

**AN EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY TO FIND
WORK IN SALTS MILL.**

**THE STORY OF FELKS CZENKUSZ
1920 TO 2013**

Compiled and Produced by Maggie Smith. January 2013

Introduction and Acknowledgements:

I am deeply indebted to the staff, volunteers and members of the Polish Community who meet at the Polish Community Centre on Edmund Street, Bradford, for their patience, kindness, refreshments and interest in this work.

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Thank you, all of you but in particular I need to thank

Mr. Feliks Czenkusz who passed away in August 2013. Feliks asked me to add the word below to his completed story:

'We owe a debt of Gratitude to the British Authorities and local administration for fairness. Despite early difficulties, through the years we have enjoyed a decent standard of living and for the generations of our children and grandchildren who have been enabled to join the middle classes'

FELIXS CZENKUSZ (1920 - 2013), my story -

I was born on June 4th in 1920 in a village called Lakorz, about 3hrs bus ride away from GDANSK and 2 kilometres from the German Border.

My childhood was spent in the village and my father was a craftsman with leather, making tack for horses and also working in upholstery. I was the eldest child and had 2 younger brothers and 2 sisters

I was almost 18 years of age when, in March 1938, I joined the Polish Junior Junaks (Cadet) Battalion because there was high unemployment in my area. The Cadets were assigned to do public works in the summer period and were trained in crafts and technical work in the winter. During my first summer we were working on the River Warta and in the winter I was training to be a road construction technician.

All that summer was marked by tension not only in Poland but in the rest of Europe and these tensions threatened war.

When the Germans invaded Poland I was stationed at Wilno in North East Poland but my parents and family, living, just 2 km from the German Border, bore the consequences of the conflict from the first hour of the invasion. Later I learnt that my father got up early on

Poverty in Poland during the Period By mid 1930s, Poland, a country with a large agricultural sector, was significantly affected by the Great Depression with peasants being one of the most affected groups. Polish peasantry, especially in overpopulated areas of Lesser Poland, was desperately poor. Prices of food products fell down, which resulted in smaller profits for the peasants. In some provinces, the countryside went backwards to the 19th century, with imminent prospect of hunger. **Unemployment among youth in villages was widespread,**

The Hitler Stalin Plan for Poland On August 23, 1939, Hitler and Stalin signed a non-aggression pact, called the **Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty**. Secret protocols of the treaty defined the territorial spheres of influence Germany and Russia would have after a successful invasion of Poland. Hitler had been creating justifications and laying plans for such an invasion since April 1939. According to the agreement, Russia would have control over Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, while Germany would gain control over Lithuania and Danzig.

Poland would be partitioned into three major areas. The Warthland area, bordering Germany would be annexed outright to the German Reich, and all non-German inhabitants expelled to the east. More than 77,000 square miles of eastern Polish lands, with a population of over thirteen million would become Russian territory.

The central area would become a German protectorate, named the General Government, governed by a **German civil authority.**

September 1st to the sound of explosions and aeroplanes. He had gone to his brother's house, which was next door, and shouted 'Joseph its war!'

At that time I was in lodgings outside Wilno, where some road works were being undertaken. I heard that war had started at about lunch time on the same day. We saw people coming from the market in Wilno, aeroplanes overhead and people rushing away, telling us 'its war'.

At the farm near where we were they had a radio and they confirmed war had begun. I had no idea what would happen to me or all of us – I was 19 years old.

No-one had expected the war to progress at such speed and although we weren't soldiers we were housed in Army Barracks and were in army style uniform. Our Commandant told us we must stay where we were and continue normally as before.

Wilno did experience a severe bombing on the Friday of the second week of the war. 20 or more aeroplanes came over and started bombing the radio station and the airport. Later that afternoon, we saw a lot of civilians (those who had cars) leaving the city. God



The German Invasion of Poland September 1st 1939

At 6 am on 1 September
Warsaw was struck by the first of a succession of bombing raids, while two major German army groups invaded Poland from Prussia in the north and Slovakia in the south. Air supremacy was achieved on the first day, after most of Poland's air force was caught on the ground. Panzer spearheads smashed holes in the Polish lines and permitted the slower moving German infantry to pour through into the Polish rear.

In advance of the line of attack the *Luftwaffe* heavily bombed all road and rail junctions, and concentrations of Polish troops. Towns and villages were deliberately bombed to create a fleeing mass of terror-stricken civilians to block the roads and hamper the flow of reinforcements to the front. Flying ahead of the Panzers, the Junkers Ju-87 dive-bomber (Stuka) fulfilled the role of artillery, and destroyed any strong points in the German path.

The surprise German strategy of *blitzkrieg* was based upon continuous advance and the prevention of a static frontline that would permit Polish forces time to regroup.

knows where they were going – it was very depressing and sad.

On the Sunday, we went to church as usual and when we were marching through Wilno we saw soldiers on the streets and realised that, because these soldiers were aged in their 40's, the reservists had also been called up and were doing garrison duties because the younger men had gone to the front. The atmosphere was awful.

The Germans were approaching Warsaw, 300 km away, so they were still a long way off. When we left the church that day however, all the soldiers were talking about the rumours that the Russians had invaded Poland from the East.

After returning to the barracks and tried to act normally. Then our battalion was called to a meeting. An Officer came and told us to pack up our belongings and told us we would be moving out in a few hours and may never return here.

First we were issued with full army field equipment such as rucksacks, clothes, uniform, shoes, rifles and ammunition. The officers told us 'now you are soldiers'.

Most officers were living with their families in our barracks but they had to leave their

The Partition of Poland 1939



Under the terms of two decrees by Hitler, with Stalin's agreement (8 and 12 October 1939), large areas of western Poland were annexed by Germany.

The size of these annexed territories was approximately 94,000 square kilometres with a population of about 10 million, the great majority of whom were Polish. Nearly 1 million Poles were expelled further east from this Nazi-controlled area. Soon, 600,000 Germans from Eastern Europe and 400,000 from the Third Reich were settled there.

The Nazis kept in place 1.7 million Poles who they deemed were Germanizable, including between one and two hundred thousand children who had been taken from their Parents.

Duiker and Spielvogel note that by 1942, the number of **new German arrivals in pre-war Poland had already reached two million**.

families behind and also start to move out. We saw some distressed people.

Towards the evening we marched to the Railway Station, we travelled to the outskirts of Wilno, it was raining and aeroplanes were flying overhead. It was getting dark and we noticed a large number of Polish troops in the fields.

After disbanding the marching column we tried to find some shelter and somewhere to sleep. A small group of us found a house with 3 women in residence, one of whom was ill. The women let us sleep on their floor.

Next morning, someone called us and we were set to digging trenches and preparing defences in the fields, to protect the city we were told. We saw many Polish troops around the city.

Darkness fell again and we went into the trenches we had made. We could hear noises on the nearby road. Russian tanks were coming down the road and artillery exchange could be heard from a distance.

We got orders from our commander to leave the area and we began to move towards a farm. To our surprise Wilno was showing lights, as if in peace time. The reason was probably to assist the evacuation of the city.

Creation of General Government, Central Poland

The remaining block of territory was placed under a German administration called the General Government (in German: *Generalgouvernement für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete*), with its capital at Kraków. A German lawyer and prominent Nazi, Hans Frank, was appointed Governor-General of this occupied area on 26 October 1939. Frank oversaw the segregation of the Jews into ghettos in the largest cities, particularly Warsaw. In April 1940 Frank made the morbid announcement that Kraków should become racially "cleanest" of all cities under his rule.

Significant border changes were made after the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, and again in late 1944 and 1945, when the Soviet Union regained control of those lands and moved further west, eventually taking over all Polish territories.

