

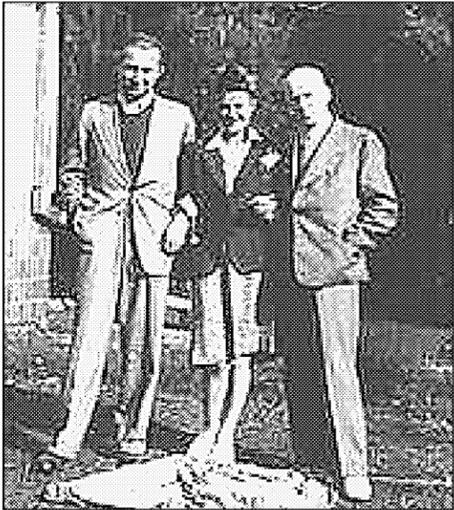
Zofia Korboński, † 1915-2010

Radio Coder Provided Information from German-Occupied Poland

By: **Ted Mirecki,**

1st VP of the PAC

*Washington Metropolitan area Division
and PAC National Director.*



L. Stefan and Zofia Korboński with a friend

During World War II, the British government made available to the various governments in-exile from countries occupied by Nazi Germany, voice radio transmission facilities to broadcast to those countries, under the pretense that the transmissions originated in the occupied countries. To pull this off, the radio stations needed daily news feeds from observers on the ground. From Poland, the news was provided by Zofia Korboński, wife of Stefan, who was the Polish Government-in-Exile's delegate and director of the Directorate of Civil Resistance, which coordinated non-military resistance efforts by the Polish populace against the German occupying forces. Zofia and Stefan gathered information from the extensive network of the Polish Underground Resistance, and Zofia was the cipher clerk who encoded the messages for transmission to Great Britain. Among the news first reaching the West by this route were: information about medical experiments on women prisoners in the Nazi German concentration camp at Auschwitz; the location of Hitler's command bunker in East Prussia; the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943; daily reports on the fighting during the three weeks of that Uprising; the final deportation of ghetto residents and destruction of the ghetto; tests of V-1 and V-2 weapons on Polish territory; daily reports on the fighting during the 63 days of the Warsaw Rising which began on August 1, 1944; the "liberation" by the Soviets which marked the beginning of the next occupation of Poland. Zofia Korboński died in Washington DC on August 16 from pulmonary failure, after a long illness.

Born in Warsaw on May 10, 1915 as Zofia Ristau, daughter of a chemical engineer, she graduated from a secondary school and the School of Political Science in Warsaw. In July of 1938 she married Stefan Korboński (1901-1989), prominent Warsaw attorney and high level activist in the Polish Populist Party, which was a major force on the Polish interwar political scene, being the party in power on several occasions in the period 1920-1926.

When WW II broke out in September of 1939, Zofia went to live with her grandmother in eastern Poland, and Stefan was called up into the army. He was captured by the Soviets, who divided Poland with Hitler according to the secret codicil of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Stefan managed to escape and rejoined Zofia. They declined an opportunity to escape the country via Romania, and returned to Warsaw to assist their native land in whatever way they could.

In a situation unique in German-occupied Europe, the Polish political establishment under the authority of the Government-in-Exile in London set up a secret underground state complete with all of the structures of a functioning society: courts, schools, press, armed forces – all under deep cover from the occupying Germans. Being highly placed in one of the major political parties that formed these structures, Stefan played a major role, being named as the head of the Directorate of Civil Resistance. Zofia was his loyal assistant in all his undertakings – she considered her activities secondary to his and would not talk about hers except as how they related to his.

Clandestine radio transmissions by the Polish Underground were begun immediately after the cessation of hostilities, and Zofia was involved from the start. She selected locations for the transmitters, smuggled equipment between locations, secured hiding places for the equipment in the event a location was threatened, served as lookout, and was the sole coder/decoder. Initially, transmitters were home-made, but eventually they were replaced by American-made professional ones supplied by air drops.

