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The Memorial In Autumn Colours by MoreTravel | (771)



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Photographer's Note

The target of my autumn walk was a place, where an American bomber Liberator ('California Rocket') crashed on December 18, 1944. A memorial was built near the crash site few years ago. You can see one genuine piece of this plane there.

There is an account of the events by Tad Dejewski (#060 Navigator) below:

The Fate of the "CALIFORNIA ROCKET"
B-24. Serial No. 251714

MISSION #166 - the bombing of a synthetic fuel's factory in Oswiecim.

18 DECEMBER 1944 - As we arrived at the I.P. over Strumien, Poland, we took a heading of 59 degrees magnetic and flew over Lake Goczałkowickie. The distance to the target was 22 miles. On the turn we lost our #3 engine and #2 was running hot. Bill Beimbrink, our Pilot, asked me for a heading to Italy. I told him to take a



Photo Information

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180 degree turn and then I'll give him an on course correction. In the meantime, a P-51 pilot of the red-tailed 332nd Fighter Group (The Tuskegee Airmen) came over to give us cover. When the #2 engine quit, the pilot of the P-51 seeing that the pilot made a course change towards Russia wished us "Good luck" and left to rejoin his fighter group. I gave Bill a 90-degree heading because the whole eastern front, from the Baltic to the Aegean Sea, was the Russian front. Beimbrink called me on the intercom to tell me that there was a large city dead ahead. Realizing that the city was Krakow and probably well fortified, I called Bill, gave him a course correction to 115 degrees magnetic, and told him to head for the mountains. As we went through this series of course changes #4 engine gave up the ghost. The pilot leaned over to the co-pilot and told him to feather #4 engine. Through some misunderstanding, #1, the only live engine, stopped running. It got awfully quiet up there and wild thoughts pop up in your head. "Is Bill trying to sneak by the enemy?" The pilot immediately realized what happened and hit the #1 switch and got the engine running again. Clarence Dallas, the Nose-gunner, called on the intercom "Three ME-109s at ten o'clock". Beimbrink called me and said "Tad, what do you think we should do?" I had an idea what Bill had in mind. He didn't want to put the lives of the whole crew on the line so he asked me and I agreed. As we turned into the three fighters flying in "V" formation, they passed us at about seventy-five yards. I still think they saluted us as they went by. They flew west, made a 360-degree turn and continued on to Germany. This was the report from Bill McCuttie, the Tail-gunner. Bill Beimbrink and Spence Felt #220 the Co-Pilot, had both feet on the left rudder to keep the plane from spiraling-in before the rest of the crew had a chance to bail out. We were losing 1,000 feet per minute. Jack Blehar #201, the Ball Turret gunner, Walt Venable, the Radioman and Clarence Dallas, Nose-gunner left the nose compartment to go to the rear of the plane. Bernie Racine, the Waist-gunner and Bill McCuttie gathered around the camera hatch to decide who was going to jump first. Up in the nose I was left alone with Bob Nelson, the Bombardier. This happened to be his first mission. He kept asking me how to open the nose-wheel hatch. I was still working at the navigation table and said "Pull down the handle under the table." Bob gave it a yank but nothing happened as it was safety-wired. I reached under and gave it a good jerk and broke the safety-wire and the hatch blew out. Meanwhile, I'm looking for an explosive charge to blow up the "G-Box" and when I finally found it, I opened the little compartment and guess what, there's an "O'Henry" candy wrapper inside; To hell with it, I don't think it'll survive the crash anyway. Bob Nelson is sitting down on the deck floor with his feet dangling out of the aircraft. I told him to climb back in and kneel on the deck, grab the sides of the hatch and whenever you feel you're ready, pull your arms in and tumble out. Just prior to this, Bill came in on the intercom and told everyone that he's not hitting the emergency bell and to "Jump whenever you're ready." When I heard this, I looked down and still had my heated slippers on. It didn't take me long to get them off, put on my GI shoes and get into my flying boots. My throat mike was already disconnected, so I lost contact with the flight deck. I could hear them but I couldn't talk back. On the flight deck, Bill told Ed Sich #012, the Flight Engineer, to go back in the rear with the rest of the crew and told Spence to go into the bomb-bay and out. He would be right behind him. Bill turned around and went back to the flight deck. Spence jumped and never did see Bill again. Since I thought that I was the last man out of the aircraft, I noted the altimeter reading and jumped. It was 11,900 feet. I figured a free fall of about 3,000 feet would be about right. When I pulled the "D"-ring, nothing happened. My GOD what did I do wrong and I didn't have much time to fix it. Something told me to follow the cable, which I still had in my hand. I gave one more yank and the pilot chute popped, pulling out the main canopy chute. I was slipping the chute to lose some altitude when I started to swing like a pendulum and one of the panels folded. I maneuvered the parachute around to get the wind on my back. I checked my watch when I opened the chute at 1258 and landed at 1305 hours.