Soviet administration zone

By the end of the Polish Defensive War against the two invaders, the Soviet Union had taken over 52.1% of the territory of Poland, with over 13,700,000 people. The ethnic composition of these areas, were as follows: 38% Poles, 37% Ukrainians, 14.5% Belarusians, 8.4% Jews, 0.9% Russians and 0.6% Germans. There were also 336,000 refugees who fled from areas occupied by Germany, most of them Jews (198,000).

All territory invaded by the Red Army was to - **Sovereign Lithuania**. annexed to the Soviet Union with the exception of the **Wilno area**, which was transferred

After marching some distance we realised that we should work our way towards the Lithuanian Border as Lithuania was still neutral. We marched for about 30 km during the night in the rain. Eventually we came to a village that was full of Polish troops from all Units. We were still 12 km from the Lithuanian border.

The reason that the Poles surrendered the City so easily was that there was no main army to defend it. The bulk of our armed forces were in the west fighting the German Army there.

We didn't know what to do for sure or what would happen next. We could see many buses travelling from Wilno, full of families trying to escape the conflict. At one point the Polish Troops opened fire but it was a mistake and everyone laughed afterwards.

All the Polish Units got mixed up together and we all began to slowly make our way to the Lithuanian border. All discipline was lost and it became every man for himself.

Some soldiers that were from this part of Poland set off to try to get to their homes. I couldn't do this as I was too far away as were so many others so we decided to keep moving towards Lithuania.

When we got to the edge of a forest, we met a farmer's wife, who we found to be living alone

Poland and the Soviet Union never officially declared war on each other –

the Soviets effectively broke off diplomatic relations when they withdrew recognition of the Polish government at the start of the invasion. The Soviets chose therefore to largely regard Polish military prisoners not as prisoners of war but as counter-revolutionaries illegitimately resisting the legal Soviet reclamation of West Ukraine and West Belarus.

British Historian Simon Sebag Montefiore states that Soviet terror in the occupied eastern Polish lands was as cruel and tragic as Nazi in the west. Soviet authorities brutally treated those who might oppose their rule, deporting by 10 November 1940, around 10% of total population of **Kresy**, with 30% of those deported dead by 1941.

They arrested and imprisoned about 500,000 Poles during 1939–1941, including former officials, officers, and natural "enemies of the people", like the clergy, but also noblemen and intellectuals.

The Soviets also executed about 65,000 Poles. Soldiers of the Red Army and their officers behaved like conquerors, looting and stealing Polish treasures. When Stalin was told about it, he answered: "If there is no ill will, they [the soldiers] can be pardoned".

as her husband had been called up. She was completely distraught but gave us milk to drink and she showed us the way to the first village in Lithuania.

When we did cross the border we were stopped by 2 border guards who told us that we had crossed the border and to surrender our arms. They removed the breeches from our rifles and let us continue on to the village in Lithuania.

We were in Lithuania from September 1939 to July 1940. In June 1940, the Russians invaded Lithuania. We had been housed in a Lithuanian camp of sorts, as they had no prepared camps, we were housed in a school building. We were guarded by the Lithuanians but when the Russians invaded they took over our camp.

Shortly after this, the Russians made us pack our things and told us to be ready to travel. The next day we marched to the railway station and were loaded on to trains. We set off, passing Wilno City during the night and some of the Polish refugee's wives came to see their husbands and friends pass by to say goodbye.

We first stopped at Molodeczno and the train stopped there all day. When we were in Molodeczno, the Soviet Officers were sorting

On 15 June 1940 Lithuania was occupied by Soviet military forces

Lithuania was compelled to form a government that would rule in accordance with Soviet wishes. Large numbers of Lithuanians fled to the West, but tens of thousands were caught and sent to Siberia.

In August 1940, Lithuania became a Soviet republic. In June 1941, 30,455 Lithuanians of political importance were sent to Siberia and about 5,000 political prisoners lost their lives. But by the end of the month, Lithuania was in Nazi hands. In October 1944 it was retaken by the USSR. Whilst the majority of Polish POWs were held by the Soviet Union, several thousands were held by the government of Lithuania.

The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic refused to allow Red Cross supervision of prisoners on the grounds that it had not signed the 1929 Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War (PoW).

Prisoners were handed over by the military to the **NKVD**, the Soviet Secret Police.

As early as September 19 1939, the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, Lavrenty Beria, ordered the NKVD to create the Administration for Affairs of Prisoners of War and Internees to manage Polish prisoners.

us and segregating officers from soldiers and army from the police force.

Then we were transferred to Russian trains. We set off again and travelled east, passing Minsk. We spent 5 days on the train and the Russians provided us with a little food. We learnt to avoid the salted fish as it made us very thirsty.

We eventually stopped in a small town called Babynino and we noticed it was a poor town, very neglected because the houses had no glass in the windows, just paper was used.

On leaving the trains, for most of a day we marched until we reached our camp. We were lucky because in this camp we were not made to work. We had a number of political educators assigned to work with us. At this time Russia and Germany were Allies, due to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

I don't know why we didn't get put to work by the Russians. They came to our blocks about 10am each morning and talked to us about communism – this was their 'job'. It was 1940 and Russia and Germany were friends but we did get hints that the Russian Authorities were becoming suspicious of Germany and we thought that this may be why they were not more harsh towards us.

How Russia handled the displaced Polish Soldiers –

The NKVD took custody of Polish prisoners from the Red Army, and proceeded to organize a network of reception centres and transit camps and arrange rail transport to prisoner-of-war camps in the western USSR.

The Russian Camps - The camps were located at Jukhnovo (**Babynino rail station**), Yuzhe (Talitsy), Kozelsk, Kozelshchyna, Oranki, Ostashkov (Stolbnyi Island on Seliger Lake near Ostashkov), Tyotkino rail station (56 mi/90 km from Putyvl), Starobielsk, Vologda (Zaenikevo rail station) and Gryazovets.

Once at the camps, from October 1939 to February 1940, the Poles were subjected to lengthy interrogations and constant political agitation by NKVD officers. The Poles were encouraged to believe they would be released, but the interviews were in effect a **selection process to determine who would live and who would die.**

The Katyn Massacre of Officers -In March 5 1940, pursuant to a note to Joseph Stalin from Lavrenty Beria, the members of the Soviet Politburo signed an order to execute 25,700 Polish "nationalists and counterrevolutionaries" (Polish Officers) kept at camps and prisons in occupied western Ukraine and Belarus. This became known as **the Katyn massacre.**

Mass Deportation - During 1939 to 1941 the Soviets deported 1,200,000 Poles deported to the Soviet Union for forced labour or resettlement, of which perhaps 146,000 died. This number does not include those shot for failing or straying out of line during deportation, or disobeying an order.

We were able to compare the behaviour of these guards with that of the guards who had escorted us during our travel. These escorts had had the faces of brutal men of the Steppe.

By this time the Germans had entered the Balkans, Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The barracks housed around 3,000 Polish soldiers with a few former Polish internees from Lithuania and soldiers from Latvia and Estonia.

In the spring of 1941, rumours began to circulate in the camp that Germany would change direction and go to war with Russia. When we asked about this possibility, the Russian Officers denied it but on our barrack walls hung huge red sheets of writing condemning German action, particularly that in Yugoslavia - thus expressing Russian anger against Germany.

We began to get letters from Poland with strong hints about what was happening and that Germany was about to invade Russia. A massive concentration of German troops on the Russian border, that could not be hidden, had been seen by Polish family and friends.

Although our letters were censored, families in Poland were able to indicate that German troops were massing on the Russian border. Soon there were also strong hints that our time in this camp was coming to an end. Eventually

Whilst held in Russian Camps, it is unlikely that men, such as Feliks, were aware that the Polish Government had managed to re-form in exile.

