypnosis. Although his arm didn't regain the ability to feel pain or temperature Dr.Wandstein was able to use it in the most complicated dental operations.

My uncle, an accomplished pianist didn't talk very much when he was staying with us but played Bach most of the time; on our old rather good upright piano. My



*Mother, Zygmunt and Wacek*

mother, whose musical tastes inclined to Chopin, thought it rather boring. Practically a teetotaler, he died in 1937 of a heart attack at the age of 52.

To this day I regret his early death. I had just emerged from post-teenage stupidity (at the age of 22 after I had finished the course at the officers school of artillery in which I was doing my national service). I had matured very much in the last two years and I had hoped to have many more interesting conversations with him. On the rare occasions when we talked together before I had always felt that he wasn't really interested in what I was saying but how I was saying it and why. Although resenting it a little, I was also quite flattered by his, as I realise now, rather clinical interest in me...

...In 1924 my father resigned from his position of County Architect and took over the private practice of an architect called Nowakowski who had recently died. The practice was running several small jobs in and around Kielce and a large complex of infantry barracks in Bukówka on the outskirts of the town. About the same time my father was commissioned to design several new churches in the Diocese of Kielce where he also became the conservator of the existing churches and diocesan buildings. In this capacity he also designed and supervised the conversions and enlargements of the several old village churches. Ultimately ecclesiastical buildings and army barracks became the main lines of his practice.

He employed three assistants — Mr. Witold Klebowski an Architect, Mr. Tygan and Mr. Jerzy Saski both building technicians and we had to move to a large house to accommodate the office as well.

My parents rented a rambling, turn-of-the-century house with a high mansard roof. It had several enormous rooms on two floors and two acres of old, neglected fruit garden in ulica Bazarowa (Market Street). The orchard was full of gnarled old fruit trees, very good for climbing,



*Mother and Zygmunt*

which, although never looked after, bore an enormous variety of good sweet fruit.

The garden had also two tribes of small ants — one of black ants and another of yellow ants — with a system of several well established nests and highways, all carefully segregated as a result of past conflicts and wars. By artificially crossing and linking their separate well trodden roads I was able to start interminable wars which used to last for weeks on end.

I had then lots of time in hand because my mother and the doctors managed to keep me away from school for about a year. Having some teaching experience from her young days in Riga — she used to help some of her younger German cousins with their homework — she managed to educate me quite reasonably at home.

The garden become my domain and kept me happy and reasonably sane. It was bordered on all sides by a wilderness of tangled lilac and hazel bushes.

The strong hazel stems were best for bows and swords and the gently tapering straight lilac twigs for ar-





Kielce Main Street



Church designed by my father in Grzegorzewice

rows. The bows had wire reinforced strings and were used in shoot-outs with colleagues and friends of mine who had a standing invitation to come and play with me and my little brother. All this armory was used in wars and battles which were raging in our garden.

Sometimes we had nearly a dozen boys roaming the garden and playing cowboys and Indians, or re-enacting battles and skirmishes remembered from Polish history. Fencing with hazel sticks was the order of the day and hazel bows and lilac arrows were used in sieges and ambushes. Arrows were usually sharpened to a fine point and during one of the battles I jumped down from a tree shouting, "Look, I am wounded". The arrow was sticking from my eye, wedged between the socket-bone and the eye-ball. I pulled the arrow out leaving a hole in the eyelid which somehow didn't bleed at all, but I had a very black eye for quite a long time.

I also had some other solitary martial interests. My mother showed me how to make a gun-powder type explosive, mixing sugar, saltpetre, charcoal and sulphur. I remember that I was already careful and scheming enough to buy these ingredients separately from several different shops and chemists.

The explosions were of a rather volcanic character, occasionally blowing up our sandpit but mostly fizzling out slowly like small sulphurous volcano craters. One such volcano kept belching out yellow, stinking and eye-smarting smoke for about a day and half, alerting and annoying the whole neighborhood.

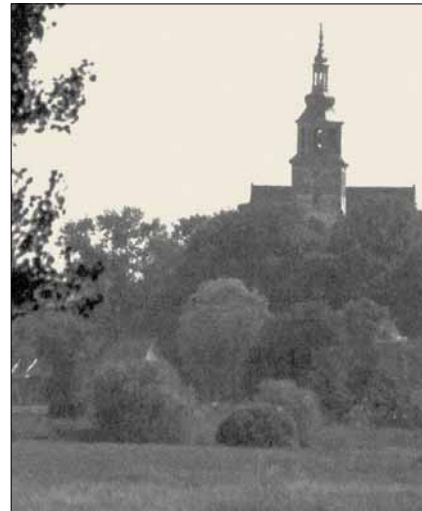
I also had several toy guns of the type called "cork gun" ("korkowiec"). The ammunition was made of bottle corks with a blob of match-head type explosive embedded in the hole in the rear end of the cork. The cork was

tightly muzzle-loaded into the barrel of the gun, and the trigger released a spring-loaded pin which hit and ignited the very loud charge. The cork missile had a very high initial velocity but being light was also quite harmless. I later discovered that explosive cork stuck back to front on the tip of the bow-arrow made spectacular explosion on hitting the target. The explosion, although very loud, did as much harm as a Christmas cracker.

