

# Erzsebeth Buchsbaum

United States Holocaust Museum

Erzsebeth was raised in Budapest, where her Polish-born Jewish parents had lived since before World War I

Her father, a brush salesman, fought

for the Austro-Hungarian forces in that war. The Buchsbaums' apartment was in the same building as a movie house. There was a small alcove in the apartment, and Erzsebeth's brother, Herman, made a hole in the wall so that they could watch the films.



1933-39: "Every summer Mother, Herman, and I took a special trip to Stebnik, Poland, to visit Grandma. Father stayed back to work. I loved Grandma's village. We'd walk near the train station and smell the flowers. I'd play with Grandma's dog, Reyfus, and sometimes we'd travel by horse and buggy to the nearby spa, where a band played and people sat and sipped drinks. In 1938 when Germany annexed Austria [the Anschluss], Herman emigrated to America."

1940-44: "Since we were Polish-born, we had to leave Hungary in 1941 when all "foreigners" were forced out. We went to Kolomyja [Kolomyia], Poland, where a ghetto was imposed (by the German occupiers) in 1942. Thousands were killed, and by summer I decided to escape back to Hungary. A smuggler took our small group through the woods. We slept by day and walked all night. On the 12th day, we heard a German shout: "Get up!" After I crawled into a hollow tree trunk, I heard shooting and voices crying "No!" Then it was silent. The smuggler had been wounded. The others were dead."

Erzsebeth escaped Hungarian work camps and many brushes with death. She moved to the United States in 1951.

## General Stanislaw Skalski

(Times Online UK Edition)

Stanislaw Skalski was born on November 27, 1915, in southern Russia. Two years later the family moved back to Poland. In 1933 he enrolled at the Warsaw School of Political Science. He took up gliding and in 1936 left university to enter the Air Force Officers' Training School at Deblin. He passed out on August 15, 1938, and was posted to the 4th Air Regiment stationed at Torun.

The leading Polish fighter ace of the Second World War, Stanislaw Skalski, wasted no time and made his first kill in the early morning of September 1, 1939. Full of the chivalric instincts of another age, he landed in a field beside the German bomber he had shot down, pulled the two wounded crew clear of the wreckage and bandaged them up before handing them over to the police.

He was also an exceptionally brave man. Shot down during the Battle of Britain, he injured a leg and was badly burnt. But he absconded from the infirmary to rejoin his squadron, and since he could not walk properly, let alone run, he would sit in his cockpit awaiting the scramble.

He commanded a section (six planes) against the Germans in September, 1939 (in Poland). Skalski managed to shoot down six German planes before, halfway through September, his own machine gave out.

In July, 1940 he was posted to RAF 501 Squadron at Gravesend (Great Britain), in which he fought throughout the Battle of Britain. He was shot down twice, but destroyed six German planes between August 30 and October 8, 1940.

In March, 1941 Skalski was then posted to 306 Polish Squadron, forming up at Church Fenton from the remnants of the Torun Air Regiment. In January 1943 he put together the Polish Fighting Team, better known as Skalski's Circus, a unit of 15 Polish fighter-pilots who fought alongside 145 Squadron in North Africa in the final push against Rommel. In recognition of his exceptional performance, Skalski was given command of 601 County of London Squadron in Malta — becoming the first Pole to lead a British squadron.

The next year he was back in the Polish Air Force, leading the 133 Polish wing over the landing beaches on D-Day and during the fighting in Normandy. On June 24 he scored his 22nd and last kill.

In October, 1944 he was sent on a staff course to the US, and on his return in February, 1945 he was posted to the staff of 11 Fighter Group and later to RAF Command in occupied Germany. By the end of the war he had attained the rank of Group Captain and he won the DSO, the DFC three times and the American DFC.



## Henryk Wroblewski

[Polandinexile.com](http://Polandinexile.com)

Henryk was born in St. Petersburg in 1921. His mother was a housemaid to a Russian general and father was a member of the Czar's Palace Guard. The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 persuaded the family to return to Poland. In 1922, the family settled in Vilno.

Here is Henryk's account:

—On September 17th, 1939, early on a Sunday morning, Soviet Russia invaded Poland. A small Polish unit was leaving town. With a few of my colleagues, we joined this unit as volunteers. Equipped and armed, we marched west, but did not get far because Soviet troops cut us off. On September 20th we crossed the Latvian border. We were disarmed and interned temporarily by the Soviets in a barbed-wire surrounded camp. We were now treated like prisoners of war. After a few weeks I was sent to a camp at a port on the Baltic Sea where the Soviets had a naval base. At the camp there was little to do, so I volunteered to work on a farm to the south.

In the summer of 1940 I went to work on another farm in southern Latvia. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1940 Latvian police took us away from the farm and returned us to the camp. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1940 we marched to the railway station. Soviet soldiers told us that we were going home but we did not believe them. On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1940 we crossed into Soviet Russia and traveled through until we reached Babinowo. We were taken to a camp called Juchnowo.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1941 we marched to the railway station where we were packed into wagons. The next day we passed through the outskirts of Moscow. After ten days of travel we arrived at Murmansk and then loaded into the confined hold of a cargo ship called the *Clara Cetkin*. We traveled across the Arctic Ocean heading for the Kola Peninsula. During the journey, we experienced hunger and thirst. After ten days at sea, we arrived at the Kola Peninsula. Here we went straight to work on building an airfield.

After two weeks we were loaded onto barges and taken back down river. We were loaded onto a cargo ship and shipped to Archangel. At Archangel we were put into camps surrounded by barbed wire. After four days we boarded a train and traveled south through Wologda, Yaroslaw and halted at a station called Wladimir. The following day we disembarked and marched on foot with an escort of armed guards to the town of Suzdal. When we passed some local on-lookers, the guards told them we were German POW's and we received a lot of abuse from them. The camp at Suzdal was better than others. It was an old monastery situated on the outskirts of the town and we were kept in the old church.