The Polish Government in Exile
– The new Polish government established after Germany and the Soviet Union occupied Poland in September 1939. The Polish government-in-exile was first based in France, but moved to London after the French army surrendered to the Germans in mid-1940. The Allies accepted the government-in-exile as the legitimate representative of the Polish people soon after it was created. The government-in-exile allied itself with the West, as its members believed that only a total military victory over Germany would restore Poland's independence and freedom. In addition, it amassed its own land, air, and naval forces.

Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski:
(May 20, 1881 – July 4, 1943)

General Sikorski was a Polish military and political leader. During World War II he became **Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile**, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, and a vigorous advocate of the Polish cause in the diplomatic sphere. He supported the re-establishment of diplomatic relations.

His government was recognized by the western Allies, as Poland, even with its territories occupied, still commanded substantial armed forces: the new Polish Army was soon reassembled in France and in Syria.

we were told we were going to be transported to another part of Russia. All our men were afraid that we would be sent north and we heard stories that a number of massive sledges were coming to our area.

We were mistaken. Later when we were released from the camps we heard that the men who had been imprisoned in the south were in a worse physical condition due to more infections and diseases.

When the time came for us to leave camp we were marched for some 40km to a railway station. I was in the second group to be boarded on a train. It was the 4th of June and I was 21 yrs old – it was the worst birthday of my life. We did not know where we were going.

On the train, we all tried to work out the direction the train was travelling in but from the beginning of the journey we realised that the train was travelling southwards but, as we slept through the night the train changed direction towards the north.

Soon we learned we would be travelling to Murmansk, on the Arctic Sea. We passed many trains going in the opposite direction that were covered with snow. We travelled along the Finnish border. When we got to Murmansk we disembarked.

The beginning of the formation of the Polish Army in Exile -

Although many Polish personnel had died in the initial fighting or had been interned in Switzerland following the fall of France, **General Sikorski** refused French Marshal Philippe Pétain's proposal of a Polish capitulation to Germany. On June 19, 1940, Sikorski met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and promised that Polish forces would fight alongside the British until final victory.

General Sikorski and his government moved to London and were able to evacuate many Polish troops to Britain. After the signing of a Polish-British Military Agreement on August 5, 1940, they proceeded to build up and train the Polish Armed Forces in the West

Polish Deportation by the Russians (USSR) Some Figures

In 1940 and the first half of 1941, the Soviets deported more than 1,200,000 Poles, most in four mass deportations. The first deportation took place 10 February 1940, with more than 220,000 sent to northern European Russia; the second on 13 April 1940, sending 320,000 primarily to Kazakhstan; a third wave in June–July 1940 totalled more than 240,000; the fourth occurred in June 1941, deporting 300,000.

Approximately 100,000 former Polish citizens were arrested during the two years of Soviet occupation. The prisons soon got severely overcrowded with detainees suspected of anti-Soviet activities and the **NKVD** had to open dozens of ad-hoc prison sites in almost all towns of the region

We were then marched into the city. On the way we noticed that every building site was surrounded by barbed wire and we learnt that these houses had been built by prisoners. We had to rely on word of mouth and the prevailing rumours because we were never told what the plans were for us.

We reached our camp which was situated by a fiord that joined Murmansk and Polarnote. One day we were given food from the kitchen – I felt very lucky that day as my bowl had a piece of meat in it, by accident. Most of the talk on that day was about imminent war between Russia and Germany. We found out that Russia was mobilising their reservists – some of whom were housed in the camp we were taken to.

We had a chat with our fellow Russian prisoners and as we were discussing the war I remember a professor from Leningrad and when we were discussing the war coming between Russia and Germany we did ask him if he would fight for Stalin. He answered us in Latin with a saying that ‘ all rulers are mortal but nations are eternal’ he did not like Stalin.

Shortly afterwards, some aeroplanes coming from the direction of Finland flew over the Fiord, the Russians raised the alarm but before the Russians could organise their defences the aeroplanes had gone.

The Destinations of those Polish Citizens who were arrested -

The wave of arrests led to forced resettlement of large categories of people. Their destinations were the Gulag labour camps and exile settlements in remote areas of the Soviet Union. Altogether roughly a million people were sent to the east in four major waves of deportations

For the Polish People Remaining in Soviet held Polish Territory –

According to the Soviet law, all residents of the annexed area, were dubbed by the Soviets as citizens of *former Poland*. They automatically acquired the Soviet citizenship. However, since actual conferral of citizenship still required the individual consent and the residents were strongly pressured for such consent. The refugees who opted out were threatened with repatriation to Nazi controlled territories of Poland.

Upon resumption of Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations in 1941, it was determined based on Soviet information that more than 760,000 of the deportees had died – a large part of those dead being children, who had comprised about a third of deportees

Altogether roughly a **million people were sent to the east** in four major waves of deportations. According to Norman Davies, almost half of them were dead by the time the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement had been signed in 1941 (see Page 13)

Then came the day when we were told it was time for us to be moved again and we were marched to the port of Murmansk. The ship we boarded was called the Clara Zetkin – the name of a famous communist. Again, we were boarded but not told where we were going. We could only guess that our destination would be one of the sub arctic islands’

The Clara Zetkin stopped when we were 1 day at sea – this was the day that Germany invaded Russia, the 22nd/23rd June. Of course we prisoners had no concrete information but the whole ship was ‘shaking’ with rumours.

We knew that the Russian officers were getting official instructions from Moscow. After one day of the ship standing we sailed again and soon arrived at the mouth of the river Panoj and were stationary for a few hours due to a choppy sea.

Here there were barracks for a group of Russian soldiers. There was no road from where we were moored and we were marched 2 to 3 km to a camp that had 2 large marquees. These were already occupied by other Polish soldiers who had arrived by earlier transports.

When we arrived, the Russians threw out the older reservist soldiers to sleep in the open on the ground and housed us in the Marquees. We were a few hundred yards from the river and

The Russian (USSR) Restructuring of Polish Governmental and Social institutions from 1939

While Germans enforced their policies based on racism, the Soviet administration justified their Stalinist policies by appealing to the Soviet ideology, which in reality meant the thorough Sovietization of the area. No later than several weeks after the last Polish units surrendered, on 22 October 1939, the Soviets organized staged elections to the Moscow-controlled Supreme Soviets (legislative body) of *Western Byelorussia* and *Western Ukraine*. The result of the staged voting was to become a legitimization of **Soviet annexation of eastern Poland.**

Subsequently, **all institutions of the dismantled Polish state were being closed down** and reopened under the Soviet appointed supervisors. Polish literature and language studies were dissolved by Soviet authorities. Forty-five new faculty members were assigned to its main University Lviv and transferred from other institutions of Soviet Ukraine

Simultaneously, Soviet authorities attempted to remove the traces of Polish history of the area by eliminating much of what had any connection to the Polish state or even Polish culture in general. On 21 December 1939, the Polish currency was withdrawn from circulation without any exchange to the newly-introduced rouble, which meant that the entire population of the area lost all of their life savings overnight.

All the media became controlled by Moscow. Only a Communist Party was allowed to exist.

soon aeroplanes were flying over the camp. The Russian soldiers opened fire on the aeroplanes and after that they admitted that Russia was at war with Germany.

A lot of our men were sleeping but the Russians woke us up, telling us to leave the Marquees, and then Russian political police started to speak to us. They informed us that Hitler had invaded Russia and was being supported in the invasion by Mussolini. They urged us to work hard for them.

We were given work about 9 miles inland and we were sleeping on the land. The work we were set to do was to build an aerodrome and we worked on this for a few weeks. Then the younger men were moved nearer to the sea. We began to hear that Polish people in exile had agreed to support Russia.