I landed on a shepherd's spread. The first thing that came to his mind was "German Paratroopers." He ducked behind his little house. When I saw him peeking out, I yelled to him to come and help me. I couldn't even lift my chute off the ground. As we dragged ourselves up a slope (I bailed out on the side of a mountain) I ran into Dallas. After the people realized we were Americans, they offered us some warm milk and bread. Then Dallas asked "What happened to you?" I couldn't figure out what he was talking about until he told me to look at my scarf. My white scarf turned to scarlet red. I could have been hit by German fire or by an eager farmer thinking that I was a German paratrooper. I gave my chute to the lady of the house and told her to hide it. A neighbor came in and started whispering, but it was so loud I could hear every word. She said there were three soldiers coming up the path. I told Dallas what the whispering was about and said to him, "We better get out of the house in case they happen to be Germans." He agreed with me and we stepped out. To our surprise, the soldiers were three of our crewmembers, Ed Sich, the Engineer, Jack Blehar, Ball Turret-gunner and Walt Venable, Radioman, who was being carried by Ed and Jack because of torn ligaments in his knee. When Walt bailed out and his chute opened his leg became entangled in the shroud lines. He landed in a pine tree and his weight lowered him to where he could step down onto a stump of a tree and then hobble down to the ground. I sent Ed and Jack back to where Walt hit the tree and told them to take down the chute and bury it. In the meantime, up on the hill two young (Gorale) highlanders came up with a partisan Courier. This Courier was dressed in a long black cape and black fedora. This is the closest I came to a real live Count Dracula. He was a very pleasant fellow. I asked him where he came from and he said "Near Warsaw." It was good to know that he came from Sierpc, my father's hometown. I mentioned my uncle's name and he knew him: This made me a little more secure of my safety. About 1430 hours, we started walking down the mountain (the Luban Range). It took us almost two hours to reach a small chalet. The sun went down and it got dark very quickly. The five of us went into a fairly large size room illuminated by about a 25-watt bulb.

A knock on the door and a couple of partisans brought in Racine, a Waist-gunner. He landed in the same mountain range as we did, but slightly west. He was very happy to see us. His second language was French but I didn't think he ran into many people who could speak French. We now had a total of six after bailing out. Only the courier gave me his name, Mister Fafszynski. All the others just used their pseudonyms. The owner prepared a room for us and told us we would have to leave at daybreak. It was a long and tiring day for us. At 0300 hours, the lights came on and the owner came up to me and said "Panie (Mr.) Dejewski, the Russian Partisans are coming to take your people to their headquarters. Our advice is to avoid them and go with one of the Polish partisans to the Battalion Headquarters of 'Lampart'."

It was a long walk in the deep snow but at least they had a horse drawn sleigh for Walter, our Radio Operator. We stopped at a little hamlet and walked up to a cottage, opened the door, and there was Bill McCuttie, our other gunner, surrounded by the natives throwing all kinds of questions at him. Bill had no idea what they were talking about. He was one happy fellow when he saw six members of his crew standing there. It was daybreak and we were walking with our guide leading the way. The guide was wearing a German uniform, a sleeveless sheepskin jacket and a large belt with a couple of grenades attached to it. A rifle was slung over his shoulder. He also had a red and white armband on his left arm.