On August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1941 we were released by the Soviets. We were going to join the Polish Army being formed in the Soviet Union. Almost a month later, we left camp and marched to the railway station without a Soviet escort and under the command of our own officers.

On September 8th, 1941 we arrived on the Volga River. Here the 5th Polish Division was being formed. The Polish Government in London wanted a couple of thousand young men to volunteer for the Polish Air Force in England. I immediately applied and on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1941 we started our journey to England.

On January 30th, 1942 we were transported south to Uzbekistan. Here we waited until March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942 when we boarded a ship on the Caspian Sea. On March 27th, 1942 we arrived in Tehran. On April 3<sup>rd</sup> we went south. We boarded an English ship called the *City of Canterbury*. and sailed for Bombay, India. We arrived on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942.

Our final leg of the journey started on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942 bound for South Africa. We arrived in Cape Town on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942 and departed on May 13<sup>th</sup> aboard a Norwegian ship called the *Bergen Fjord*. We arrived safely in Glasgow on 7th June, 1942.¶

## **Corporal Ignacy Skowron**

Taken from an interview with Adam Easton of BBC

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939 Corporal Skowron, then age twenty four, was stationed at Westerplatte fort in the city of Danzig, (Gdansk) Poland. The Germans attacked the fort at 4:45 A.M. that morning which would mark the start of World War II. Cpl Skowron and 182 other soldiers

guarded the fort as the German military relentlessly attacked. Cpl Skowron remembers that —I took the telescope and looked out at the channel, first right, then left and then at the cruiser which was moored in the bay. At that moment I saw a flash of red and the first shell hit the gate.¶

Then, Cpl Skowron —grabbed a machine gun.¶ He recollects that —we got the order and we started to fight back. I saw huge trees being snapped in two.¶ The German attack lasted several days and Cpl Skowron remembers that —on the second day there were three attacks before midday. We fought back and then later we heard some noise and there were three planes overhead.¶ The planes dive bombed the Polish and a guardhouse was completely destroyed, killing five.

This fighting between the Germans and Polish continued for seven long days. Cpl Skowron notes that —the Germans saw that their attacks were not working so they used flame throwers to try and overcome us. By the sixth day, we were barely managing to survive because we were cold, hungry, dirty, and we had not slept. We were struggling.¶

Cpl Skowron received the Order Virtuti Militari, Poland's highest military decoration for his wartime service. Skworon said —You have to help people. My friends were fighting, I had to fight too. I have sad memories; we did not think we would ever get out of there alive. We were like a bird in a cage.

## **Krystyna Skarbek**

Adapted from [Notable Biographies.com](https://www.notablebiographies.com)

Krystyna Skarbek was born in or near Warsaw, Poland, on May 1, 1908. She enjoyed an upperclass childhood as the daughter of a bank official.

Skarbek's husband became a diplomat, and after their marriage the couple departed for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, his new post. They were in Ethiopia when German forces invaded Poland in September of 1939. Although the battle between Polish troops and the numerically superior Germans was short (lasted five weeks), underground resistance began along with the official campaign. Skarbek and her husband went to London, where Skarbek volunteered to work as a spy. She had already prepared a plan: she would go to Budapest, Hungary, print propaganda leaflets, and ski into Poland across the Tatra mountain range. An experienced skier, Skarbek had friends in the area who could serve as guides. She would then undertake intelligence missions and assist Polish resistance fighters in escaping from the country.

After some initial skepticism, the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) approved the plan, and Skarbek departed for Budapest on December 21, 1939. Her work for the SOE expanded, she was given the name Christine Granville (by which she was generally known in Britain after the war). Skarbek's initial plan succeeded. She barely managed to cross the mountains into her native country.

Skarbek's intelligence activities in Warsaw were successful enough that posters advertising a large reward for her capture were put up in every railroad station in Poland. Working with spies

for the Polish resistance, she assembled a dossier with photos of German troops massing on the borders of the Soviet Union, even though the two countries had signed a nonaggression pact.

Pressure on Skarbek increased in Hungary as well, and she was arrested early in 1941 and interrogated by the Gestapo, the German secret police. During her questioning, Skarbek bit her own tongue hard enough to draw blood, coughed hard, and succeeded in convincing a Hungarian doctor that she was suffering from tuberculosis. Skarbek was then smuggled out of Hungary in the trunk of a Chrysler car belonging to British ambassador Sir Owen O'Malley, crossing successfully into Yugoslavia. She made her way through hundreds of miles of Nazi-occupied territory to SOE headquarters in Cairo, Egypt.

In July of 1944, she parachuted into southern France. Her mission was to assist French resistance fighters in advance of the American ground invasion of southern France at the end of the summer. One day she was stopped near the Italian border by two German soldiers. The soldiers told her to put her hands in the air. She did so, revealing a grenade under each arm, pin withdrawn. When she threatened to drop them, killing all three, the German soldiers fled. Skarbek was awarded the French Croix de Guerre and the British George Medal, both high military honors. She was appointed to the Order of the British Empire (OBE).



## Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński

-Bill Johnston

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński is regarded by Poles, literary scholars and

ordinary readers alike, as one of the greatest Polish poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Baczyński was born in Warsaw on January 22, 1921. His parents were intellectuals. The young Baczyński began writing poetry at an early age; by the time he was 18 he was producing mature work. In the summer of 1939 he graduated from the elite Stefan Batory Grammar School in Warsaw; a few months later war broke out and Poland was occupied by the Germans.

In the early years of the war, Baczyński continued to write copiously, and studied Polish literature in the underground university. Baczyński published his work in small clandestine editions under the pseudonym "Jan Bugaj."