The work was incredibly dangerous. Of the 40 to 50 persons involved over the course of this activity, about half perished. The Germans had excellent radio-detection technology deployed on vehicles and aircraft which allowed them to determine the location of transmitters. German agents disguised as Polish priests, railroad workers or mailmen were sent to reconnoiter the area, followed by armed units to eliminate the transmitter and its crew. Survival required frequent changes of location, limiting the duration of transmissions, and continual observation of the environs, typically done by women.

Among Zofia's duties was the training of observers to recognize German surveillance. The radio station was particularly significant during the Warsaw Rising of August –October 1944, when transmission conditions were especially difficult. At times, the Korboński's equipment was the only functioning transmitter in the city, able to transmit news of the fighting. Every day, it would transmit news of the atrocities committed by the Germans on the civilian population which resulted in the loss of over 200,000 lives. In the words of Oxford historian Norman Davies, it was the equivalent of a 9/11 attack every day for 63 days. The radio station continued to transmit information from Poland until November 1945, when Poland was already occupied by the Red Army.

The Korbońskis were both arrested by the NKVD in 1945, but were released as part of an amnesty when the nascent Communist government made a sham semblance of cooperation with the non-Communist opposition, which included Korboński's Populist Party. But when that facade ended and opposition politicians were once again being arrested in 1947, the Korbońskis fled to Sweden and within two weeks came to the United States.

Stefan immediately became active in émigré organizations, while Zofia began working in the Polish section of Voice of America, preparing texts for transmission to Poland – coming full circle from her wartime activities. She retired from VoA in 1980. Thereafter she became active in various Polish-American organizations, including the Polish American Congress, Polish Veterans Association and Friends of John Paul II Foundation.

Stefan died in the spring of 1989, just months before the first free elections that established the start of a democratic government in Poland. That year, Zofia made her first post-war visit to Poland, and then visited regularly, becoming engaged in the construction of the Museum of the Warsaw Rising and the Monument to the Polish Underground State.

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A True Polish Hero

My Friend Zdzisław

By: **Stanley L. Karp, Jr.**

Part II

Though Britain and France had signed agreements to come to Poland's aid if attacked, no significant aid was forthcoming. France, whose troops outnumbered those of Germany, mostly had their troops immovably stationed on the Maginot Line, which later proved to be of no avail. Britain's focus was preparing for its own defense and concern for Western Europe. Poland was on its own! Polish forces fought gallantly as the desperate battle raged without letup for two weeks—ending with the signing of a cease fire agreement on September 27, 1939. Around 6 thousand Polish soldiers were dead and nearly three times that wounded. Over 100 thousand were made captive. More than 25 thousand Warsaw civilians were killed and twice as many wounded. The battle was tenaciously and bravely fought, but against overwhelming odds. Warsaw was not given up without a fight!

Zdzisław's older brother Zygmunt fought in the Siege of Warsaw. After the cease fire agreement on September 27, Zygmunt managed to return home in Lipno. There he joined a Polish underground combatant unit. Also, he took a job in a bank run by Germans as a "gofer", doing various sorts of menial tasks. As Zdzisław tells the story, one Saturday, Zygmunt was alone in the bank, the other clerks having left for the day. A young Hitler youth came in and greeted him with the Hitler salute. Zygmunt responded with "guten morgen" (good morning). The brash youth took umbrage at this response, and he repeated, "Heil Hitler". Zygmunt again responded with "guten morgen". There was an uncomfortable pause. The young German, now furious, yelled, "Heil Hitler!" To which Zygmunt gave a composed but quietly defiant response of "guten tag" (good day). At that point the bank's owner, a German, returning from lunch, sized up the situation, and ordered the youth to leave. The Hitler youth notified the Gestapo of the incident. On April 10, 1940 very early in the morning, dogs could be heard barking, throughout all of Lipno. The Gestapo was sweeping the town, making arrests. Those deemed troublemakers by the Gestapo were arrested, including Zygmunt. On April 17, 1940, about a thousand arrestees, Zygmunt among them, were sent to Grudziac, a nearby town. Zygmunt was then sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Germany. In February 1944, he was transferred to the concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen, one of the worst. Later, he was sent to a concentration camp in Hamburg. From there, when being returned to Bergen-Belsen, for some unknown reason he was diverted to a prison of war camp in Senbostel. At war's end he was rescued by British troops from that location—found among the dead and barely alive himself, he could not stand at all.