One day another ship arrived and unloaded Russian prisoners to continue the work we were doing. We were asked to prepare to leave on the same ship and we still did not know where we would be going. They gave us food for 3 days rations – some bread and some very nice ham. I was so hungry that I ate all of my ration during the first day. I was very hungry again after that.

We sailed to the White Sea to a port called Archangel. When we arrived there it was warm

The German Invasion of Russia, 1941

The Germans had begun massing troops near the Soviet border even before the [campaign in the Balkans](#) had finished. By the third week in February 1941, 680,000 German troops were stationed on the Romanian-Soviet border, in preparation for the attack.

Hitler moved 3.2 million German and about 500,000 Axis soldiers to the Soviet border, launched many [aerial surveillance](#) missions over Soviet territory, and stockpiled [materiel](#) in the East.

The [Soviets](#) were still taken by surprise, mostly due to [Stalin's](#) belief that the Third Reich was unlikely to attack only two years after signing the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](#).

The Soviet leader also believed the Nazis would be likely to finish their war with Britain before opening a new front. He refused to believe repeated warnings from his intelligence services on the Nazi build up, fearing the reports to be British misinformation designed to spark a war between Germany and the USSR.

Operation Barbarossa - was the [code name](#) for [Germany's](#) invasion of the [Soviet Union](#) during the [Second World War](#). Beginning on 22 June 1941, over 4 million troops of the [Axis powers](#) invaded the USSR along a 2,900 km (1,800 mi) front, the largest invasion in the history of warfare.

The ambitious operation, driven by [Adolf Hitler's](#) persistent desire to conquer the Russian territories, marked the beginning of the pivotal phase in deciding the victors of the war.

but its winters were very cold and the land had no trees. We disembarked and were taken to a 'prisoners' camp. We were mixed in with Russian prisoners. These prisoners were housed in cages and these people looked as if they were in a zoo.

We remained there for a few days and then we were put on a train and we began to travel south. We did not know it at the time but this was the first step to our becoming free men again.

We travelled by train for a few days and eventually we unloaded in the fields of a collective farm. We were very hungry and thirsty. Soon another train picked us up and we travelled further on.

We were still prisoners and we passed a train carrying many Russian casualties. Finally the train stopped at Tatiszczewo and outside this town was a prepared army camp waiting for us. At this point we knew that we were to be in the army once more. We were housed in tents and some of our officers were given buildings within the camp.

We realised that now we were in the Polish army and more Polish officers arrived in camp. We were loosely organised at first but were gradually allocated to units and regiments such as the infantry or engineers. I found myself

Operation Barbarossa was to combine a northern assault towards Leningrad, a symbolic capturing of Moscow, and an economic strategy of seizing oil fields in the south beyond Ukraine. Hitler and his generals disagreed on which of these aspects should take priority and where Germany should focus its energies; deciding on priorities required a compromise.

While planning Barbarossa in 1940–1941, in many discussions with his generals, Hitler repeated his order: "Leningrad first, the Donetsk Basin second, Moscow third. Hitler was impatient to get on with his long-desired invasion of the east. He was convinced Britain would sue for peace, once the Germans triumphed in the Soviet Union.

Total Axis forces available for Barbarossa were in the order of 3.9 million. On 22 June, the German Wehrmacht achieved a local superiority in its initial assault (98 German divisions), including 29 armoured and motorized divisions, some 90% of its mobile forces, attacking on a front of 1,200 km (750 mi) between the Baltic Sea and the Carpathian Mountains.

After the German Invasion of Russia in 1941, diplomatic relations were re-established as the invasion forced Stalin to look for allies. Thus the military agreement from August 14 and subsequent **Sikorski-Mayski Agreement** from August 17, 1941, resulted in Stalin agreeing to declare the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in relation to Poland null and void, and release tens of thousands of Polish prisoners-of-war held in Soviet camps.

placed in a reconnaissance unit - a poor choice as I was short-sighted and wore glasses

Then a General Anders arrived in camp to take a look at his future soldiers. He walked with sticks, a reminder of his recent imprisonment, and he took charge of us but we had not been issued with arms at this point. We were drilled and full army life began.

Shortly afterwards, the Russians supplied us with arms. My division was supplied with semi-automatic rifles, mortars and some field artillery.

By this time it was winter and snow fell heavily but this was to prove to be a critical moment for Russia as the German army was marching through Russia and getting near to Moscow. There was a high level of tension in the camp.

We were not yet deployed in a war area and I was afraid that in the case of a Russian Army collapse that we would be abandoned deep inside Russia as had happened in the First World War.

Eventually we were told that the Germans had had to retreat due to the Russian winter. On December 7th it was announced in camp that a Polish Supreme Commander of troops based in London – a General Sikorski was going to visit our troops.

A protocol of the Polish-Soviet (**Sikorski-Maisky**) agreement of July 30, 1941, provided for the release of all Poles in Soviet exile as well as for the formation of a Polish army on Soviet soil. The document, signed in the presence of **Winston Churchill** and Anthony Eden, used the unfortunate term "amnesty" for the release of the exiles; they were, in fact, Stalin's bargaining chip in the contest for the status quo borders of Poland immediately post war. According to a January 15, 1943, note from Beria to Stalin, 389,041 Polish citizens were freed as a result of that "amnesty."

Gradual release of some of the Polish Deportees - As Feliks and his fellow prisoners were slowly being moved towards their inclusion in the exiled Polish Army, many other far-flung Polish exiles began to make their way as best they could southward, to where The Polish army in exile was forming, in the hope of liberation.

These journeys, often several weeks long, brought new suffering and **tens of thousands died from hunger, cold, heat, disease and exhaustion on that trip to freedom**. For many, the help provided by the United States and Great Britain was too little and too late.

The Polish Second Corps - Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Soviet attitudes to the Poles softened somewhat and following negotiations with the Polish Government in London, Poles in the Soviet Union were freed and began to form fighting units. These were concentrated in the Orenburg area and **Major General Wladislaw Anders** became commander of this new Polish army.

We got that news at the same time as we learnt that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbour, bringing America into the war. I was very glad to hear this.

General Sikorski announced that we would be moved further south soon. One month later we were placed on trains and we then travelled for 12 days through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and at one point we were only 90km from the Chinese border. It was very warm during the day and cold at night. It was interesting for us as was the sight of camels grazing.

Spring came and our men began to die of diseases such as Typhoid and Cholera. We were disembarked in Dzhalal Abad in Russian Turkistan and we camped there and underwent more military training. We learnt that we were to be evacuated from the area and that we would be placed under British Command in the Middle East.

At the beginning of August in 1942 we learnt that our army was leaving the Soviet Union and were busy packing our things. We had to return all the equipment that had been supplied to us by the Russians, firstly our arms then all other equipment the Russians had supplied. On August 5 we marched to the railway station and started our journey, stopping first at Krasnowods on the Caspian Sea.

Lieutenant-General Wladyslaw Anders CB (11 August 1892 – 12 May 1970)

was a General in the Polish Army and later in life a politician with the Polish government-in-exile in London.

Anders was in command of a cavalry brigade at the time of the outbreak of World War II. The Polish army at that time had not yet had a chance to fully modernise, having been resurrected only 20 years earlier, in 1918–19, following Polish independence from German, Austrian and Russian rule.

Polish forces, mechanized and personnel, were no match for the larger German credit/debit-funded Wehrmacht with their massive Blitzkrieg tactics, and the Polish forces were forced to retreat to the east. During the fighting and retreat he was wounded a number of times.

Anders was later taken prisoner by Soviet forces and was jailed, initially in Lvov (then Lwów) and later in Lubyanka prison in Moscow. During his imprisonment Anders was tortured.

Anders was released by the Soviets with the aim of forming a Polish Army to fight alongside the Red Army.