In 1943, Baczyński took the momentous decision to join the Armia Krajowa (Home Army), the Polish resistance. Despite his poor health, he was asthmatic, and the efforts of colleagues who recognized his genius and tried to keep him from the front lines, he insisted on remaining in active service. In spring 1944 he took part in several operations. When the Warsaw Uprising broke out in August, 1944, Baczyński was involved in the fighting from the beginning. On August 4, he was killed in action.

Baczyński's mother carefully preserved his manuscripts. Eventually, in 1961 Baczyński's collected works were published for the first time.

# Lisa Dawidowicz

United States Holocaust Museum

Lisa was born to a Jewish family in the small city of Ostrog in southeastern Poland. Her parents operated a grocery out of their residence;



; the front half of the house was a store and the rear half was their home. Ostrog was an important center of Jewish religious learning in Poland, and by 1933 Jews made up almost two-thirds of the city's total population.

1933-39: —My family was religious and we regularly attended services. I studied at a Polish school until the Soviets arrived in September 1939, at which time I briefly attended a Soviet school. But Soviet rule didn't alter our lives much.¶

1940-44: —Suddenly everything changed. The Germans invaded Soviet controlled Poland in June 1941 and reached Ostrog in July. They quickly set up a ghetto and organized the local Jews into work brigades. We realized by late 1942 that many of these groups were not returning from their work sites. We searched for a hiding place. A poor farm woman agreed to hide our family of five in an underground potato cellar--there was no room to stand and we could breathe only through a hole covered by pumpkins. We remained there for 16 months.

After living in displaced persons camps in Germany, Lisa emigrated to the United States in 1949.

# Lonia Goldman Fishman

United State Holocaust Museum



Lonia had three sisters and one brother. Her parents owned a cotton factory in the town of Wegrow. The Goldmans were a religious family, strictly observing the Sabbath, the Jewish holidays and the dietary laws.

1933-39: —After studying all day at public school, I attended a religious school for girls called Beis Yakov where I studied Hebrew, the Bible and Jewish history. Later, when I was in high school, a private tutor

came to the house to teach me Hebrew. My favorite hobby was knitting. After finishing high school I learned the quiltmaking trade. We moved to Warsaw in the mid-1930s when my father opened a down feather factory there.¶

1940-44: —We were trapped in the Warsaw ghetto when it was sealed off in November 1940. There in the ghetto, at age 18, I married Sevek, a tailor. In 1942 Sevek and I escaped to Wegrow, and then to a village near the town. A peasant couple, Jan and Maria, agreed to hide us. With bloody fingernails we dug a dank cellar "grave," lined it with straw, and lay motionless in the hole, concealed from danger for 18 months. Jan and Maria risked their lives by bringing us food and emptying our chamberpot every day. Once a week they sponged us down.¶

Lonia and Sevek had to relearn how to walk after their many months of confinement. In 1948 the Fishmans emigrated to America.

## **Major-General Stanislaw Sosabowski, C.B.E**

Polandinexile.com

Major-General Sosabowski's (born 1892) early years in south-eastern Poland were tough. His mother was widowed when he was twelve years of age and the family slowly slid into poverty despite a very small state pension.

Stanislaw disliked foreign rule and had joined the Polish Underground at the age of fourteen and to lead a school group. In 1908 these units became armed and called 'Polish Rifle Units'. By 1911, Sosabowski had passed stiff military exams and received his first commission to command a unit with the Austrians during World War I. By the end of the war, he was promoted to second lieutenant. He observed the disarmament of the Austrians who had commanded him and assisted in the formation of the Polish Army for the war against the [Bolsheviks](#).

In September, 1939 Sosabowski commanded the 21<sup>st</sup> Children of Warsaw Brigade. Poland was in a state of collapse and the Germans had issued their eight-point conditional surrender. Despite numerous casualties, the troops under his command maintained their resolve and loyalty to Sosabowski. Sosabowski was determined not to concede defeat and enter a prisoner of war camp. He decided to rejoin his unit and lead them into captivity where lower ranks might obtain their discharge papers from the Germans. The march into captivity must have been miserable as the remnants of other units joined them as they marched through the broken ruins of Warsaw. The German attitude to the captured Poles ignited his decision to escape. The next few days were spent evaluating an escape route. In the end, civilian clothes were stashed in a local hospital and an army doctor advised using lumbago as a cover for a trip for further medical investigation and treatment.

Sosabowski was familiar with the workings of running a covert underground operation. His initial tasks were to set up cover jobs for operatives. Forged papers described him as a motor salesman employed at Lodz. Sosabowski provided a basic cover so that he could obtain travel permits. Trips within the annexed zone included a trip ordered by the commander of the Home Army to collect funds from Romania. The Home Army began building rudimentary networks with these resources.

Sosabowski worked with unquestionable devotion to securing freedom for Poland in numerous ways. Later in his career, Sosabowski's courage while commanding the Polish Independent Parachute Brigade was well documented.

# Mieczyslaw M. Wnuk

polandinexile.com

Born in Zakopane on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1917 Mieczyslaw (Mietek) was one of six children belonging to Jan and Jozefa Wnuk. Mietek had completed military training prior to the war breaking out. He entered the cadet officer school in the autumn of 1937 and was placed in the army reserves.

In the early hours of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, Mietek awoke to the sound of aircraft flying over the house. Mietek, as an army reservist, had already been put on alert and had packed a rucksack with food and clothing.

Mietek decided to meet up with some friends to the east and from there, make their way independently to their unit. Mietek arrived in Lwow on September 10<sup>th</sup> amongst the refugees, which had swollen the city to a million inhabitants and placed a great strain on the city's resources.

With the army in disarray, transport crippled and chaos all around, Mietek decided to make for the Romanian border with his friends. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, a German plane dropped leaflets advising the war was over. As they rested in the open countryside on the night of September 17<sup>th</sup>, they witnessed the first of the Russian tanks invading from the east.