The Swedish Red Cross took him into their care, after which he lived in Sweden and raised a family there, while making presentations as a "witness to the forgotten Holocaust". [In 1960, Zdzisław returned to the site of his mother, Bronisława's death. He met with a local village leader who informed him that, based on the description Zdzisław gave him, he recalled seeing the body of Bronisława. He said that after the German advance had passed, the locals had collected the bodies of five civilians, including Bronisława's, and buried them in a common grave with fifty soldiers. In 2000, accompanying Zdzisław and his sister, Helena, I with our son Stan and his family stopped at the site of the bombing for a solemn period of contemplation and homage.]

In late October or early November 1939, Zdzisław, Irene, Helena, and Stasia were placed in an orphanage established in Skolimow, a village a few miles south of

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\$5,000 Pulaski Scholarships American Council for Polish Culture

An extremely generous grant from the Conrad R. Walas family, which was inspired by the fervent appeal at an Annual Convention of the American Council of Polish Culture by Mark F. Brzezinski, Esq. to all Polonia for the financial support of young Polish Americans pursuing higher education gave birth to the ACPC's Pulaski Scholarships for Advanced Studies. Since that time students in graduate studies have besieged the Council for help in meeting the financial challenges they face today. Happily, the Council was able to dole out five \$5,000 scholarships from the Endowment Fund's income to very worthy students who have not only gone on to successful careers but in a good many cases are also actively participating in Polonian activities at creative levels.

Unfortunately, the Pulaski Endowment Fund is still recovering from the recent economic troubles and the ACPC was able to offer only one \$5,000 grant last year and is faced with being limited to only one grant for the Pulaski Scholarship in 2011. At the ACPC's 2010 annual convention, Treasurer Gregory Biestek offered a donation of \$500 to the Pulaski Endowment Fund with a challenge that Polonia adds sufficient funds so that a second \$5,000 scholarship may be offered in 2011. This generous offer motivated Mr. Mark Brzeziński to seek once again to inspire Polonia groups and individuals to contribute to the Fund so that we can offer at least two \$5,000 scholarships this coming year. He has submitted a statement to ACPC that urges **Polonia to offer its support.**

Donations should be made out to "Pulaski Scholarship Endowment Fund" (ACPC is a 501 (C) (3) tax exempt organization) and mailed to:

**Mr. Gregory Biestek, Treasurer
American Council for Polish Culture
817 Berkshire
Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230**

For further information, please contact Mr. Marion Winters, Chairman Pulaski Scholarships for Advanced Studies, at 508 -919-0160 or mvwinters@charter.net □

RAF podcast tells tale of Polish pilots

An October 18 article on the *Polskie Radia Website* reports... A new set of podcasts produced by the RAF Museum in the United Kingdom reveals the bravery of Polish pilots during the Battle of Britain, whose 70th anniversary falls this year.

Today's date, 11 October, has been specifically selected to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the withdrawal of 303 (Polish) Squadron from the front line after a successful tour of duty which recorded the destruction of 126 enemy aircraft in 42 days.

Pilots of 303 Squadron with Hawker Hurricane, Leconfield, Battle of Britain, 1940, Photo: Royal Air Force Museum The record made '303' the most successful of all the RAF Squadrons that defended Great Britain and its peoples during the Battle of Britain.

The recognition of the Polish pilots is described in the podcast. "In all, 145 Polish pilots fought in the Battle of Britain. For 29 of their number killed, they shot down 203 German aircraft," assistant curator of the RAF Museum Peter Devitt told Polish Radio.

The podcasts have been produced in both English and Polish versions. [MP3] (jb)

Source: RAF Museum □