One day I created pandemonium by shooting such an arrow through the open window of a room full of businessmen waiting to see my father. The arrow, shot through the open window, exploded hitting the wall over their heads. Although quite shocked, the waiting clients had fortunately a sense of humor equal to their business sense; they were building sub-contractors, builder's merchants and artisans touting for work and some of them were also great friends of my father.

Television not having been invented, I read everything in sight: stacks of old newspapers, journals and volumes and volumes of 19th century novels, long-forgotten old plays and travel books. I also read an 18th century translations of Herodotus and Tacitus and Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. It would be quite impossible to list everything I read so avidly, so that I mention only the most bizarre and the most important.

I read very thoroughly several volumes of 19th century forgotten medical journals, full of sometimes gruesome details and case histories, which somehow found their way to our bookshelves. My parents also subscribed to several sometimes explicitly shocking, illustrated avant-garde literary magazines. Both kind of reading were my important sources of learning about the facts of life.



Churches in Lopuszno and Mniow

In addition the keen and strictly forbidden "Tom-peeping" on various copulating animals, officially and ceremoniously performed in remote corners of the Różaniec farmyards added the substance to my sex education. ("Różaniec" — "The Rosary" — the large farm of my doctor-uncle where we used to spend with my mother all our summer vacations).

Coming back to the more respectable side of my interests and of my reading, I used to page over and over again through several linen-bound volumes of the pre-war Studio Yearbook, which my father had managed to salvage after the war from his Riga studio.

They had many photographs and drawings of beautiful country houses, vicarages, parsonages and manors designed by Voysey, Mackintosh, Bailey-Scott and their contemporaries. I think they must have influenced the architectural part of me for the rest of my life.

We also had at home several horsy books, both of my parents being keen riders and horse lovers in their young days. Both my brother and I were literally nurtured on these books. The enormous linen-bound book of Juliusz Kossak, a mid-19th painter, was always laid out open on our nursery table. The book was full of reproductions of sketches and paintings of "taboos" (herds) of feral horses, cavalry charges, heroic deaths on the battlefield, skirmishes, jousting and wolf-hunts. On top of these monochromes there were also many very good colour reproductions of his major paintings representing mid-19th century country life, horses, hunts and famous events and battles of Polish history.

The sad sequel is that the originals of all these large, middle of the 19th century water colour paintings began to turn into faded near-monochromes by the end of the first quarter of this century. Juliusz Kossak must have used

unsuitable water-colours and only the high quality colour reproductions of this book made at the turn of the century have retained their original colours.

We also had a large book on the horse and horse-origins and races related to the history of the world. The book was illustrated with reproductions of paintings, engravings and photographs from the oldest to the most recent. The very witty and scholarly text was read and re-read by all of us.

My father also had a very comprehensive linen-bound vet's manual, by Prof. Vetulani, with detailed illustrated descriptions of horse breeding, maintenance, illnesses, cures and anatomy of the horse with very good photographs and drawings. He also had on his shelves the fat illustrated volume of sentimental and somewhat sycophantic histories of famous Polish horse breeders and their studs with a lot of reproductions of portraits and photographs of their stud farms with famous Arabian and thorough-bred stallions and brood mares.

Most of these studs were in south-eastern Poland and belonged, almost without exception, to Polish landed gentry grown rich and titled, thriving on the political stability of this part of Poland which was annexed by the Austrian Empire at the time of partition at the end of 19th century. Some of these magnificent stallions and beautiful mares were often bought and transported overland by the owners themselves directly from Arabia. Most of the illustrations were really good reproductions of nineteenth century sepia photographs.

On top of all this, later on I read over and over again a book written by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, the daughter of the painter Juliusz Kossak, herself one of the best Polish writers of the day. The title of the book was "Pozoga" (nearest correct English translation of this word would be





ZB 2nd Light Artillery, Kielce



Col. Dabrowski

Gen. Devine

a blend of "Conflagration", "Blaze" and "Holocaust"). The book was a large, beautifully written documentary, describing in detail the plight and the extermination of the many landed gentry of eastern Poland and the destruction of their estates and manors by the Soviet armies and local communists during 1917 revolution and the following 1920 Polish war of Independence.

No wonder that, in the event of not becoming a famous general, I regarded death in a cavalry charge as the alternative and most fitting glorious end of a gentleman's life. Because of my early reading all my chivalrous dream battles turned into imaginary revenge wars as well. That made me train myself to become a most effective and efficient avenger.