As they made their way towards Romania they came across the first Russian-occupied town, where they were taken prisoner by the Russians. Herded into a churchyard that was surrounded by a high wall, Mietek learned the Polish Government had escaped to Romania.

Mietek returned to Lwow even though the town was becoming more dangerous for Poles, not just from the invading German and Russian armies, but also from the Ukrainians. With Poland successfully partitioned between the Germans and Russians, Mietek learned that Polish forces were now being reorganized in France as a force in exile.

By October 21<sup>st</sup>, life in Lwow was becoming increasingly more difficult for Mietek. He decided to make his way home. Mietek obtained papers and travel permits from the Germans, and made his way to Krakow. Once in Krakow, family friends assisted in finding a driver of a truck to take them home to Zakopane. Zakopane was overrun with German troops and a *Gestapo* unit operated from one of the sanatoriums.

On January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Mietek volunteered his services to the resistance. In the early evening, Mietek made his escape to Czechoslovakia. On arrival, he made his way to the Polish Refugee HQ and was interrogated by Polish Intelligence officers. Mietek was asked to return to Poland and set up safe places along the escape routes while escapees waited for their guides. Retracing his earlier route, he arrived in Koszyce and reported to the Polish Underground H.Q.

The Polish Underground prepared fake passports and travel documents disguising Mietek as a laborer working in France. He left Budapest towards the end of February. He crossed into Italy where he experienced good treatment from the Italians. Mietek made the crossing into France trouble-free. On his arrival in Paris, Mietek learnt he had been reassigned to the 1st Polish Division, 2nd Regiment and sent to the training camp.



After training, Mietek was assigned in April, 1940 to the 3rd Battalion of the Second Regiment of the French Army, and posted as an observer. After the fall of France, Mietek spent three weeks traveling on foot to Lyon. From July, 1940 until November, 1942, Mietek remained in Vichy France.

Mietek was demobilized on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1940 and advised to falsify his records in case he was captured. At the end of September, he left for the Alps to take up his studies in French as a ‘cover’. For much of 1942 until March 1943 Mietek split his time between studies, ski competitions and being hired to train the Dauphin team in cross country skiing and ski jumping. Mietek fled to Portugal, where he was picked up at night by a British boat manned by British sailors.

Mietek reached Gibraltar on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1943. Mietek stayed in Gibraltar for seven weeks and arrived in England on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1943 when his ship docked at Bristol. Mietek was finally debriefed and posted to Dunblane in Scotland to train commandos.

## Sarah (Sheila) Peretz Etons

United States Holocaust Museum

—Sheila (nee Sarah Percec), born on February 19, 1936 in Chelm, Poland, describes her family and early childhood. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. During the German occupation, just 3 years old, and her mother were forced into a ghetto. One day, a Polish Catholic policeman warned them that the ghetto was about to be liquidated. He sheltered Sarah and her mother first in his house, then in a potato storage bunker, and then in a chicken coop on his property. “I was in that shack hiding for over two years. Never went outside. Uh, in the winter it was very cold; in the summer it was hot. And, um, he



used to bring us, uh, usually, uh, a loaf of bread for both of us every day and a bottle of water. Once in a blue moon for a special occasion he would bring a little soup. And, uh, sometimes he had, if he had to go away on business where they send him to another town for a day, or some other, he would, his wife or his daughter will never give us anything so we starved for a day or two until he came back. And my mother and I been in that, uh, uh, shack for--at night sometimes

my

mother used to sneak out to clean up the [chamber] pot, and, uh, I never went out. Uh, she wouldn't let me out, and I was afraid to. She was, uh, I, we didn't have anything to do. I didn't have anything to play. I was at that time six years old, and I didn't know...I used to play with the chickens and play with the straws, there was a lot of straw on the floor and he used to, he put up, uh, a kind of a mattress or something where we slept in a corner with blankets, and that was where we stayed”. After the war, Sarah emigrated – first to Israel in 1947 and then to the United States in 1963.

# Tadeusz Komorowski

Adapted from [Knowledgerush.com](https://www.knowledgerush.com)

General Count **Tadeusz Komorowski** better known by the name **Bór Komorowski** (Bór being his wartime code-name), was a Polish military leader. Komorowski was born in Lwów. In the First World War he was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army, and after the war served as an officer in the Polish Army.



Komorowski was one of the organizers of the Polish underground in the Krakow area, with the code-name Bór. In July, 1941 he became deputy commander of the Home Army (AK), and in March, 1943 was appointed its commander, with the rank of Brigadier-General.

In mid 1944 as the Soviet forces advanced into central Poland, the Polish government-in-exile in London instructed Bór-Komorowski to prepare for an armed uprising in Warsaw, so that the government could return to a city liberated by Poles and not by the Soviets.

The Warsaw Rising began on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944, and the insurgents of the AK seized control of most of central Warsaw. The Soviet Army was only 20km away but on Stalin's orders gave no assistance: Stalin described the rising as a "criminal adventure." The British were able to drop some supplies by air but gave no other assistance. The Germans employed large forces of SS and regular troops, plus auxiliary forces made up of Soviet Army deserters.

After two months of fierce fighting, Bór-Komorowski surrendered to the Germans on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944. The surrender depended upon Komorowski's condition that the AK fighters would be treated as prisoners-of-war. Bór-Komorowski was imprisoned in Germany. He was liberated at the end of the war and spent the rest of his life in London, where he was active among Polish émigrés. From 1947 to 1949 he was Prime Minister of the Polish government-in-exile.

# Valerian Tevzadze

Givi Koberidze

Tevzadze was a Georgian military officer and Polish resistance fighter. From 1918 to 1921, when Georgia enjoyed a short-lived independence from Russia, Tevzadze served as a colonel of the Georgian national army. The Bolshevik invasion early in 1921 forced him into exile to Poland where he received further training at the Higher War School. He settled in Warsaw, married a Polish woman, and published a book about the geography of the Caucasus in 1933.