However, **Continued friction with the Soviets over political issues as well as shortages of weapons, food and clothing**, led to the eventual exodus of Anders' men – known as the Anders Army – together with a sizeable contingent of Polish civilians via the Persian Corridor into Iran, Iraq and Palestine. Here, Anders formed and led the 2nd Polish Corps, fighting alongside the Western Allies, while agitating for the release of Polish nationals still in the Soviet Union.

There we boarded Russian ships sailing to Persia (now Iran). We landed in Pahlavi in Iran and were put in a primitive camp along the beach by the Caspian Sea for a few days. Then lorries came to transport us to Iraq. After 3 days travel we arrived in Iraq and were dropped on an empty desert area to build ourselves a camp. This was August, unbearably hot but with a few weeks of hard work and extreme discomfort, the camp was in existence – of course British experience and supplies were essential.

We spent a year in Iraq. Firstly we had a reorganisation of our army on British lines, with our numbers now at nearly 100,000 soldiers. The task was not simple and we were training to use new weapons. I was transferred to the Signal Battalion to learn wireless servicing and learning the Morse code.

Now, gradually we were supplied with British arms and eventually we were transported to Port Said Zone in Egypt with some of our men sent to Lebanon for their final mountain combat training. General Sikorski paid us a second visit but on his return flight to London he perished in an aircraft tragedy in Gibraltar.

After a Christmas spent in Egypt, we were then shipped to the front in the south of Italy. We landed in Taranto and this port held a huge



The new destination for these Poles was Iraq where they found temporary quarters in large transit camps initially located in **Pahlavi** and **Mashhad**, and later in **Tehran** and **Ahvaz**. While Gen. Anders' troops were subsequently transferred to Palestine and from there to Iraq, the civilians remained in Iran.

During the two great evacuations (the first, between March 24 and the beginning of April 1942; the second, between August 10 and September 1, 1942), from **Krasnovodsk across the Caspian Sea to Pahlavi** (Iran), and the smaller overland evacuations from Ashkhabad to Mashhad (in March and September 1942), about 115,000 people (including some 37,000 civilians, of whom about 18,300 were children) left the Soviet Union.

The soldiers of Anders' army went on to fight in many battles, including the one at **Monte Cassino**. The civilians, because they could not be repatriated, were forced to remain in foreign lands for the remainder of the war.

The Allied Italian Campaign



convoy of ships. There were many Polish soldiers amongst the troops disembarking there.

It was early spring in the south of Italy but full winter and deep snow in the mountains. We began to meet soldiers who had been fighting during the winter months and had seen, whilst travelling in a small van, a small cemetery for our men who had been killed, had already sprung up. The mountains still had snow on them and we were housed in tents set up in olive groves.

Rumours started spreading that we were going to Monte Cassino to fight the Germans who held this high ground. It wasn't a pleasant feeling – we knew that the British and American Forces had been engaged in a bloody battle there from our radio messages.

We didn't want to die but we had to go where we were sent. Before the battle that involved our troops we saw many mule trains taking supplies to the front line. Supplies were brought up as high as possible, initially by lorries driven by our Polish female soldiers.

On the evening of May 11 at 11pm, our Polish Troops joined in opening artillery fire with British troops on the fortified German bunkers on the heights. The artillery fire lasted until 1am and then the infantry moved forward. We

The Background to the Allied Invasion of Italy –

Axis surrender in North Africa in May 1943 was followed by the Allied invasion of Sicily. This did strike a fatal blow at Italian self-confidence, which had been wobbling for some time. **Mussolini was deposed** and the new government made secret peace overtures. There was so much pressure to take advantage of the changed situation, that the Allies landed in southern Italy in September without a clear strategic aim. They even considered landing at airfields around Rome with Italian connivance. However, they wisely discarded this plan as too risky.

The Germans reacted so swiftly when Italy surrendered that the Allies were actually able to gain little advantage. Italian troops were disarmed and treated harshly if they fought against the Germans. Yet the Allies had secured Italian beachheads but the one at Salerno was only achieved with much difficulty in the face of fierce counter-attacks. In Italy, the Allies now found themselves committed to a campaign which had possessed great political attractions but now offered manifest military disadvantages.

There was, for a start, no prospect of Italy ever becoming more than a subsidiary theatre. Plans for the invasion of France were well under way. Amphibious resources would shortly be diverted for the Normandy invasion.

were able to capture some positions but had to withdraw from some shortly afterward due to German counter attacks.

I was in the 'Wireless Van' working to keep communications open between the front line and our battalions. From my own experience, radio communication at the beginning was useless due to too much noise. Our wireless station was to serve the 5th Engineers Battalion. I remember well that it consisted of 5 radio receivers and senders with 2 men to each receiver. One of the receivers had the role of 'control station' and the others were attached to different companies.

I mostly served at 5 company station and if, for example, I had a message for 3rd company I had to first report this to the control station and wait to be given a green light before this could be sent to 3rd station. We were forbidden from corresponding with stations outside our group 5. Our role as wireless communicators worked less well than the use of despatch riders on motorbikes.

On the morning of May 12, one of our sergeants came and told us that we had suffered heavy casualties. In his opinion, the most deadly problem was when shells hit the rocks – splintering these over a wide area – many of our men had been killed by rock

Background to the Italian Campaign continued - These amphibious resources would have been a considerable advantage in Italy, for they would have given the Allies the potential to hook round German defensive lines. Secondly, assertions that Italy was the 'soft underbelly' of Europe **came easiest to those whose maps lacked contours.** Italy's mountainous backbone sends rib-like ridges down to the coast to both east and west. Rivers flow between the ridges. An attacker advancing from the south is confronted by a heartbreaking sequence.

Monte Cassino's Vital Position
The restored monastery of Cassino dominated the landscape. In the winter of 1943-44, the Allies found themselves confronting the Gustav Line, which crossed Italy south of Rome. For much of its length the line ran along rivers, with the Garigliano, Gari and Rapido strengthening its southern sector. It crossed Route 6, the Rome-Naples highway, which ran on to Rome along the Liri valley, between the Abruzzi and Aurunci mountains. The entrance to the Liri valley was dominated by the great bulk of Monte Cassino, crowned by an ancient Benedictine monastery. Behind the monastery, the ground rose even more steeply to form 'a vile tactical puzzle' (Ellis). In front of the hill stood the little town of Cassino, and the rivers Gari and Rapido. **It was one of the strongest natural defensive positions in military history.**

splinters. Our own subaltern had been killed in the first hours of battle and was the first casualty we were aware of. Many other casualties were to follow from our ranks.

The fighting for Monte Cassino continued for a week, until May 18. On May 18, the Monastery of Monte Cassino was captured - during the week it had become a symbol for the Polish troops because once this was captured we could hold onto the heights.

After this victory, the Germans withdrew but dug in and kept fighting at Piedmonts to allow many of their units time to evacuate the area. Once we had all reached the heights we could see across a flat plain all the way to Rome.

The American Troops marshalled on the flat plain with tanks with the task of crushing the enemy forces in this area. But the Germans were too clever for that and after their delaying action they withdrew to the North of Rome. The American General Clark was to blame for this.

The Germans withdrew to Rome. The Commander of the American forces was General Clark who was determined to capture Rome and become the first allied Commander to capture a European Capital. Later in my life I

The First Battle of Cassino - dragged on until mid-February. The second battle began on 15 February, with the controversial destruction of the monastery by heavy and medium bombers. On the one hand, it seems likely that there were no Germans in the monastery at the time. However, they were to defend its ruins tenaciously. Furthermore, the nearest Allied troops were too far away to take advantage of the shock of the bombing.

Ellis rightly judged the attack that followed to be one of the low points of Allied General-ship in the war. He castigates 'a wilful failure at the highest level to take due account of the terrible problems involved in mounting a concerted attack across such appalling terrain which were still being grossly underestimated a full month later'.