Digressing forward in time, when I was twenty one the national service selection board decided to train me in the more effective art of gunnery instead of my preferred choice of cavalry. Thus becoming more brainy than the average foot or horse soldier and suffering from a chronic lack of opportunity for heroics, and very seldom being in the right place at the right time and even less frequently saying the right things to the right people, I spent my wartime working in the fringe intelligence of the resistance and later on as a field intelligence officer in the 104th Regiment of the A.K. (Home Army — the underground armed forces commanded by the Polish Government in London).

Digressing further into the future I ended my war as an A.D.C. to col. "Bohun-Dabrowski" (Antoni Skarbek) the C.O. of the "Holy Cross Brigade" of the "N.S.Z." ("National Armed Forces" — another Polish resistance organisation which was fighting not only against Germans but also against armed communist bands).

Towards the end of the war when the victorious Soviet armies were advancing through Poland the Brigade was ordered to withdraw through Germany and Czechoslovakia

in order to escape from communist Russians and to join the western allies. I was then seconded to the Brigade by the A.K. Intelligence Command in Kielce.

So much for my dreams of becoming a famous general or attaining a glorious gentlemanly end in a cavalry charge. As far as my dream-war of revenge is concerned I failed to take advantage of the frequent opportunities which happened during my wartime adventures, not only because the occasions did not seem heroic enough but also my hate of communists mellowed somehow with age and experience.

At this time, at the end of 1944 while I was still a field intelligence officer of the A.K. battalion I was put temporarily in command of a platoon which was taking part in securing an enormous area of Samsonów Forest for a large air-borne supply operation. The planes were dropping weapons, equipment and occasional agents from Italy and Britain.

In the adjoining area of the Forest two Russian intelligence captains with their field radio station and its crew were also parachuted down expecting a "reception committee" and all the necessary back-up of the People's Army — Polish communist partisan organisation. They said that they had been badly let down by the communists who, panicked by a stray German supply column which was transporting firewood collected in the forest, had disappeared by the time the landing took place.

The Soviet parachutists, beautifully equipped, together with the radio outfit and its crew were led by two front intelligence captains: a Ukrainian Cpt. Anatolij Olejnik- Babuszkin and a Czech Cpt. Jurek Piotrowski.

When, after being alerted by our outposts, I met them in the over-grown forest glade dripping wet with morning dew, they were already in good well-secured marching order in spite of their troubled landing.



Zigmunt Borowiecki

The Captains, dressed in civilian dark winter overcoats, elegant grey trilby hats and black city shoes, were carrying umbrellas and leather brief-cases filled mostly, as we found later, with bottles of vodka. Their soldiers were well equipped, had the latest Russian sub-machine guns P.P.S. and some of them wore green suede sand-boots from English air-drop supplies.

One of the Captains explained their predicament to me and asked for protection and permission to encamp within the area secured by my outposts. Permission granted they turned out to be excellent companions, and one of the Captains, when thoroughly drunk, tearfully apologised for the extermination of thousands Polish officers in Katyn by, as he said, "these dreadful political commissars". They also had an unbelievable ability to stay neat and clean when camping or even sleeping rough. All the time that I spent with my Captains in the forest they kept their city clothes on. I shall describe this complicated episode and its final implications in more detail in my wartime reminiscences...

...To help with my story I have to digress now to the recent political history of Poland in the ten years preceding the start of the 2nd World War.

In 1926 the parties of the ruling coalition and the democratically elected president Wojciechowski were removed from power by the military Coup d'Etat of marshal Pilsudski. The coup was welcomed by most of the enlightened and progressive public opinion although, in the process it ousted from the coalition government not only the right wing National Democrats but also the other coalition members, Polish Socialist Party, Christian Democratic Party and a small-peasant-farmers' party called Peoples' Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe) the leader of which, Wincenty Wi-

tos happened to be the Prime Minister of the government ousted by the Coup.

The parliamentary process was abandoned and until the beginning of the second world war the country was ruled by the, on the whole enlightened and quite liberal, military junta headed by Pilsudski and after his death by his successors and the appointed by him president Moscicki.

The coup happened because, thanks to the differences and frictions between the ruling coalition parties, the country was sliding into utter chaos and anarchy. Either a left wing Marxist government or a take-over by the extreme reactionary and anti-Semitic elements of the right wing parties appeared to be imminent.

Most of the senior officers involved in the coup were regular officers of Pilsudski's Legion and some of them para-military activists of the Polish Socialist Party which was led by Pilsudski himself, who organised armed resistance against Russia during the Russo-Japanese war and at the time of the 1905 socialist disturbances.

At the beginning of the first world war in 1915 Pilsudski formed, in conjunction with the Austrian army, the Polish Legion which was fighting on the eastern front of the Central Powers against tsarist Russia. After the war and the collapse of the Central Powers Pilsudski's Legion became, a nucleus of the army of the emerging independent Poland which absorbed hundreds of thousands of conscripted Polish soldiers and some semi-mercenary regulars of various nationalities from the Russian army, which had disintegrated during the revolution, and from the remnants of the defeated German and Austrian forces.