With the outbreak of the World War II, he was summoned to active service in command of the northern sector of the defense of Warsaw. Captured by the German troops, he was subsequently released through the mediation of high-ranking Georgian officers of the Wehrmacht. However, Tevzadze soon joined the Polish resistance movement under the nom de guerre of "Tomasz." For

his service he was decorated with a Virtuti Militari cross, the highest military order awarded by Poland.

He spent the rest of the World War as a chief of staff and deputy commander of the 7th Infantry Division of Armia Krajowa, which operated in the German-occupied Polish lands. After the war, he remained in Poland, avoiding arrest by the Soviet security services, living incognito as Walerian Kzyżanowski, collaborating with an anti-Communist underground society.

## Witold Pilecki

Spartacus Educational

Witold Pilecki was born in Poland in 1901. When the German Army invaded the country in September, 1939, Pilecki joined the Tajna Armia Polska, the Secret Polish Army.

When Pilecki discovered the existence of Auschwitz, he suggested a plan to his senior officers. Pilecki wanted to get himself arrested and sent to the camp. He would then send out reports of what was happening in the camp. Pilecki would also explore the possibility of organizing a mass break-out.

Pilecki's colonel eventually agreed. Pilecki secured a false identity as Tomasz Serafinski, and arranged to be arrested in September, 1940. As expected he was sent to Auschwitz where he became prisoner 4,859. His work consisted of building more huts to hold the increased numbers of prisoners.

Pilecki soon discovered the brutality of the Schutz Staffeinel (SS) guards. Pilecki was able to send reports back to the Tajna Armia Polska explaining how the Germans were treating their prisoners. This information was then sent to the foreign office in London.

In 1942 Pilecki discovered that new windowless concrete huts were being built with nozzles in their ceilings. Soon afterwards he heard that prisoners were being herded into these huts and that the nozzles were being used to feed cyanide gas into the building. Afterwards the bodies were taken to the building next door where they were cremated. Pilecki got this information to the Tajna Armia Polska who passed it onto the British foreign office. This information was then passed on to the governments of other Allied countries.

In the autumn of 1942, Jozef Cyrankiewicz, a member of the Polish Communist Party, was sent to Auschwitz. Pilecki and Cyrankiewicz worked closely together in organizing a mass breakout. By the end of 1942 they had a group of 500 ready to try and overthrow their guards.

Four of the inmates escaped on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1942. One of these men, a dentist called Kuczbara, was caught and interrogated by the Gestapo. Kuczbara was one of the leaders of Pilecki's group. So when Pilecki heard the news he realized that it would be only a matter of time before the SS realized that he had been organizing these escape attempts.

Pilecki had already arranged his escape route and after feigning typhus, he escaped from the hospital April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1943. After hiding in the local forest, Pilecki reached his unit of the Tajna Armia Polska on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. He returned to normal duties and fought during the Warsaw Uprising

in the summer of 1944. Although captured by the German Army he was eventually released by Allied troops in April, 1945.

## **Witold Urbanowicz.**

By Dariusz Tyminski

Witold Urbanowicz was born March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1908 in the country-village of Olszanka, near the city of Augustow. In 1930, he started his training in Military Aviation School in Deblin,

In September 1939, Urbanowicz headed a group of air cadets to Romania with the task of ferrying new MS-406 and "Hurricane" fighters to Poland. Unfortunately, the German "Blitzkrieg" of Poland came during the delivery of these aircraft. Urbanowicz returned to Poland and was captured by the Germans. During the night he escaped, and after three days was back with his unit in Romania. By the end of 1939, Urbanowicz joined the first group of Polish pilots in the RAF. In the opening days of the "Battle of Britain" in August, 1940 he saw action in the British 145th Squadron and scored 2 victories. On August 21st, he was transferred to the 303rd Kosciuszko Squadron, and took charge of Flight "A".

In combat on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Urbanowicz was promoted to unit commander. Urbanowicz became the youngest Squadron Leader in the RAF, and during his service in that role remained at the rank of Polish Lieutenant.

On the afternoon of September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1940, during 303rd Squadron's second combat of the day, Urbanowicz downed 2 airplanes. The Polish unit's tally for the day was 16 destroyed German planes. On September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Sqn. Ldr. Urbanowicz was awarded the Silver Cross Virtuti Militari (the highest Polish award)

With the end of his tour of combat duty, Urbanowicz was assigned to the HQ of the 11th Fighter Group. From April, 1941 until June, 1941 Urbanowicz led the 1st Polish Fighter Wing. Urbanowicz was sent to the USA, where he was appointed assistant of the Air Attache in the Polish Embassy. In September, 1943, he left the diplomatic service and took an American offer to enter a new tour of combat service on the Chinese-Japanese Front, with the 14th US Air Force. On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1943 Urbanowicz joined the 75th Fighter Squadron, stationed at Kunming.

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1943 Urbanowicz finished his Chinese tour and returned to Great Britain. After a short period of work, he was again posted to diplomatic duty in the USA. Following the demobilization in 1946 he returned to Poland and shortly afterwards was arrested by the communist security service. He was freed, and immediately decided to leave Poland. Urbanowicz immigrated to the USA, where he died on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1996.

Witold Urbanowicz holds the distinction of second position on the list of Polish aces of WWII. His official score is 17 - 1 - 0.

## **Zbigniew Maslaczyk**

Polandinexile.com

Zbigniew Maslaczyk was born in Kalisz, Central Poland on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1915. The family moved shortly after to the town of Ostrow Wielkopolski, where they bought a house on the corner of the main square. They also owned and ran a shop in the town.