British and Indian troops attacked the high ground, while New Zealanders bludgeoned their way into Cassino itself. While there were some gains, the German grip was not shaken. The third battle began on 15 March, with yet more bombing. Despite the prodigious courage of British, Indian and New Zealand troops, the German parachutists holding the town and the high ground still hung on.

It was not until May 1944 that the Allies at last brought their full might to bear on Cassino.

saw photographs of General Clark next to road signs that pointed to Rome.

The Polish Second Corps troops were able to rest a little near Campobasso. We were there for 3 weeks and whilst we were travelling, at our stops, many Italian Civilians approached to look at us. They were quite friendly. One of our transport drivers was a boy called Radon who, although he was 17yrs of age, looked much younger. The Italian women cried when they saw him as they thought a child is already fighting in war.

When our rest period was over we were called back to the front because the German troops were massing along the Adriatic Sea. We soon came into contact with enemy forces again, capturing town after town with heavy and prolonged fighting. The Italian Port Ancome fell into our hands.

We fought our way to Rimini where the Germans had heavy fortifications. British troops brought their heavy artillery and they bombarded the area and took control. It was the first time I had seen such large artillery.

We were again allowed to rest a Porto Son Elpidio. It was the summer of 1944 and the Polish troops were beginning to believe that

The Final Battle for Monte Cassino –

The Allies prepared for the final battle by moving much of the 8th Army from the Adriatic coast, while 5th Army shifted its weight to reinforce the Anzio beachhead, now under the command of Major General Lucian Truscott.

The new offensive, Operation Diadem, smashed through the neck of the Liri valley by sheer weight, and **the Polish Corps took Monte Cassino. (Anders was the commander of the 2nd Polish Corps in Italy 1943–1946)** Between the Liri and the sea, the French Corps made rapid progress through the Aurunci Mountains, and by the third week in May the Germans were in full retreat.

The American Commander – Lieutenant General Mark Clark had a number of options for the breakout from Anzio, and was eventually ordered by Alexander to thrust into the German line of retreat. Although this manoeuvre would not have bagged all the defenders of Cassino, it would have captured most of them. **In the event, however, Clark chose instead to strike for Rome**, guaranteeing himself a place in the history books but letting the Germans escape. The distinguished American military historian Carlo D'Este called his decision 'as military stupid as it was insubordinate.' As its direct consequence, although the Gustav Line was broken and Rome was liberated, **the hard-fought battle of Cassino was less effective due to Clark's decision.**

the war was finally coming to an end as the Germans continued to surrender or withdraw.

After the longest rest period we had at Porto Son Elpidio, we were moved inland and Polish troops were then ordered to march in the direction of the Apennines'. It had begun to rain heavily so we marched in mud for much of the time. We reached Piero di San Bgno and we captured this town. We went on to capture Santa Sofia then Predappio – the birthplace of Mussolini. We learnt that Mussolini's father had been a blacksmith and I saw the smithy where he had worked.

We then marched on until we reached the plain of Forliand Faenza where the front made a halt and made camp the winter position.

Throughout that winter we had seen that enemy troops still held the banks on the other side of the river Segno.

On April 12 at midday, the Allies started an offensive there against the enemy troops. We were supported by American bomber planes that flew in waves over the enemy positions causing much damage and death, some Polish soldiers were also killed in these raids.

In the evening, our artillery opened fire and we prepared to move across the river in the

The German Held Positions in 1943



Whilst The Polish Second Corps was active and fighting in Italy, they will have become increasingly aware of the American and British Agreements with Stalin about post war territories

The Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam Agreements:

In 1941, when Germany invaded Russia, Stalin found himself in the position of being allied to America and Britain. These 3 'superpowers' held three major conferences during WWII in which they debated the future of the post-war world.

The Teheran Conference

The first of these conferences was the Teheran conference, held in 1943, in which the Soviet Union was granted additional territory, "this involved placing the Baltic States, eastern Poland and Bessarabia in the Soviet Union, as well as northern Bukovina..." claims Martin McCauley in his 1983 book, The Origins of The Cold War 1941-1949.

The Yalta Conference

The second conference occurred at Yalta in the Crimea in February 1945. **It was agreed at Yalta** to help liberate Eastern European countries by installing democratic governments, to allow the Soviet Union to possess Eastern Poland and in compensation grant Poland a large portion of Germany,

morning. That night we slept in our clothes in our vans, to be ready to go at any moment.

When morning came, it was reported that the enemy had been defeated across the river and then we were able to march quickly – like the blitzkrieg – as all enemy defences were collapsing in front of us. Many of the enemy soldiers just sat by the roadside, waiting to be collected as prisoners.

We were moving towards Bologna and one morning, when listening to the radio, our troops heard that Bologna was captured. This marked the end of the Italian Campaign for the Italian people. After the capture of Bologna the Polish troops were withdrawn, never to fight again. This marked the end of mine and my immediate colleague's war in Europe.

We were eventually moved to Bologna and when there improvised a Polish Army Parade that had to be taken by our Corp Deputy Commander because General Anders was back in Britain. A Guest at this parade was the American General Clark. At this time Italian civilians were reading in their newspapers that the war in Italy was over.

We knew by now that we, as organised Polish Troops, would not be able to go back to Poland so the victory was tinged with sadness for us. I was young, single and glad to be alive so I was

The Yalta Conference continued:

It was also agreed to divide Germany into four zones of occupation (each controlled by Britain, France, the U.S. or the Soviet Union), to form an international order to replace the League of Nations and that the Soviet Union would declare war on Japan within 90 days of the end of the war in Europe.

The Potsdam Conference

The third conference was held in Potsdam in August 1945. By this time President Roosevelt had passed away and had been replaced with President Truman, while Prime Minister Attlee was elected to replace Prime Minister Churchill halfway through the conference. At Potsdam, "The four occupation zones of Germany conceived at the Yalta Conference were set up... Berlin, Vienna, and Austria were also each divided into four occupation zones,"

Poland's boundaries were set, however there was debate over the future of the country.

"The Polish government in-exile had moved to London and expected to return to Poland after the war. With his forces now in full occupation of Poland, Stalin wanted his own regime put in place," (L. Freedman, 2001)

A compromise was reached. A government was set up in Lublin and Stalin promised that free elections would be held after the war with both pro-Western and pro-Eastern members of government put in place.

less sad than some of the men, especially those who had left their families and children in Poland without the prospect of ever seeing them again.

We were moved from place to place in Italy after this and, in all, had to stay in Italy for one more year. For those of us who had never managed to complete our education in Poland a College was established and I was able to study humanities, maths and English and Italian languages.

Whilst in Italy studying we depended on the BBC World Service for news and we heard of many debates in the British Parliament about what to do with us. Some MP's were for us coming to Britain but others were against this. Mr. Clement Atlee was now Prime Minister and Mr. Churchill was in opposition.

Finally in 1946 we were transported to Britain in ships. My group were loaded onto the 'Empire Pride' and landed in Liverpool. We were moved to Norfolk and for a time we were able to continue with our studies but our spirits became low as our teachers, concerned with their own future careers elsewhere, were leaving us.

We began to realise that we needed to plan for our long term future in Britain. We were gradually demobbed and entered civilian life.

The Reality of these Decisions for Poland

The concept of **Western Betrayal** refers to the view that United Kingdom and France failed to meet their legal, diplomatic, or moral obligations with respect to Czechoslovakia during the Munich Agreement and subsequent Occupation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany, as well as to Poland on the eve of the World War II.

The same concept also refers to the concessions made by the United States and the United Kingdom to the USSR during the Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam conferences, to their stance during the Warsaw Uprising, and some other events.