This new army was supplemented by the volunteer Corps of the General Dowbór-Musnicki attached to the White Russian Army and the Corps of Polish Volunteers in light blue uniforms which fought under the command of General Haller against the Germans on the side of the French Army. They were P.O.W.'s of Polish nationality drafted by the German and Austrian and captured by the French.

This new Polish army, integrated, organised and led by Pilsudski with the aid of French Generals, halted and expelled the Soviet armies invading Poland in 1920.

After the 1926 Coup d'Etat the Polish parliament (the Sejm) became a talking shop dominated by an amorphous non-elected party calling itself "Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rzãdem". It can be loosely translated as "Non-partisan Consortium for Co-operation with the Government."

To add to this "Alice in Wonderland" confusion the original political parties, with the exception of the previously banned Communist Party, were allowed to exist

openly, to recruit new members and to carry on their political activities.

After several years of this sort of futile opposition the National Democratic Party, which by then changed its name to the National Party, was split from top to bottom by the 1933 O.N.R. secession. The difference between these parties was that the O.N.R. (Organisation of National Radicals) was totalitarian, socially radical and openly violent in its tactics.

During the last couple of years at my school in Kielce I had realised that none of the deposed political parties nor the organisations of the government supporters were sufficiently conservative and authoritarian for my congenital reactionary inclinations.

I had been day-dreaming about the restitution of Polish monarchy, and a strong paternalistic government which would wage a total war against Soviet Russia, avenging all the horrors of the 1917 revolution, and regaining the provinces of eastern Poland lost to Soviet Russia. This would ultimately re-create the ancient Commonwealth of Poles, Lithuanians and Ruthenians stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

My hate of communism was reinforced by the reliable and actually true information about Stalin's genocidal horrors which were filtering to us through the borders with adjoining Russia.

The advent of totalitarian anti-Communist regimes in Europe also gave me hope that the resulting political upheaval may bring the war of my day-dreams closer to reality.

I also came to the conclusion that the democratic countries of western Europe would be too weak and unwilling to oppose the eventual Soviet aggressive take-over and we would have to rely on an alliance with the growing military power of the emergent fascist countries and our own strength of the Polish state organised on conservative and authoritarian lines.

It was at this stage of the development of my political thinking that I learned about O.N.R., its ideology and activities. Although it was too populist and not as imperialist and authoritarian as were my juvenile proclivities when, as I have mentioned previously, I was approached by the O.N.R. activists at the admission offices of the Polytechnic. I was persuaded by them to join their "propaganda section".

The activities of this section were, to begin with, less exciting than I expected. Divided into small groups we started distributing propaganda leaflets and the weekly rag of the O.N.R. called "Sztafeta" at the Polytechnic and around the adjoining quarters of Warsaw. During these rather boring chores and forays we were harassed by or-

ganised groups of left-wing and communist students and gangs brought from outside the Polytechnic.

(I remember that one of the active leaders of one of these gangs was a known communist called Ruminski.)

They were all either communists or members of the Legion of Youth. The "Legion of Youth" ("Legjon Młodych") was an organisation of young government supporters which after its inception was infiltrated and practically taken over by crypto-communists.

(I suspect now that Ryszard Bialous and his girlfriend Krystyna Blonska, my colleagues at the Department, could have belonged at that time to these under-cover activists of the L.M.. Both their names were of White Russian émigré parentage. They were both, somewhat older and more mature, colleagues of mine in the first year of architecture. Ryszard Bialous, an active senior Scout, became subsequently one of the famous heroes of the Warsaw Insurrection in 1945. I met him in London at the beginning of 1947, shortly before he returned to Poland. I told him all about my wartime adventures. He told me then that I must definitely start writing my memoirs before I forget it all)

At Polish universities before the war only a very determined minority of the students belonged to this left-wing alliance. Gradually the ensuing brawls developed into running skirmishes and whenever they happened near larger demonstrations or meetings real battles developed.

We were armed with knuckle-dusters, batons etc. and some shots were fired. This brought some excitement to these, until then rather tedious events. The uniformed and armed state police very rarely intervened and were quite civilised when they did. Maybe because of this, in spite of all the noise and commotion, the resulting damage and injuries, compared with similar disturbances in other countries of Europe, were minimal.

This reminds me of a little of the joke about the recent revolution in Portugal, which brought down the rather benevolent paternalistic dictator Salazar. This tumultuous revolution raged for two years but the only casualties were a lieutenant, his wife and their dog when their car was shot at by mistake at a road block. This makes me think that perhaps the Portuguese like Poles are not only less effective revolutionaries but also more civilised than most of the other nations of Europe.