Sich and Blehar were at the rear of the column. One of them said, "Isn't that Spence over there at the tree line?" Spencer Felt recognized us from about a hundred yards down the road but hesitated to call us because he thought we were caught by a German, but then again what was the guard doing at the head of the column. Spence couldn't see the red and white armband on the guides left arm, which was away from his view. We waved and called out to him. He came plodding through the kneedeep snow. Bill McCuttie was the seventh and Spence Felt was number eight of the crew. One day had gone by and all we needed to find was Nelson the Bombardier and the Pilot, Beimbrink.

We reached Lampart's headquarters early in the afternoon. It was in the foothills of the Turbacz mountain and the slopes were quite steep. We had to leave injured Walt Venable down in the valley at a cottage. I had to be the interpreter for both the crew and for Walter. Sich being of Slavic descent could make out some of the conversation and I had to stay with Walter down below. Before I left, Lampart gave me a Skoda 7mm pistol with eight cartridges.

It was dark when I got to where my bunk would be for the night. I heard a dog barking and when I looked out the window, there were white parkas outside. Everyone was wearing white parkas, the Germans, the Polish Partisans and the Russian Partisans. Then the inevitable knock on the door. A cold sweat came over me and

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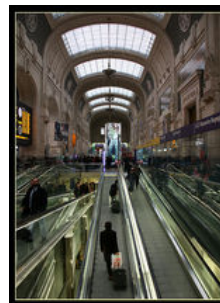
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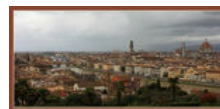
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the next thing I heard was "Pan Dejewski, somebody is here to see you." Now, who could know me out here? Well, it was number nine, Bob Nelson, the Bombardier. I had to lead Bob back up the hill and introduce him to the crew, whom he never met and then it was back down the hill to hit the sack and get some rest.

After three days at Lampart's we were transferred to another outfit, east of where most of us bailed out. We walked twelve or thirteen kilometers until we reached a village called Kamienica. We got there at dawn and were really bushed. The guide took us to the town leader's home. They treated us to a little wine, which went down very well after a long hike through the snow. The second course was warm milk and buttered bread. At 0700 hours we left to walk another five kilometers to Szczawa and then two more kilometers to the end of the road to a little place called Bukowka. Here we met the commander of this outpost, which was manned by a winter contingent of Polish partisans. While the leader was arranging for cabins where we could stay, half a dozen of the underground called me to have a drink with them. There were two shot glasses and a bottle of bimber (vodka) on the table. I figured these people only had two whiskey glasses. These partisans had a little game they were going to play with me. One fellow took the bottle and filled up the two glasses and handed one to me and said "Swit". I still don't know what it means, but now I'm in charge of the two glasses. I gathered that I'm going to have to drink seven of these, rot-gut bimbiers, to their one: I quit early in the game.

The commander located three cabins in the hills. Blehar stayed in one with Venable, Sich in another with Dallas and Racine and I took the third cabin with Spence Felt, (who was in command of the crew since Pilot, Bill Beimbrink was still missing), Nelson and McCuttie.

On Christmas Eve, we were having a typical Polish "supper" in one of the homes. Then we went down to the valley where the people of the surrounding area gathered at the sawmill and had their holiday celebration. Nearby in Mlynno a massacre occurred. We heard that sixty men, women and children were killed. This was the 23rd of December. We assumed that the murders occurred because of us. Forty-seven and a half years later, Spencer Felt and I while driving through the mountains discovered that two German officers were killed by Russian partisans and in retaliation the massacre occurred. Actually 56 people died. Among them were five members of one family. Two brothers who helped us down the hill the first day were part of that family. They survived. Spence and I met one of them when we were in Poland in 1993.