Zbigniew continued his studies and got a job as an engineering technician with a local company and he qualified as a metallurgical engineer. He was keen on boxing and football but the hobby he loved most was the new sport of gliding.

When Poland was attacked by Germany in September, 1939, Zbigniew went south and managed to escape to Hungary. He eventually made his way to join up with Polish forces in France. He enlisted in the Polish Air Force attached to the RAF on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1940. He was initially based on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, which was one of the notable bases of the Polish Air Force during the Battle of Britain.

On the May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1940 he was posted to the seaside resort of Blackpool in Lancashire, to the Polish Air Force Headquarters.

Further postings for Zbigniew included the Polish Depot at Bagington Aerodrome (now Coventry Airport), where his trade was recorded as Aircraft Hand/Pilot. Bagington was the base of 308 Polish Squadron that was fighting in defense of the Midlands. Zbigniew then trained at Newton Flight Training School from where he qualified as a Flight Sergeant.

In April, 1942 he was stationed as part of the 6th Anti Aircraft Co-operation Unit. On May 31<sup>st</sup> Zbigniew took off on a training flight with a warrant officer. They flew to Manchester. The plane crashed while doing exercises diving on a gun post and both men died.

Zbigniew was buried in Layton Cemetery, Blackpool England.



## **Zenon Waclaw Krzeptowski**

[Polandinexile.com](http://Polandinexile.com)

Zenon Waclaw Krzeptowski was born on the January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1922. In 1937 Zenon was part of the Army Auxiliary Service. Here, he was taught basic infantry drill including use of weapons and field craft and more significantly, how to fly gliders.

At the outbreak of the war, Zenon had joined the ZWZ or the Zwiasek Walki Zbrojnej (the Union for Armed Struggle) underground movement. Activities ranged from espionage and assassination to smuggling, dis-information and terrorizing the German occupiers. Their exploits included a fake underground newspaper aimed at dissenting German soldiers headed towards the Russian Front.

Zenon Krzeptowski left Poland in May, 1940 at the age of 18. Zenon left Poland because the Gestapo had arrested a colleague from his unit. Zenon's escape was through the snow topped Tatra Mountains of the Liliowe Pass and Cicha valley to the village of Podbanske in Slovakia and from there to Budapest where he was directed to the college at Zamardi.

The journey across Slovakia would have been the most dangerous part. The Germans had occupied Slovakia in March 1939 and the Slovak border guards used to organize man-hunts with

bloodhounds. Escapees would have to dodge the Gestapo patrols which blocked their escape to Hungary.

During his travels Zenon lost his clothing and money when a patrol almost caught him trying to get a drink from a stream. He escaped by hiding under brush. During the trek south, he sought food and shelter in a farm. The farmer fed him and then had him arrested. His feet suffered terribly from the long trek and required hospital treatment. His feet were operated on without anesthesia to correct damage caused by wearing his boots with wet feet.

Zenon's journey from Budapest to the college went without incident because he was now traveling on false papers. The school acted as a transfer point for the evacuation of young people to the Polish Army in France.

Army records show Zenon enlisted into the Polish Land Forces under British High Command in Palestine on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1941. He was posted to the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade Artillery Regiment as a dispatch rider where he learned to ride a motorbike

Zenon officially arrived in the United Kingdom on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942. He was sent to the Polish Air Force Depot at Blackpool and RAF Station Kirkham just in time to celebrate his twentieth birthday. He completed a journey which started 1 year, 8 months and 10 days earlier. Training with the Air Force began on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1942 and Zenon began operational flying in late 1943.

## Zbigniew Wyrwicz

Yvonne Merritt

—I was a career officer; I finished training in what is the equivalent of West Point, in the Infantry when the war started, Sept. 1, 1939. I was 26 years old. In the army, life revolves around executing the commands of your superiors. The news of our defeat affected me deeply. In our retreat from Krynica eastward to Lwow, the roads were clogged, strewn with corpses of soldiers as well as civilians, it was very depressing. I tried to reorganize my unit from soldiers and stragglers from other groups to press forward, but these positions were already occupied by the Germans who were close behind us. My commander ordered me to surrender, but after one final battle that ended victoriously, I decided to escape with my troops southward into Romania, which at the time was neutral territory. Unfortunately, en route, I changed my shoes, developed sores on my feet, became ill with a high fever and had to stay behind for a few days. This was in the Carpathian Mountains. I returned to Lwow where I hid throughout October and then went to Przemysl, occupied by the Soviets. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, I crossed the River San which now was in German hands.¶

—While in the underground army danger lurked at every turn. In the home or on the street, I was always in fear of being discovered. Difficult living conditions were overcome by the camaraderie of others.

One thing that kept up our spirits was our sense of humor. There were jokes and poking fun at the enemy brought howls of uncontrollable laughter. The underground was busy plastering the city with anti-German posters, hanging Polish flags on government buildings. Being caught doing any of this type of propaganda work was cause for arrest.

—War found me as a mature adult, but there were still many events for which I was not prepared. Since childhood, I wanted to be in the Army, just like my father. My family's wish however, was that I go to Medical School. The underground didn't utilize children unless they were exceptionally clever. One 16 year old that I had as a student in the forest school was a gifted horseman and he served as a courier. One had to always be on the alert. The army was extremely organized. We lived in the forest and kept moving around.

—Risks were taken at every step. My family survived the war. I illegally ran away to Germany when the war ended to escape the Communists, as they were arresting those in the Underground. Once, the communists surrounded my unit, took all my documents from me, and prepared to shoot us. I asked to allow our chaplain, who was with us, to hear our last confession, when suddenly, another communist patrol rode up in panic and asked our captors to come quickly as their help was needed at another location. That saved us from certain death.

—We never gave up hope.

## **The Story of Ravensbruck Camp Inmates**

Yvonne Merritt

This is the story told by Jozefa Kantor. She was a Polish Girl Scout leader who formed a Scout troop within the concentration camp. They called themselves —MURY or WALLS.