In addition to our usual, so called propaganda, activities we started disrupting and heckling meetings of our opponents. Small groups of our organisation began roaming the centre of Warsaw after dark, carrying bricks in carrier bags, and breaking the windows of the offices of the various left-wing organisations and their journals and of the premises of the communist-dominated trade unions.



*The 'Lower Quadhouse in the Lower Corner of the Main Farmyard*

In the process many of the Jewish shop fronts were also smashed. It was explained to me when I had expressed my doubts about it, that most Jewish people were communist supporters anyway, and some of their young people were not only dedicated communists but also Soviet agents. These actions seemed to be exciting enough for me, a juvenile delinquent that I was, to shut up and not to press for any further explanations.

We had by then in our ranks a much smaller proportion of young students than before and at least half of our members happened to be much less politically motivated activists than just hooligans and dedicated thugs. They ranged from working and lower middle-class teenagers and young people to middle aged men in their forties, most of them unemployed.

A few of the older ones were veterans of the white Russian armies who joined the Polish army but left it with the end of 1920 war. Many of them weren't even Polish. We learned from them some street brawling techniques, but mostly lots of bawdy Russian barrack-room songs and hard drinking. All these window-breaking raids usually started and ended with heavy drinking. The police were often alerted by the noise and commotion, and lots of our people were pre-emptively arrested. I became fed up with all the inefficiency and stupidity of these operations and decided to show on my own what could be done with much less upheaval and commotion...

### Introduction

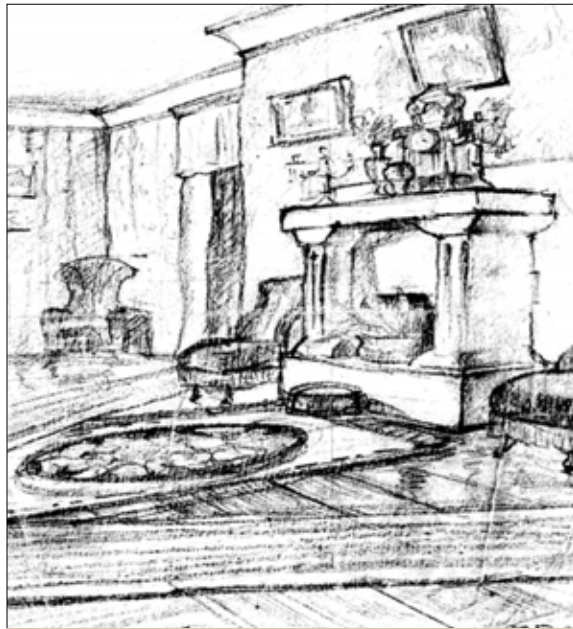
When Zygmunt became involved, in late 1944, with passing information to a Russian undercover unit and his identity was compromised, he was ordered to leave Poland as soon as possible. It was arranged that he should join the Holy Cross Brigade which was planning to make its way to the West between the German and Russian armies.

To make more credible the importance of getting Zygmunt out of Poland, the Brigade commander had been told that he was a delegate from the Polish Government in London. Zygmunt had not been told of this ruse and was very surprised that he was treated with such consideration. The Brigade had made its way across the mountains (in winter) to Czechoslovakia and after negotiations with the Wehrmacht, was based in an abandoned German training camp. It was from here that he was ordered to go to Berlin.

### "GUDERIAN PAPERS"

Czechoslovakia. — Brigade stopped by the Germans in its march westward and encamped in an abandoned German army training ground and artillery shooting range. Rozstani — Early spring 1945. In the middle of the refresher training course for officers I was ordered by my battalion Commanding Officer Capt."Gustaw" to report to Capt."Tom" in Brigade's H.Q.





"Salon" in Rozianec

Taken to Capt. "Tom's" room together with Paul de Hesse, a Cadet-Officer of A.K., a P.O.W., captured after the Warsaw Insurrection and freed by us from German convoy in action at Kotwitz — Silesia in February.

Orders given to us by Capt. "Tom": — leave by train early next morning for Berlin. Specific actions: — To visit a number of forced labour camps in the Berlin area to organise the release of certain detained individuals connected with A.K., N.S.Z. and other Polish resistance organisations. To get in touch, through various family connections of Paul de Hesse, with the H.Q. of R.O.A. ("Rossiejskaja Osvobodziennaja Armada"- "Russian Liberation Army") in Berlin. Paul's full family name was "de Hesse von Schoenschoenau" and the Polish branch of his international family had relations who were German, French, Russian, Georgian etc. He spoke several languages fluently.

We were to investigate the possibility of R.O.A.'s co-operation with the Brigade in support of western forces advancing into Czechoslovakia through the Pilzen area of Sudeten where R.O.A. — in which many thousands of Soviet Army defectors and P.O.W. volunteers were organised by the Russian General Vlasov and volunteered to join the armed forces of Germany. They had several of their armed units stationed in the area where the Brigade, on its march west, expected to meet the American 3rd Army.