Around the 15th of January 1945, the Germans sent in troops to clean out the pocket of partisans in the hills. We expected them to come down the road. A telephone call came in when they left Kamienica. We left immediately for the hills. While moving quite rapidly through the forest, we heard rifle and mortar fire. As a matter of fact they bracketed our living quarters and the third mortar shell exploded in our room. This is what we were told by the partisans as they retreated and caught up with us. Another thing that we found out about the Germans was that they were daylight warriors in this part of Poland. We didn't have to worry about them during the night. As this battle was going on, the nine of us and a Yugoslav officer sat at the edge of the tree line and watched the skirmish. When darkness came upon us, we headed over the hill into the village of Zalesie. We met five members of a B-17 Crew that bailed out on 13 September 1944. They had a rough time because no one on their crew could speak Polish.

On 19 January 1944, all hell broke loose. The main German Army being pushed back by the Russian Army, met head on in the village of Zalesie. We wound up being in no man's land. The 155 mm shells whistled over the cottage. You could actually hear the rotation of the shells. We stood outside for a while watching the flares and exploding shells and hoping that the plotters didn't have our cottage marked as a target. It was a little eerie out there so we went inside and stuffed the windows with mattresses to hold the noise down. Eight of us decided to doze off and McCuttie sat in front of the fireplace and stared into the fire. The only light was from the fire. The door burst open and Bill kept yelling "Amerikanski! Amerikanski!" His shouting woke me up and I could see the barrel of a burp gun in the doorway. I was sleeping on a bed against the wall next to the doorway. Jumping up, I made the mistake of grabbing the barrel and raising the gun to the ceiling, stupid move right? Because with one burst he could have killed nine fliers. He must have been dumbfounded. I was hoping he thought I was brave. Anyway, he was Ukrainian and we understood each other. I asked him where his intelligence unit was and he told me that they were in Limanowa, a little town about twelve kilometers northeast.

I arranged with Dick Hansler, the B-17 navigator, to accompany me on this trip since he was familiar with the German Language. I think we broke all the rules of escape. We dressed in civilian clothes. You could be shot if caught by the enemy. The people in Poland, being subjected to German rule for over five years, learned some of the language. Should anything happen to me on the way he would be able to communicate with people. We were walking along the country road, smoking in the Polish style, (I had to brief Hansler in some of the habits and styles). Two Russian soldiers came over a rise and I told Dick not to do any talking, just tip his hat. Everybody tips their hat in Poland. When I tipped my hat, I said "Dzien dobry" (good day). One of the soldiers asked me, "Mas za kurycz?" I took that to mean, do I have any chickens and I said no. They walked down the road and at about fifty yards they fired a shot over our heads and waved for us to come down. Well, we didn't get very far and now we've been captured by our allies. The Russians took us to their captain and after a short interrogation, they drove us to a schoolhouse and transferred us to another captain, who was drunk as a lord, and he told some of his men to take us behind the stable and shoot us.

There was an apartment above the schoolhouse and the woman that lived there, (I heard about this woman, she was a school teacher and a partisan) came out on the landing and called to the Russian officer to come up and have a drink or something to that effect. Hansler met her before and she recognized him. All she wanted now was to buy some time. The "Kapitan" staggered up the steps and followed the woman into the apartment. She offered him some vodka (bimber), and after a taste of that, he reached into his dispatch case, pulled out a bottle of 197 proof vodka. That's pure alcohol. He brought out some hard tack and salt pork. He shared all this with us. I then said to Hansler "Drink this stuff and you'll get so drunk that you won't care what happens to you". The Russian drank his and Dick poured another waterglass full for him. He drank nearly a half liter of pure alcohol. It was time to go and when he motioned we followed him. He got to the stairs, took one step, missed the next 22 steps and landed in the arms of two of his soldiers. Hansler and I walked down slowly while I counted the steps. The soldiers then grabbed him hustled him off and dumped him into the cab of a truck. The Russians drove us to the next town where we were to be interrogated by a full Colonel. We met the Colonel and talked for a while, but he was difficult to understand. On his suggestion he had a Colonel there that could understand English. I couldn't understand a word of his English and told him in Polish to get the other Colonel because I can speak better Russian than he can speak English. I wish I could remember his name. All I knew was his rank. He asked me how many men were in Zalesie. I told him about my crew and the five B-17 men. Hansler was kept as a "hostage" while I took off with the Colonel in his staff car.