—We formed a wall together to collectively serve God, Country, and our fellow man, as pre-war Scouting oaths demanded. Our aim was to inspire the spirit, to instill national pride, and to win friends among the other nationalities in the camp. We recognized other girl scouts by their attitude toward others and their behavior. Each of us took on the task of gathering other girls, especially those who needed special care.

—We're standing silently in rows in the main prison square between the barracks wondering when the roll call will end. The black-caped female prison guards sharply marched between the columns of gray, exhausted women. German shepherds, held on leashes, showed their teeth. The barrack leaders give their evening report. The setting sun casts its last rays on the beautiful sky that slowly turns dark with clouds.

—Each of us is lost in thought. Some of us frequently glance at Jozia Kantor, who is praying fervently. She told some of us \_If you're a Girl Scout, after assembly, come to the Wall.' Your heart starts racing with fear and you ask yourself \_Should I go?' Each one of us is exhausted from a long day's work. We mingle among the other prisoners. The sirens are blazing, telling us it's bedtime. It's dark. You can't see the moon or stars. Dark figures are moving in one direction. Faces are indiscernible. It's hard to tell who's coming to the Wall. Not many. A whisper seems to emerge from underground \_Are these the scouts? We join hands. We're standing in a row, can't see each other's faces, but our hands are joined. We look to the east – in the direction of our homeland, to our distant home. The wall before us cuts us off from the world; it protects us. A Wall is a symbol of protection, of safety, a defense against an invading enemy.

—Suddenly we sing, in a whisper, our song. Today we begin our joint scouting duties. Jozia whispers \_It will be better for us knowing that there are more of us. We'll be a standing wall, a silent wall, joined by the Scouting ideal and guarding against evil entering our souls and those of our neighbors. We're Scouts always and everywhere. Do you remember your Scouts' oath? One after the other repeats the oath, in an emotional whisper. We sense danger close by. We hold our breath. Our hearts stop. We huddle to the wall. The danger passes. We repeat the oath...

—This officially was the beginning of our clandestine battle for our Polish souls, for strength to resist and faith in enduring this earthly hell. We dispersed in all directions, silently as rabbits, avoiding the circling searchlights. We felt that neither the highly electrified barbed wired fences, the vicious dogs, the lead-weighted whips, the vile cursing by the guards, cold and starvation, nor the exhausting labor could break our spirit. This started the Scout Troop. We were bound together with ties stronger than blood. We were no longer alone. The forming of this Scout troop was a great emotional experience for us. The organizers were Jozefa Kantor, Maria Rydarowska and Zofia Jancy.

## **Czeslaw and Henryka Korzycki**

Yvonne Merritt

—I was 18 when the war broke out Sept. 1, 1939. I was in Warsaw. I was raised in a very patriotic family. My plans for the future were not yet crystallized. My friends and I were very hopeful of our future.

—When Germany attacked it was a surprise for me. It did not necessarily depress me. I volunteered for the army. The news that Poland had to surrender was sad but I understood why. At the time, I was in Eastern Poland. When the Bolsheviks entered from the East on Sept. 17, there was no hope for victory. I tried to escape into Romania. In December, 1939 I crossed the river Bug into German-held territory. The day after I returned to Warsaw I was sworn into the Underground Army. I took part in printing and distributing the underground newspaper and making hand grenades, I finished army cadet school.

"Beginning in 1942, I was hunted by the Gestapo. They searched my house for me and my sister who was also in the underground with me. I was in southern Poland at that time; I was told about the search and warned not to return. A culminating point of the Underground was the failure of the Warsaw Uprising. I was leading a company prior to the Uprising. Interestingly, the battle started earlier than planned. I was having a bath at my parents's house when I heard the first shots. I dressed quickly and tried to join my company. The roads were blocked so I joined another group. The Germans were determined to wipe us out because the position that we held was critical. We were fighting the SS troops and the Cathedral (where we were) changed hands many, many times.

—I must say that the Underground Army (AK) can be divided into 2 groups: those who fought in the Uprising of 1944, and those who fought before the Uprising, some even from the very beginning. Because of the great danger associated with the Conspiracy Movement, the Commanders were very selective as to who could join at the beginning. A group of five people first formed. Belonging in the early days was an honor, a distinction. During the Uprising, everyone participated and there were huge losses. During those 60 days, my company —Igryk had 700 members and at the end had 75 living, all sick or wounded.



—My parents' home was completely burned. They were taken as slave labor to Germany. After the war, they settled in the town of Lodz. I saw my mother for the first time in 1960 when I visited Poland. My father died in 1949. Never did see him. My sister was seriously injured. She was shot in the lungs. She served as a nurse and messenger during the war.

—In one instance an SS man fired at me and just missed my head. My colleague saved me by shooting him. Another time I heard a shot and my colleague was bent in half. I thought he was joking but he was really shot. Another time, I lost my hearing from all the bombarding. During bombarding, I really hated going into cellars. I would hide against some wall. I had to stay and see what was happening. Once a wall fell on me, but I survived.

—It was a grand adventure for a young man. We saw it as a romantic time, even in critical situations. Everything seemed normal. We never gave a thought to wondering if we would survive. Never.

## **Kazimierz Olejarczyk**

Yvonne Merritt

—I was a 20-year-old American citizen living in Warsaw as a student at Warsaw Polytechnic. I was raised in Poland, in Polish schools, even though I was a U.S. citizen. I had been born in the United States and then returned to Poland with my parents. We hardly expected the war to break out. We were at a summer cottage near Warsaw and the American Embassy notified all American citizens that they should leave the country because of the situation. We returned to Warsaw and everyone was preparing for air raids and expecting gas attacks. People were plastering windows, blackening them, and digging trenches to stop the tanks.