It was also planned to attack and free some concentration camps in the area before their inmates could come to any harm from the desperate and vindictive S.S. guards.

We were going to travel in plain clothes and were given all the necessary railway passes. Capt. "Tom" also gave us 9mm semi-automatic pistols to be carried, gangster fashion, in shoulder holsters under our civilian jackets. He topped it up with wads of paper money and individual documents issued in our real names. The papers were headed "Front Aufkloerungs Commando 202" and were signed by Gen. Guderian who at this time commanded the German eastern front.

All these impressive looking papers didn't help us very much next morning — the railways were so disorganised and overcrowded with refugees moving west that we just about managed to jump onto the running board and ride holding to the door handles etc. and later finish the first leg of our journey sitting precariously on the narrow iron ladder over the buffers between the carriages whose roofs were already fully occupied. After several freezing hours we changed trains at the sidings of a big railway junction late at night, already in Germany.

We found an empty compartment reserved for Wehrmacht officers and blissfully fell asleep on soft velvety benches. We didn't wake up when the train started moving and it was only at day-break at some station that I was woken up by the enraged screams of several young German officers who had opened the door to our compartment. All this racket didn't wake Paul who slept curled up like a drunken sloth. I sat up and pulled out the documents from my pocket. The effect of these Guderian-signed papers presented by a bedraggled and unkempt dirty civilian was quite surprising and immediate. They saluted clicking their heels and backed out from the compartment mumbling some sort of inexplicable apologies.

When they left us I managed to wake Paul and told him what had happened. He didn't appear to be either surprised or impressed and locked himself up for a long time in the toilet off the carriage's corridor. As I was to learn later, his morning ablutions and grooming usually took at least half an hour or more, regardless of what was going on, and sometimes involved washing his whole body in cold water with a tooth-brush. I respected this healthy habit of his and always tried to plan our itinerary accordingly.

With his blond, faded balding hair, fuzzy baby-face, watery blue eyes, ginger eyelashes and tubby body, Paul looked a bit like an indignant albino beaver. He moved about with the pent-up slow motion of a hyperactive sloth. All this combined with a sharp sense of humour, quick wits, and ability to memorise long figures and small details as well as to retain in his head important, long information, made him not only an amusing companion but also a very useful additional memory bank. We couldn't

carry many notes, addresses, dates etc. on us and we had to keep the most important information in our heads.

But I had to look after him too because he could also be quite absent-minded. While changing trains the next night he left behind his canvas side-pack with some coded notes and spare ammunition. Fortunately we saw the train being shunted away to the nearby sidings. Without saying a word he trotted off into the maze of tracks and while I waited in the compartment of our new train, he came back in less than half an hour with an embarrassed grin on his face and the canvas pack on his arm.

He showed then how imperturbable, resourceful and sometimes fearless he could be in a tight corner. It was very difficult to guess his age — he could have been eighteen and he could equally have been taken for a healthy forty. I learned later that his age was then only twenty three. It was a surprisingly young age considering his fluency in so many languages.

We arrived late the next night in an enormous glass-vaulted hall of one of the large stations of central Berlin. Most of the glass had been blown out. The broken glass had been swept away and in some parts of the cast iron roof the structure was already replaced with some opaque or solid materials. Very windy, draughty and wet. Bearing in mind the continuous Allied air raids, everything seemed to be in remarkably good order. We tidied ourselves, washed and shaved in a large and clean basement lavatory with mirrors and running cold and hot water. We managed to persuade Paul to cut his grooming time to a necessary minimum. Taking our overcoats and jackets off to wash we exposed our guns in the under-arm holsters.

This unconcern must have confirmed our legitimate respectability in the eyes of the attendant, a grand-motherly looking old lady. She was about to close her establishment for the night and told us that she had a room to let. We immediately agreed to take it. It was so much easier than to look for Paul's cousins all over ruined Berlin. She locked up her loos well before midnight and took us to her flat which was about fifteen minutes walk away from the station. On our way there she introduced herself. Her name was Frau Kaolinski and she had a large family of several grown-up sons and daughters who now lived somewhere else with their families.

We had noticed that Berlin had been badly bombed and only about a third of its buildings were still standing undamaged. We were let in by a concierge who had already locked up the heavy gate-like door for the night. Frau Kaolinski lived on the top floor of an old-fashioned block of private flats with the lifts out of order. She insisted on sharing with us her small meal and we fell blissfully asleep in our very cosy small room, in real beds.

We stayed at Frau Kaolinski's during our long fortnight in Berlin. At least once a night we had to run several flights down to the cellars converted into an air raid shelter. With sirens wailing and bombs falling around, our shelter shook badly. The people who ran down from the other flats, although resigned and not very happy, didn't seem to be greatly panicked and managed to exchange jokes and occasional banter. After every explosion they thanked God that it was not us this time. The bombed streets were tidied up, as quickly as possible and bars and cafes stayed open till late every night. Most of them had been bombed out and moved to the partially-rebuilt ground floors of other destroyed streets and the bricked-up arches under the elevated Berlin railway, which was still operating with fair regularity.