We came to a little stream and started fording it. The water was only about six inches deep but the engine died midstream. The Colonel cursed the chauffeur up, down and sideways, than he asked me how far the house was. I just said it was right over the hill. I didn't want to annoy him by saying it was five kilometers. (Zbludza, his forward HDQ to Zalesie).

When we arrived in Zalesie, I ran into a native (I knew he was a partisan, but now we couldn't recognize them as such because the Russians, now that they overran Poland, considered the partisans as bandits and their enemy) and asked him if he knew where the Americans were hiding. We never entered the house through the front entrance way. We always used the forest side. The native talked as if he never saw me before. That was smart of him but it didn't help me very much. Finally I saw my radioman pop out of the house and told the Colonel "That's the place." We went in and Dallas was cooking up a lot of dried beans. They ran out of pots and pans. The Colonel dined with us and told us to get ready to move out to Gdow.

We were assigned a Russian guide to take us to Gdow. Some of the natives took us for Germans and started to mistreat us. One elderly woman started spitting and cursing us. She didn't realize that there are many Americans that can understand the Polish language. When I got tired of her ranting, I cut in and lambasted her in her own language. She regretted what she called us and offered us food. Not too much but enough to sustain us for a while. We knew that the natives didn't have much food to spare but what she offered was

satisfactory.

A Russian Air Force major interrogated us and the Russian cooks prepared some chopped meat patties and tea. As we were eating, we noticed that there was an airstrip nearby that had some bi-planes. I looked at Spence, he looked over to Ed and all down the line everybody had a puzzled look on their face. We knew Spence could fly one of the planes. I soloed in a PT-17 before the Air Corps transferred me to Navigation School. We thought about this for a while and just dumped the whole idea as too big a risk.

The Russians loaded us on a truck and drove us to a small city call Bochnia. They put us up in a doctor's vacated apartment. We stayed there one night and backtracked to another city called Wieliczka. Under this whole city was one of the largest salt mines in the world, mined continuously for over 700 years.

The Russians arranged accomodadons for us in two small apartments. The owner of one of the flats was a projectionist for a theater in town and he managed to have the film break in few of the most interesting spots. He would cut and print certain frames. He asked me if I was interested in copies. I said I would if I can get past the Russians with them. One of the shots was taken through the periscope of a U-Boat. It was the Battery of New York City taken from the lower narrows. Another picture was of the retreat of the British forces from Dunkirk. Yet another picture was taken of a British formation of light bombers from a captured plane manned by a German crew. I think they were propoganda films taken for European consumption.

We stayed in Wieliczka a few days and then they packed us in a truck and drove us to Nowy Sącz. Here the Russians dropped off the whole crew in an old empty office that had all the indications of a fast exit by the Germans. The five B-17 men came along with us on this trip. A Russian guard came along with us to keep us "company" until housing was located for us. For a few days we were paired up in different homes until a central location was found. At this time the Soviet Command let us walk around town. We located a barbershop in town where one of the barbers wanted to learn English. He knew a little of our language, so a few of us spent quite a bit of our time there teaching him.

One day, walking down the street, a young fellow went by. About 20 yards passed us he calls out. "Are you from North America?" To me that was kind of a strange remark. Nobody ever called us North Americans. I called him over to ask him a couple of questions. He was seventeen years of age and six years ago, in August 1939, his mother brought him and his brother to Poland for a short visit. Five and a half years later, and he was still here. I told him about the barbershop and he became one of our best scavengers. The owner let us use the back room where we could meet and stay warm. By the way, his name was Joe. The poor fellow had an overcoat that was much too big for him. We made arrangements to meet Joe one day at the barbershop and that's when we realized why the big coat. He had so many pockets in his coat that he looked like a small supermarket. The owner of the barbershop started to drink too much so his wife closed down our "dubroom." The Russians finally found an apartment that could accomodate all of us. The bathroom facility was across the street, a slit trench behind some bushes. Just one trench for men and women, a very friendly place. There wasn't too much variation in the cuisine, one meal a day and everyday barley. Did you ever have barley with mustard? Not too bad if you are very hungry. Also now we have good security at this Soviet Manor, they have a guard posted in the courtyard.