—September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939 was a beautiful day. In the morning I left with flowers to visit my future fiancée. She was away in the countryside. I saw airplanes over Warsaw. I saw puffs of black smoke which meant they were shooting. There were searchlights in the sky. Then I heard the first bombs whistling down. When I returned home the radio was on and the President of Poland announced that German soldiers crossed the border into Poland during the night.

—The fighting went on beyond September. I took part in a demonstration at the British Embassy.

The first four or five days in Warsaw were pretty normal. On the sixth day, things changed as German tanks were closing in from the North. All able-bodied men were encouraged to leave Warsaw. On September 7<sup>th</sup>, I took down my bicycle, some provisions, a blanket, an old revolver and fourteen bullets to find the army.

—We ended up in Kobel which was near the Russian border. German tanks were approaching. My mother and grandmother stayed in Warsaw. They had a rough time. They went down into the coal bin during air raids. They eventually crossed the bridge to stay with a cousin.

—I felt less afraid. I felt more immune, because I was an American citizen and that gave me confidence. For a year and a half I was in Warsaw under German occupation, trying to leave the country. I finally did, through Spain and Portugal. I decided to join the Polish army in Canada. I joined the Air Force. I trained in Canada before being sent to England as a navigator. I was

assigned to the Polish Bomber Squadron assigned to the Coastal Command looking for U-Boats patrolling the Bay of Biscay off the coast of France. Later I was assigned to the bi-weekly Polish Air Force publication —Skrzydla - in London. When the war ended, I was discharged.

## Irena Bankowska

Yvonne Merritt

—The Soviets were in Bialystok from September, 1939 until June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941. There were schools during the Russian occupation. They were Russian schools, not Polish schools. You weren't allowed to speak Polish, even among your friends. It was that way until 1941. Poles were not allowed any freedoms. We were bullied, harassed, persecuted. My father worked during that time and mother stayed home. I went to school. In 1941, the Germans returned and the war intensified. There was fighting back and forth. The line advanced and retreated, back and forth, many, many times. The population hid in cellars during this time. We were afraid of both the Germans and Russians! The Germans rode around in the streets and would shoot at whatever they pleased. The Russians did so too. The Russians dragged my father to dig trenches. The Germans then occupied us until 1944.

—Under the Germans, we couldn't attend school. I was taught in secret schools, so-called *\_tajne komplety*. I studied mathematics, language, history, and geography. Once I took bread to a Jew who said his children were starving. A Ukrainian man, who was helping the Germans, saw this and dragged me to police headquarters. There they beat me and demanded to know why did I give him this bread? I denied that I gave it to him. While I was screaming in Polish, a young officer came up and asked what the matter was. It turned out this German lived, before the war, in Poland and spoke Polish. He saved me and brought me back home.

—I was too young to belong to AK but I did what I could. Once I was returning from my secret classes and a German soldier started to chase me. I had to run. I ran like crazy. I didn't know why he was chasing me, but I ran across the street, all the way home. The Germans forced us to salute them with a raised outstretched arm saying *\_Heil Hitler!* In private we would stretch our arm in salute and say in Polish, *\_My dog can also jump this high!* We were forced to learn German songs but we had no respect for them. We were allowed 1.5 kilos of bread a week, 10 —dekagrams of cooking oil a month. My parents did what they could to look out for me.

—In 1944, when the Russians returned to our city, everything was in ruins. The entire town of Bialystok was destroyed by the Germans. There were many Jews in our city. They were gone and the schools were destroyed. The hospitals were mined, totally destroyed by the Germans. When the Russians came everything was in rubble. I signed up for school. There were no desks or chairs. There were no books, ink, or chalk. The Germans tried to destroy everything. They burned the prison even with the prisoners.

—The war taught me to value one's family, each other. My parents were always there to protect me, even as the bombs were falling. I learned to value and love my country even more too.

# Irene Musman

Henrietta Nowakowski

Musma's father, Emilian Nowak , was a victim of the Katyn Forest Massacre.

—When the war broke out we lived in the Carpathian Mountains south of Lwow where my father was stationed as a forestry engineer. I was too young to attend school at the time. In April of 1940, when the Russians came from the East, the Russians took us to Siberia, my mother and me. We were lucky because my mother managed to take a lot with her. She took linens and fancy nightgowns. Later she was able to trade these goods for food. She took picture albums and carried them with her throughout the entire odyssey. Everything else was bartered.

—My Uncle joined the Anders Army, which was formed mostly from Siberian prisoners. That gave us the privilege of being cared for by the army. We also had a neighbor who came to Siberia and brought us to where the army was assembling. He had papers to release four people. My neighbor forged the number and changed it to six. My mother and I could now leave with him.

—We traveled the route through Tashkent in Uzbekistan to Pahlevi and Tehran in Iran and then India. We ended in Colonia Santa Rosa in Mexico. The British took care of us up to Teheran. From India, we boarded an American ship. We arrived at a port near Los Angeles and went to Mexico by train. We were the last transport to leave India for Mexico. Mexico offered asylum to approximately 2000 refugees. Our accommodations resembled a motel but without separate bathrooms. They were built especially for the refugees occupied mostly by women and children. There were very few men. We lived there for almost two years. We arrived in 1944 and left in 1946. The colony was disbanded. We left for Chester, Pennsylvania. You needed a sponsor. Our sponsor was named Borzynski. He was my mother's cousin. He and his wife drove all the way to Mexico to pick us up. We had to go through the whole immigration process. We had to wait our turn. We lived in Chester for a year and a half.

The last time my mother saw my father would have been in August, 1939 when the Army Reserves were mobilized in anticipation of trouble. She had no contact of any sort not even letters from him. He was able to contact some of my mother's relatives who were able to pass on some of his papers and his wedding band. We were way out in the mountains and not easy to get to. I understand that he and others were shot between April 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 1940.