Footnote on General Sikorski

In July 1943, a plane carrying General **Sikorski** plunged into the sea immediately after takeoff from Gibraltar, killing all on board except the pilot. The exact circumstances of his death have been disputed, and given rise to a number of conspiracy theories surrounding the crash and his death. Investigators later concluded that Sikorski's injuries were consistent with a plane crash.

Footnote on Lieutenant General Anders

After the war the Soviet-installed communist government in Poland in 1946 deprived Anders of Polish citizenship and of his military rank.

Anders had, however, always been unwilling to return to a Soviet-dominated Poland where he probably would have been jailed and possibly executed, and remained in exile in Britain.

He was prominent in the Polish Government in Exile in London and inspector-general of the Polish forces-in-exile.

At this point many of the ex Polish troops decided to return to Poland it was the end of the summer in 1947.

A friend of mine, who had had experience of working in textiles in Poland had been informed that a Mill in Bingley, West Yorkshire, (Ebor) that was owned and run by a Polish Jew – a Mr. David Pike - was seeking workers who had previously worked in textiles.

This mill owner had found the names and addresses of Polish people who had worked in textiles before the war and had written to the camp to some of these men who were based there.

My friend applied for a job there and although I had no textile work experience, I decided to go with him. It was the Autumn of 1947.

This mill owner, David Pike, had many orders for cloth but not enough workers. Fortunately I was also accepted for work in this mill and my life as a civilian in Britain began.

When I first came to civilian life I thought I might be discriminated against by English people but I was to find that I faced discrimination from my fellow Polish people.

The mill owner, Mr. Pike was in his late thirties or early forties. When I arrived at the mill with my army friend, he spoke to the manager – a

The Yalta conference had initiated the era of Soviet domination of Central and Eastern Europe

This lasted until the end of the Cold War in early 1990s and left bitter memories of Western betrayal and Soviet dominance in the collective memory of the region. To many Polish overseas, the Yalta conference "constituted a betrayal" of Poland and the **Atlantic Charter**.

Territories which the Soviet Union had occupied during World War II in 1939 (with the exception of the **Białystok** area) were permanently annexed, and most of their Polish inhabitants expelled. Today these territories are part of **Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania**.

At the time of Yalta over 200,000 troops of the Polish Armed Forces in the West were serving under the high command of the British Army. Many of these men and women were originally from the **Kresy** region of eastern Poland including cities such as Lwów and Wilno

The Outcome for Many Members of the Polish Troops

In effect, Churchill had agreed that tens of thousands of veteran Polish troops under British command should lose their Kresy homes to the Soviet Union. In reaction, thirty officers and men from the II Corps committed suicide.

Churchill defended his actions in a three-day Parliamentary debate starting 27 February 1945, which ended in a **vote of confidence**. **During the debate, many MPs openly criticised Churchill and passionately voiced loyalty to Britain's Polish allies and expressed deep reservations about Yalta.**

Mr. Eastwood – and although I had never worked in textiles I was accepted for a job. There were plenty of jobs at the time. I think the mill was called Ebor Mill and it was situated alongside the Leeds, Liverpool canal in Bingley.

Then I had to undertake all the formalities to be released from the army, this took about 3 weeks. I obtained release papers from the army Commandant , a train ticket and directions to both the Bingley Mill and a lodging house in a street situated behind Busby's Store (off Manningham Lane)

On the evening that I arrived by train into Bradford, with all my belongings, I took a taxi to this lodging house and met my landlady and her husband who were both elderly.

On the day that I arrived this lady didn't know that I was coming but she had 5 or 6 other young male lodgers and she accepted me.

I had only a little spoken English at that time. The next day I went to work in the Bingley Mill on the night shift. Most workers on the night shift were ex army polish men whereas the day shift workers were mainly English. There were about 12 of us on the night shift.

I was the first person to work there that was 'outside the group' being the only person who had not worked in textiles previously. The

Feliks however was in the UK and began work in Bingley: The Ebor Mill, Bingley – built in a triangle of land between the approach to Dubb Land and the sweep of the Canal to Dubb Bridge, the original 3 storey mill building of 1819, stood at 90% to the lane parallel with Dubb Mills.

A further block was built alongside Dubb Lane forming a right angle enclosing north light sheds. At the bridge end of the mills stood Ebor House.

The mills were occupied by John Fras. Field, worsted spinner and manufacturers in the 1860.s and 1870,s. Abraham Smith and Sons, worsted manufacturers, were operating from the mills in 1884. Re-titled as A.Smith and Sons in 1890 they had re-located their looms under Norman N Smith to the adjacent Victoria Mills in 1916. Benjamin Crabtree, worsted manufacturers, were weaving in Ebor Mills from before 1930 until the outset of the Second World War, when David Pike and co. ltd. became its proprietors.

David Pike's Company manufactured plain and fancy woollen and worsted dress and coat cloths until 1965. Their cloth finishing operations – burling and mending – were undertaken on the top sky lit floor of the building fronting Dubb Lane.

others were confident, knew the job and I was the outsider.

These experienced men were supposed to teach me the skills but they were not keen to do so. They were not very friendly to me and often unhelpful. I worked there for 18 months in weaving and later on, when Mr. Pike had enough skilled textile workers he did recruit more people without these skills.

The older group gradually became the minority and the new workers were more friendly and life became more reasonable. Working on the night shift all the time was not a good experience and after 18 months I decided to leave this mill.

I then took a job at Salts Mill in Saltaire on the day shift, around 1949. This mill had many workers with different nationalities – English, Polish, Yugoslavian, Ukrainian and Italian. On the day shift I was weaving again. It wasn't a better job as such, but the relationships between workers were better. The smaller management team in the Bingley Mill had been more personal and we had had Christmas parties and day trips to Scarborough whilst I worked there. Salts was so big in contrast and I didn't get to know the managers in the same way. I worked at Salts Mill until I retired in 1982.

Feliks, Working at Salts Mill from 1949

Salts Mill, In 1853 Sir Titus Salt Bart opened the Mill that has continued to bear his name to the present day. After Sir Titus Salt Junior died at an early age the mill went into administration and the business and the village were purchased for £2,000,000 by a syndicate of Bradford business men - Isaac Smith, John Maddocks, John Rhodes and James Roberts and the Sole control of James Roberts from 1902: On February 1st 1918 Sir James Roberts disposed of Salts Mill and control of the business transferred to a syndicate of men from the Textile Trade.

In 1923, the existing private firm of Sir Titus Salt Bart, Sons & Company Ltd had a nominal capital of only £1,500,000 capital and a new £4,000,000 syndicate was now formed to float a public company under the modern title of Salts (Saltaire) Ltd. The old company handed over control on 23 July 1923 and Sir Henry Whitehead, Mr. A. J. Hill and Mr. E. H. Gates joined the new board.

In November 1929, Mr. Robert Whyte Guild, who was originally Messrs F.H. Gates Scottish agent was appointed managing Director of Salts and simultaneously the Gates business was amalgamated with that of Salts. Mr Guild was both Chair of the Board of the Company and managing Director when Feliks began work at the Mill.

Salts employed 2,700 workers, operating a total of 100,000 spindles and 700 broad looms. As war drew to a close, **Salts Board was prepared for the influx of new workers – Eastern Europeans displaced by the war.**

During my time at Salts Mill there were at least 2 different owners, one owner was French I think. I continued to work as a weaver and at first I had old weaving machines to operate. These were called Hattersley's and were very noisy. Then we had new machines installed, the Northrop weaving machines, these were more automated but the work did not become easier as we had then were given 4 or 6 machines to mind instead of 2 as in the past.

My personal life changed early in my time at Salts Mill. By the time I had changed my job, my living space had also changed. I had found some new lodgings in Bingley, then a second lodging house on the same street but then moved to a boarding house in Bradford.