Our sleeping quarters were on the second floor and the dining room was on the first. The courtyard was in the back of the house and the dining room was facing the front. We would jump out the first floor window, go into town, get a little more than enough to drink and stagger past the guard. The Russians wondered where we were getting all this vodka to drink. The Poles always told them that they didn't have any. That was the reason for keeping us under this so-called guard.

Spence and I had our little duties of interrogation to do. They brought in a fellow one day, named Ed Dyer, from Saginaw, Michigan. After a little discussion we ok'd him. Another day they brought in a pilot who said his name was "Davy Jones." Spence asked him where his home was in the states. He answered "Shamokin, Pennsylvania." Spence and I look at each other and the same thought is running through our minds, who in the hell does he think he's kidding. The next question I ask him. "Where did you bail out?" "Breslau" he answered. Breslau was a large city in Germany about 300 kilometers from where we are, (after the war it became part of Poland known as Wroclaw). He related to us how he parachuted in the main square, on the side of a building, slid down a mansard roof and some people grabbed him and took him inside. There were a lot of people in Breslau of Polish descent and were not in favor of the German regime. We then questioned him a little more about Pennsylvania and baseball. His story was a little difficult to believe. We didn't think that even the enemy could make up a story so far-fetched.

The Russians came over and told me to go to the bakery and get ten and a half loaves of bread. I took Suhling, one of the B-17 men, and a Russian guard who came along with us, to the bakeshop. Going into the shop, I noticed the name "Nosal Piekarnia" (Nosal Bakery). I asked for Mr. Nosal. When he came over, I told him that I knew a family of Nosals in Connecticut. We talked about them for a while. Then he said "what can I do for you?" I told him why I was in Poland and we had 21 evadees. The Russians told me to get ten and a half loaves of bread, a half a loaf for each man. The baker looked at us, partially emaciated, and filled two sacks or about 40 loaves of bread. It's a good thing we had the guard with us or we might have been mugged by the natives. At this time we had a group of 21 men, 9 from our crew, 5 from the B-17 crew, Hubert Brooks, a Canadian; John Duncan, a Scotsman; Stanley Staf, an exiled Pole flying with the RAF; and 2 others, a South African and a Belgian, the last two whose names I don't remember. The Russians told us that a General Novikoff wanted to talk to us in Presov, Czecho-Slovakia. They piled us all into a truck and headed south through Krynica, on the Polish-Slovak border, infiltrated some German pockets and into Sabinov, Czecho-Slovakia, only to find out that the general was waiting for us in Nowy Sacz where we just came from. After spending one night there Ed Sich got into a conversation with the lady of the house. She prepared some bread and tea (lay as she pronounced it). In the morning we got back into the truck and headed north. Along the road, we ran across a Russian troop movement. We got back to our "concentration center" and met up with the general. Our interpreter was a Cossack Major. The cossacks spoke Ukrainian, with which I didn't have too much trouble. General Novikoff asked the men if they needed anything. McCuttie cut in and mentioned that Wednesday we would like to go to church. It happened to be Ash Wednesday. The General turned to the Major and asked him in Russian, what is church. The Major told him that church was a cerkva. The General answered brusky "in Russia we don't believe in going to church."