Glazing in the entrances and display windows was reduced to a minimum and the small doors, kept open even in bad weather, were protected by heavy curtains. From behind some of them we could hear loud, very good music and singing. Most of the bars seemed to be open at all times. We couldn't resist spending a few evenings in some of them. Drinks were very expensive but once we had ordered something we could stay for a long time. Small quantities of food were served only occasionally when available. Frau Kaolinski insisted on sharing her meals with us, whenever she was off her lavatorial duties. We, in turn, used to bring some provisions which were easier for us to find in the stalls of street vendors during our wanderings around Berlin.

We had originally planned to squat in the homes of Paul's various international aristocratic relatives but, after a few days searching, we were unable to locate any of them in the largely destroyed Berlin except his Russian great aunt Tatiana de Hesse whom we found living graciously with her three silver angora cats in a grandly furnished but rather small flat in a leafy outer suburb. We realised how lucky we had been in meeting Mrs. Kaolinski. We declined Aunt Tatiana's invitation to stay in her tiny spare room despite her quite sincere insistence and explained to her the nature and urgency of our mission. Paul knew that her nephew was a high ranking staff officer at R.O.A.'s H.Q. She telephoned him immediately and arranged an appointment for us in his office for the next day.

We returned by the still running elevated train to our flat and next morning at the appointed hour entered R.O.A.'s H.Q. which was in a large, sprawling agglomeration of single-storey prefabs in a bombed-out part of Berlin. This area of the city was practically flattened by previous bombardments and the original town had been replaced by all sorts of temporary buildings strung along the still existing street pattern.

We were met by Paul's cousin in the uniform of a Wehrmacht officer already waiting for us in the reception office. He took us to a room where, after about a quarter of an hour of family news and gossip between him and Paul, we were joined by an elegant middle-aged staff officer whose rank and name I don't remember. I introduced myself showing our papers, described the nature of our mission and mentioned that we had tactical links with the British S.I.S. We had previously agreed with Paul that this deception, or if you prefer, impersonation of British intelligence agents, would help to persuade the R.O.A.'s command to accept our proposition. In the circumstances, in order to get what we wanted and get away with it, we wouldn't have hesitated to impersonate the Archangel Gabriel or even Lucifer himself.

The officer, who seemed to know already quite a lot about the Brigade, was fluent in as many languages as Paul. I noticed that during the interview conducted like a pleasant social conversation and which lasted more than an hour he had learned from us more than he would have achieved through a more formal questioning. At the conclusion of the meeting he said that they would co-operate with the proposed action but we would have to come back the following morning in order to collect all the coded details of radio communication, contact points with their units in the area etc. etc. .

We both knew that R.O.A. had some very dodgy connections and could not be trusted to be one hundred percent safe. We had also noticed in passing through that a few people in the offices had Waffen S.S. insignia. After a long deliberation back at Frau Kaolinski's, Paul volunteered that, as the better linguist and also because his family connections might give him a better chance to manoeuvre out of possible trouble, he would enter the H.Q. alone, leaving me to wait at a safe distance outside.

Next day, in the morning Paul walked into the H.Q. while I waited on the corner of a nearby side street observing the entrance. I had not only my 9mm W.I.S. in the holster but also Paul's pistol in the side pocket of my overcoat. In addition I had on me some spare magazines for both. If he came out of the building alone I would have to ignore him and follow him in order to make sure that he was not being tailed. If he came out with someone else, we had agreed on a signal which would tell me if it was safe to join them. Otherwise I would follow them and try to rescue him somehow. If he did not come out within two hours I would make my own way directly back to the Brigade.

He came out of the H.Q. after almost one hour and walked past without giving me even a wink. I followed him at a safe distance for about a mile looking carefully around. When I made sure that nobody was following us

I caught up with Paul. He gave me a wide grin and tapped the pocket of his overcoat. He had met only his cousin who gave him all the promised information. Some of it was coded but the rest of it was in notes which we would have to memorise and destroy. We had the rest of the day and the evening to do it at Frau Kaolinski's flat before she came back from her lavatorial duties.

Having finished the most important part of the mission we could then start our rounds of the labour camps. They were just outside of the outer suburbs and we had to use the infallible elevated railways which, fortunately, led to most of our destinations. The situation in Berlin was turning more and more chaotic. These were the last weeks before the capitulation and Hitler was firmly cooped up and isolated in his bunker.

We spent most of the nights lying low at Frau Kaolinski's and visited the camps only in daylight. In practically all cases we were successful in our mission. All the Camp Commandants, already quite demoralised, were visibly impressed by our credentials and released the selected people without creating any difficulties. I suspect that they knew the situation and had been ordered to follow our instructions. The freed prisoners in their turn moved promptly out of the camps to the prearranged points of contact which we gave them immediately on their release. They disappeared very quickly in order not to be in German hands at the time of the final collapse and we never saw them again.