These later 2 lodgings were with Polish people who were buying old houses and renovating them. We lived as many as we could in one house. The beds were old and our blankets had been horse blankets that were smelly. Living this way helped us save some money.

On leaving the Army I had received £60 and my weekly wage was between £12 and £15. I stayed in lodgings until I got married.

I met my wife at a dance in Victoria Hall (Saltaire). I had had to learn to dance at a Manchester Road dance school. My future wife lived with her parents in Bradford and was

Polish Settlement in the United Kingdom and Bradford:

Following the end of World War II, substantial groups of people from Soviet-controlled territories settled in Britain, particularly Poles and Ukrainians. The UK recruited displaced people as so-called European Volunteer Workers in order to provide labour to industries that were required in order to aim economic recovery after the war. In the 1951 census, the Polish-born population of the UK numbered some 162,339, up from 44,642 in 1931.

Negative Reactions from Some -

Although the British economy had been shattered and faced huge shortages in raw materials and a manpower deficit, an anti-Polish campaign by the TUC and leading unions turned public attitudes towards the Poles from a country desperately needing experienced combatants and acceptance to one shunning the Poles. The campaign orchestrated by left wing activists brought a swift response in support of the Polish People from leading politicians and papers like the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*.

Bradford's Reception - two significant numbers of 'migrants' arrived in Bradford from Central and Eastern Europe.

Approximately 3,400 were Ukrainian and 4,000 Polish – many of whom were Polish Service Men who had been formed into the Polish Resettlement Corp before release into civilian jobs. Around 1,200 people came from what was the Yugoslavia and smaller groups from the Baltic States – Hungary, Byelorussia, Austria and Germany itself.

English. Her father wasn't very enthusiastic about our relationship but when he learned that I had saved over £250 he changed his mind about me.

I was able to put a deposit down on a house. I was over thirty years old by this time and my wife was 22yrs, nearly 23yrs old.

Our first house was in Manningham, Hollings Road – a 'back to back' house. After a while we sold this house and bought a better one on Hollings Terrace – gradually progressing.

My eldest son was born February 1st 1952 – 2 or 3 days after the death of King George VI. This was exactly 10 months after we were married.

In 1956 my youngest son was born. Both my sons are married now. The eldest son lives in Shipley and he retired from work a few months ago. He feels he is English.

In 1959 I went back to Poland for the first time. I had been able to write to my family since arriving in England in 1946 and had managed to keep up with family news before the visit.

I arrived at the railway station Lipinki and my mother and father were there to meet me. It was a very emotional time. My mother looked much the same as I remembered but my father looked much older. Some of my family and friends did not recognise me. When I met some

Employment and Settlement in Bradford for the Polish People -

Along with most of the Central and Eastern European migrants were employed in the City's Textile Industry.

Living and working conditions for Bradford's new communities varied, many – particularly Italian women – lived in hostels provided by their employers and worked on short term contracts.

The reactions of Bradford's people to the Polish newcomers appears to have been generally positive. It may have been helped by the establishment of the Anglo-Polish Society in 1941 by an English World War 1 veteran (M. Neal) who had been a POW in WW1 and remembered the kindness of Polish Farmers.

There was some prejudice but also accounts of goodwill with a feeling summed up by one Polish woman as 'as long as we work and behave ourselves, we never have a problem I couldn't speak English but if I didn't understand (at work) they used to take me by the hand and show me how to do it'

One man remembers 'In Bradford there was work available in Textiles -- it wasn't the best kind of work but it was work.'

Initially the Polish people congregated together when it came to living space. For example the Oak Lane area in Manningham was very popular at first because housing was cheap and the area was close to many places of work.

Over time, the Polish Community has been characterised by quiet diligence and some kind of 'self-imposed' policy/desire to integrate with the indigenous population.

former friends I only recognised one friend from the past who had a long face.

I already knew that one of my sisters had been sent to work over the border in Germany during the war and that she had had harsh treatment from the family she worked for – they even spat on her at times.

My mum was sad that I hadn't returned to live in Poland after the war. I don't think she fully understood my reasons and kept assuring me that I could get a good job in Poland.

On my first visit, after 20 years away from home, the Russians had remained in control of Poland. During Stalin's era, people could not get out of Russian held territory to visit abroad. After Stalin's death others in power made some changes to this policy and it was easier to move between countries. Polish people did gradually experience more freedom.

My oldest son came to Poland with me when he was 11 years old.

My younger son did not get married until he was in his forties, he lived in Birkenhead before he was married. My wife was always hoping that he would get married and always looking for a wedding hat but he only married last year and she died 12 years ago.

Near the end of World War II, the advancing Soviet Red Army pushed out the Nazi German forces from occupied Poland. At the insistence of Joseph Stalin, the Yalta Conference sanctioned the formation of a new Polish provisional and pro-Communist coalition government in Moscow, which ignored the Polish government-in-exile based in London.

The Potsdam Agreement of 1945 ratified the westerly shift of Polish borders and approved its new territory between the Oder-Neisse and Curzon lines. Poland, as a result of World War II, for the first time in history became an ethnically homogeneous nation state without prominent minorities due to destruction of indigenous Polish-Jewish population in the Holocaust, the flight and expulsion of Germans in the west, resettlement of Ukrainians in the east, and **the repatriation of Poles from Kresy**.

The new communist government in Warsaw solidified its political power over the next two years, while the Communist Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) under Bolesław Bierut gained firm control over the country, which would become part of the postwar Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.

Following Stalin's death in 1953, a political "thaw" in Eastern Europe caused a more liberal faction of the Polish Communists of Władysław Gomułka to gain power. By the mid-1960s, Poland began experiencing increasing economic, as well as political, difficulties. In December 1970, a price hike led to a wave of strikes. The government introduced a new economic program based on large-scale borrowing from the West, which resulted in an immediate rise in living standards and expectations, but the program faltered because of the 1973 oil crisis.

A Note on The Contribution of the Polish Army in World War 11

A powerful ally, with some 84,000 soldiers in France alone, in 1940 the Polish Highland Brigade took part in the Battle of Narvik (Norway), and two Polish divisions participated in the defence of France, while a Polish motorized brigade and two infantry divisions were in process of forming. A Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade was created in French-mandated Syria, to which many Polish troops had escaped from Romania. The Polish Air Force in France comprised 86 aircraft in four squadrons. One and a half of the squadrons were fully operational, while the rest were in various stages of training. At that time Poland was the third largest in size.

Poles formed the fourth-largest armed force after the Soviets, the Americans and the combined troops of British Empire. Poles were the largest group of non-British personnel in the RAF during the Battle of Britain, and the 303 Polish Squadron was the highest-scoring RAF unit in Battle of Britain. Special Operations Executive had a large section of covert, elite Polish troops and close cooperation with the Polish resistance. The Polish Army under British high command were instrumental at the Battle of Monte Cassino, the Battle of the Falaise Gap, the Battle of Arnhem, the Siege of Tobruk and the liberation of many European cities including Bologna and Breda.

Perhaps most importantly, the Poles cracked an early version of the Enigma code, which "laid the foundations for British success in cracking German codes" Former Bletchley Park cryptologist Gordon Welchman said: 'Ultra would never have got off the ground if we had not learned from the Poles, in the nick of time, the details both of the German military... Enigma machine, and of the operating procedures that were in use.' After the war, Winston Churchill told King George VI: 'It was thanks to Ultra that we won the war.'

The Debt Owed to Poland

Remember, these Polish troops were instrumental to the Allied defeat of the Germans in North Africa and Italy, and hoped to return to Kresy in an independent and democratic Poland at the end of the War. But at Yalta, Churchill agreed that Stalin should keep the Soviet gains that Hitler had agreed to in the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

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