The Russians wanted to show the Americans how hygienic they were. They washed the windows every other day, and the nurse came in every day to give us a medical inspection. Then came the day to outfit us in Russian uniforms, but no sox. In place of sox they gave each of us two squares of white cloth. We had to learn how to fold these to make foot coverings without pinching our toes. That was an educational course in itself. Then came moving day. Some people in this city, who heard that we were leaving, came over with cigarettes and some foodstuff to take with us on our trip to Lwow (Lvov), a former Polish City that was taken over by the Soviets. Lwow is a large city and they put us up in one of the best hotels in town. Hotel George. The officers had single rooms and the enlisted men had double rooms. The maid service was great, the best since we left the states. All the help in this hotel was still Polish. The only Russian Commissar was at the head of the hotel and under him was a Polish manager. We had a private dining room with a table that could seat about thirty people. There was plenty of room including the space for two Russian guards. When the waiters came in to serve us, the first thing that we ordered was two bottles of the best vodka. They questioned our taste for the best vodka. They didn't realize that nothing was too good for our guests, the guards. As soon as they got drunk and drowsy, we took off to go into the city. They had coffee houses and pastry shops. McCuttie still had his forty-eight dollars from his escape kit. We took that and whatever we could scrape up. Went into town and blew it all on sweets.

The following day the Russians took us to a theater, gave us center seats in the second and third row, the perfect seats. Hubert Brooks somehow got the dead center seat in the second row. In comes a high ranking general demanding Hubert's seat. I sat directly behind Brooks, leaned over to him and told him not to give up his seat. Brooks was very fluent in Polish and could have told the general where to go since we were the

quests of the government. The gist of the play was Anti-American. So when the argument between Brooks and the General got a little heated, we all got up and walked out. The management begged us to stay but we just left.

We had two people that were fluent in Polish and Russian and yet now they couldn't use these languages. Brooks led an outpost of partisans for three years and Stanley Staf, the RAF man, had a mother and sister still living in Lwow. They were listed as "bandits" by the communists.

A woman, who was connected with a partisan group from around the Poznan area, named Miss Benes wanted to talk with me. She was the niece of the former president of Czecho-Slovakia. She also mentioned that she was with her boyfriend and wanted me to meet him. There were so many people that wanted to meet up with the Americans. I believe that she was a journalist and was writing some historical articles on the resurgence of the captive nations. She is now an artist in New York.

The last day, before we left Lwow, we had breakfast in our private dining room and when we finished, the commissar brought in the check. The guests of the government were now to be paying customers. He handed me the check and without turning towards Stanley, I said to him, "give me a simultaneous translation, I will talk to him in Polish, he will talk to me in Russian, and he will think that I understand him. While I'm disputing the bill with the commissar, you keep translating." I told the commissar that the bill doesn't come to me, it goes to Captain Staf. He is the ranking officer of this group. The Russian accepted this logic while Stanley scribbled his name, rank and serial number "1945." That bill was something like 645 rubles. On the exchange it was \$5 dollars for each ruble. This came out to be about \$153 per person. At that time, inflation was rampant and the communists figured let's stick it to Americans. Personally I don't think they ever collected that bill.

After breakfast, they took us to the railroad station and put us on a train to Kiev, Russia, now the Ukraine. They walked us through a big part of the city. It looked so drab and desolate. There was no guide to tell us where we were going until we reached an old building that looked like a warehouse. It turned out to be a military barracks. We went into a room and in a very short time came out with a shave and a haircut. That was that for Kiev. We returned to the station and were told that we are now going to Odessa, a city of orange trees and palms, but they never mentioned the snow.

It seemed to be the end of our stay in Russia. We were on the northern tip of the Black Sea. The railroad station was in the middle of the city. The guards marched us by the great Russian church with the large onion domes. In this part of the Ukraine, the people are Greek Catholic. We had a feeling of freedom as we marched down the French Boulevard, lined with movie studios, not our typical Hollywood, but just open lots. We arrived at our new home. It was a clinic, a rest home, a small hospital, a large dining hall. I don't know what to call it but it housed 2,000 American POW's that were left in northern Poland after the German rout by the Soviets.

Somewhere along the way I met up with two tank men. When they were asked by the army brass what service they were in, they quickly answered "Air Corps." They knew that they were better off in a small group than in a large Army establishment. Now our little Air Group consisted of, nine B-24 men, five B-17 men, Davy Jones, Ed Dyer and the two tank men, a total of eighteen. The other five went with their national detachments.