In one, quite comical instance, we had interrupted the Camp Commandant's lunch. He was a florid, sergeant-major type, a fat middle-aged German dressed in the full regalia of the Arbeits-Dienst officer's uniform. When we knocked and walked unannounced into his room, he was eating from a large bowl of soup on a table covered with stacks of official papers and files. His face went red and, without getting up, he started screaming at the top of his voice — "Raus, raus, ferfluchte schweinhunde" and several similar words of German "feldfebel's" abuse.

He surprised and stunned Paul who, instead of starting the usual introduction in his perfect German, stood still with his mouth wide open. Not having much choice, I walked a few steps forward and slammed my fist on the table spilling some of the soup in the process. This in turn stunned our "feldfebel" and I had time to say quietly in my usual voice: "ruhe" (shut up) and to present my papers. His reaction was quite unbelievable, after looking at them he jumped to his feet and apologised clicking his heels. By that time Paul had regained his countenance and politely explained to him the purpose of our visit. He forgot about his soup and was very quick off the mark in finding our people in the camp and arranging their release. In fact he did all this much more thoroughly than the despondent

commandants of the other camps. He shook hands with us and saluted very smartly when we finally left his camp.

After getting all the needed information from R.O.A. and having arranged the release from the camps of most of the people on our list, we followed Capt. "Tom's" orders and reported to a sort of Wehrmacht office in an industrial suburb of Berlin.

The office was in an unlikely looking collection of small single-storey timber prefabs on the edge of the flattened ruins of an industrial estate. There was no sentry at the entrance and the whole office seemed to be too busy to notice us at all before we approached the reception desk. We had to interrupt the frantic typing of a very good looking blonde girl in uniform in order to explain who we were and what we wanted. The inter-connected rooms were full of young officers dashing in and out in all sorts of uniforms and of army girls, some of them carrying armfuls of papers and files. All of them looked remarkably cheerful in spite of the obvious disorganisation and mild panic.

The girl spoke to somebody on the telephone. One of the side doors opened immediately and we were waved in by a, not very smart and rather tired looking, middle-aged captain. On seeing our papers he asked us to sit down and spoke for a long time with somebody on the phone. As we expected he gave us the approximate up to date position of the Brigade which was already approaching the Sudeten in its march westward from Rozstani. He didn't have any messages for us from Capt. "Tom". Before we left his room he gave us the name and address of a Major we would have to meet before leaving Berlin.

The address was in one of the most expensive suburbs of Berlin. The house had a very large neglected front garden with an old chestnut-tree-lined avenue leading to its colonnaded porch. The front door was wide open and we were met in the entrance hall by a soldier in shirt-sleeves and braces. He led us through several rooms with large wall mirrors and some walls lined with maps to a large room which had several french windows opening onto the back garden full of old trees. On a leather sofa in the middle of the room our Major was sprawling in an unbuttoned elegant uniform.

His shiny, slightly old-fashioned riding boots had been obviously made by Hiszpanski, a most expensive Warsaw shoemaker favoured by high-ranking Polish pre-war officers. On a low coffee table stood a bottle of brandy and a few glasses.

Without getting up he carefully looked through our papers, sat up and said gently: "Kinder, kinder why don't you forget about all this and just take care of yourselves. Lie low and get out of Berlin as soon as you can manage.



*Concentration Camp "Holiszow"*

And by the way: don't show your papers to anybody you don't know".

(The importance of this last advice I can see only now having read the history of the last few weeks of the war: — Four weeks before the end of the war Hitler had issued orders deposing Guderian from his post suspecting him of planning to surrender to the Western allies.).

Before we left we had a few glasses of his very good brandy, and, after a short conversation, — his manners were as good as those of some regular officers of my 2nd Light Artillery, — we retraced our steps through all the map-lined rooms, entrance hall, chestnut drive and on to the street. The orderly didn't appear at all. It was only a few weeks before final collapse of Berlin.

On our way back to our hide-out at Frau Kaolinski's we met a couple of our compatriots who invited us to squat in their open labour-camp dormitory and lie low to wait for the imminent surrender of Germany. Luckily we politely declined the invitation. We learned later that some of these camps in the Berlin area were exterminated by the withdrawing units of S.S. guards.

Without saying goodbye to Frau Kaolinski we left Berlin next morning. Our orders were to find our way back to the Brigade and hand over all the information concerning R.O.A. as soon as possible. In the event of the situation making this impossible, we had the option to lie low or move west and report to the first Western Allies Command we encountered. Fortunately the German railways were still running and it was only in the last stages of our journey that we had to hitch-hike with some Wehrmacht transport. On our last day we had to walk to catch up with the Brigade. ■