

**Karp - My friend Zdzislaw from 4**

Warsaw. Their hair was cut, their clothes thrown out onto the snow, and they were deloused, upon their entry. Early in 1940, Zdzislaw was transferred to the Warsaw orphanage so he could attend school. His sisters stayed in Skolimow.

At the Warsaw orphanage Zdzislaw was given schooling and training in electrical work. In 1941, at the age of 16, while still in the orphanage, he went to work as an electrician's helper for a private company, with his first assignment being the installation of ventilation in the German Gestapo headquarters. There he constantly heard torturous screams. By then he had joined the Polish underground, called "Armia Krajowa" (pronounced "ahr-me-ah cry-oh-vah"), which translates into "home army". It is often referred to simply as the "AK". At that age he was a provisional member, with the option of being able to resign. The following year, at age 17, he became a permanent member, at which point death became the penalty for betrayal or desertion. In 1943, at the age of 18 years, he was discharged from the orphanage. Somehow, his AK membership had escaped the scrutiny of the Gestapo. He was permitted to take the entrance exam to a technical school located in the prewar Warsaw Polytechnic Institute. He passed and was accepted, where he continued his training in the electrical field.

During this period, Zdzislaw bore witness to the brutal treatment of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. He was able to use the pass of a supplier to the ghetto to enter, largely because of the inattention of the German and Jewish guards at the gate. There he was exposed to the horrifying conditions, including chaotic crowding, emaciated inhabitants, the sick and dying laying about, and dead bodies strewn around and in carts. Though just a young boy, he felt deep despair at not being able to provide meaningful help. Many Poles did help, though the penalty if caught was execution of them and their families. Even well after the war, the residue of the horror prompted Zdzislaw to go out of his way to visit the Jewish sections of the cities he visited in Poland, including the synagogues and cemeteries. There he would muse on their sufferings. He would speak at length with any Jewish person or rabbi who might be in the area. I experienced this first hand when, at his request, we visited the Jewish quarter in Krakow's Old Town and I saw his solemn demeanor throughout.

From the very start and throughout WWII, Polish underground forces engaged in extraordinarily organized guerrilla warfare, fighting the German invaders at every opportunity with notable success. Among their wide-ranging activities, they blew up enemy supply lines and facilities, rescued Jews, smuggled intelligence to the Allies, printed newspapers, maintained an underground government, aided the civilian population, and conducted schools for children. They fiercely resisted the German occupation in every way, with great sacrifice in lives and hardship. This organized, comprehensive, focused, fierce resistance distinguishes Poland from all other occupied nations in World War II. No other had displayed such a degree of patriotic resolve! With true Polish patriotism and steel resolve on behalf of their country and family, Zdzislaw, his brother, and his father were very much part of this historic underground resistance effort.

On the August 1, 1944, the AK forces, which had been secretly gathering in Warsaw, rose up against the German Army in open conflict, in what became known as the "1944 Warsaw Uprising" (not to be confused with the courageous but smaller Jewish "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" a year earlier). This drive to liberate the capital and then the country was undertaken with promise of significant support from the Allies, including the Russians, who then were, purportedly, on the side of the Allies.

The Uprising meaningfully engaged German forces thereby also greatly assisted the second front launched by the Allied "D-Day" invasion at Normandy in June. But help was not to come. The perfidy of Stalin, manifested early on, persisted at the banks of the Vistula. Having already murdered ten thousand Polish officers and elites in the Katyn Forest and surrounding areas and having his troops kill Polish partisans and soldiers in their march toward Warsaw, Stalin was bent on allowing the Uprising to decimate the Polish fighters—so as to forestall the difficulties they would create for his plan to subjugate Poland which he had in mind from the very start of his "joining" the Allies. The Soviets halted their advance on the east bank of the Vistula River, withholding their anticipated support in a reprehensible act of treachery, to permit the overwhelmingly superior German airpower and firepower to wreak havoc upon the city and its Polish defenders. Moreover, they denied the Allies the use of airfields on their territory preventing delivery of critically needed arms and supplies to the Polish fighters in Warsaw.

Zdzislaw fought in the Warsaw Uprising as a member of the underground AK. His code name was "Longin" and he was a member of Grażyna Company, Harnas Battalion. The underground members were grouped into sections of five, each of whom was given a code name to preclude the revelation of true names under torture if caught. As Russian troops approach Warsaw on the first day of August, 1944, a fellow AK member contacted Zdzislaw, agitatedly informing him they had to report to their rallying area for duty. There, with little prior training and little familiarity with arms (he then had none), he was handed a grenade, a bottle of gasoline, and no other weapon. With that his unit was ordered to attack the main post office. As a result of the capturing of the post office, he acquired his first rifle from the defeated Germans. In this manner, Armia Krajowa armed itself throughout the Uprising.

Today, it is hard to fully grasp the hardships endured and the enormity of the heroism achieved in the bold action which constituted the '44 Uprising. To a great degree, young men and women who were boys and girls really, with little more than rifles or bottles of gasoline set forth to face an overwhelming well-disciplined enemy force with plentiful modern armaments. There was little water and food; they ate whatever stray animal they came across and took water as they found it. Motivated by an undying love of their Poland and their family, and with faith in God, they managed to engage the enemy and seize significant territory for 66 hard-fought days. A significant contribution to the allied war effort and a story of valor which will echo throughout history!

**My friend Zdzislaw**

Continued in the November issue

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