There was always a long line for the infirmary. Everytime after an examination they would give you a glass of aperitif. The officer in charge of the Army unit was a Lt. Colonel. The person who should have been in charge, a full Colonel, made the landing in Anzio and immediately went to a barbershop to get cleaned up. In 20 minutes after the landing, he was captured by the Germans and put into an Oflag Luft for the duration. The poor fellow lost his marbles. A major asked me if I would go with him and fifty men into the market square. One staff sergeant was picked up by a shore police officer of the Soviet Navy, who demanded that the sergeant turn over his dog tags to him. I jumped into this argument and told the sergeant "don't give him your dog tags, because that's the only I.D. that you have." I turned to shore policeman and in a stern voice said to him "if you want dog tags, take mine." I still had my Russian Officer's uniform on, when he noticed that he quickly backed off. I was happy that he didn't notice my rank of 2nd Lt.

Getting back to the compound, the Lt.Colonel approached me to let me know that all the men will have to sign a roster, name, rank and serial number. So everybody signed the list except for the two of us. The Lt.Col. looked at me, I looked at the Colonel and I said, "after you. Colonel." After he signed, he looked at me as if to say, "Man, the Air Corps puts out young Colonels." I signed the roster, name, 2nd Lt and serial number.

After spending about five days in Odessa, we prepared ourselves for the long march to the docks. In the meantime I was preparing myself in reading Russian script, most importantly, just my surname. If the Soviets copied our list in the cyrillic alphabet, I wanted to be sure I would recognize my name. Finally, when we reached the docks, one of their enlisted men, most likely a sergeant, started reading off the names. I don't know if there is a direct translation from American to Russian. When it comes to names they usually write the name phonetically. They're reaching the end of the list and I haven't heard anything that sounded like 'Dejewski'.

Time is getting closer for casting off, so I manage to corner the repatriation officer, a Major Hall. He told me that if you are not on that list, then may send you off to Poltava and then to Moscow. That's one place I didn't want to be. Time was getting critical so he told me, "grab my bags and follow me aboard." I 'sweated out' the whole trip all the way to Istanbul. Turkey. Eight deserters, seven German and one Italian, were picked out to stand charges. The seven Germans were thrown in the brig and the Italian was reported missing. The rumors were that he was dumped overboard.

The OWI (Office of War Information) came aboard in Istanbul and checked out to see if there were any more defectors. For two days we weren't allowed to leave the ship. We were anchored just off shore and opposite The Great Mosque. We sailed through the Bosphorus, into the Sea of Marmura and through the Dardanelles. Down through the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea we sailed into Port Said. We anchored at the north end of the Suez Canal. We stayed at Port Fuad for five days and couldn't leave the camp until The FBI got through interrogating us. NOW WE CONSIDERED OURSELVES TO BE FREE.

We boarded The S.S.Samaria and sailed west to Italy, through the Straits of Messina, landed at Naples, flew to Ban and on to Cerignola. Q.

(Note: Tad Dejewski, of Polish descent, was fluent in the language of Poland and could understand the Ukranian and Slovak languages.)

In 1992 Tad Dejewski #060 together with Co-Pilot Spencer Felt #220 visited the Upper Ochotnica Area of Poland, near the crash site of "California Rocket." They met Partisan Comrade John Lupa and paid their respects at the grave of Mayor Julian Zapala, "LAMPART" in Niedzwiedz. Gorce.

In 1993 Tad and Spencer returned to this area to unveil this memorial plaque. It is in honor of the Partisans and Soldiers of the IV Battalion ISPS- Polish Army, Major "Lampart and all those who fought and lost their lives in defending this martyred land.

2002-04-08

asajernigan has marked this note useful

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 **asajernigan**  (19669) 2010-09-29 3:50

Wiktor,
This is a fine autumn shot of this memorial from long ago.
The colorful leaves provide a nice background for this strange memorial. The lighting is fine and the photo has great sharpness.
TFS,
Asa

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