

## "I MADE FINE FRIENDS IN POLAND"

*As Told by Pilot Officer Hubert Brooks to Maria Lubinska*  
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*Pilot Officer Hubert Brooks of the Royal Canadian Air Force was born in Alberta, Canada in 1921 and was educated in Montreal. In 1940 he enlisted in the R.C.A .F. and went overseas following his training in Canada. This story was told in Polish, which he now speaks fluently'. When referring to the Polish soil, he uses such expressions as: "My region; our mountains, our people." So far as we know, Pilot Officer Brooks is the only Canadian who was a member of the Polish Home Army.*



**I**n April, 1942 I was a member of a Wellington bomber crew assigned to a raid on Hamburg. On the run-up from Hamburg both engines caught fire. For about twenty minutes we played from starboard to port engine, but were finally obliged to hail out, at 1.30 a. m. over German territory. It was pitch dark below, but we all landed safely except our air gunner, who had been killed. We scattered at once from the crashed plane, hoping to reach friendly country. But by 10 in the morning all five of us had been recaptured by the Germans. Our captors were friendly enough. After brief questioning, we were sent to different prison camps. Mine was located in Silesia, not far from the old Polish border. Most of my fellow-prisoners were British, together with a few from the Polish Air Force, operating from the United Kingdom. The living conditions were for the most part poor, the food very bad. Except for the help of the Red Cross many of us should certainly not have survived.

From the moment of my capture the thought uppermost in my mind was escape. But - how? Two months later a chance came. I got away, and reached Cracow. a city eighty miles distant. Unfortunately I was arrested there by the Gestapo and after a cursory examination, sent back to the main camp. As punishment I received ten days' solitary confinement, with bread

and water. Each third day, however, I was given German rations: thin, watery soup, two potatoes, one small slice of bread.

Two months later came my second escape-this time through the Carpathian mountains, a very rough and difficult terrain. But the Czech mountaineers gave me food and every possible assistance, so that I finally reached Vienna. having covered approximately one hundred and eighty miles. There as I was boarding a night train for Italy, I was detected by the *Bahnschutz* (Railway Police). And, of course, I soon found myself back in the same old camp-fourteen days' confinement this time, with the same meager fare.

Came my third attempt. And this time. thanks to contacts made in the prison camp with the Polish Underground Army. which we called 'A. K.' *Armja Krajowa*, I made a clear getaway. I was directed to a certain town in Poland where I contacted other members of the Home Army. Knowing nothing of the Polish language, I lost no time in starting my 'education.' My teacher was an estimable lady, eighty years young. an active member of the Underground Army . As we both understood French, the matter of instruction was greatly simplified. All the same, she started me oil with the A- B-C's as if I were a small boy. Day after day we worked. She was a lady of infinite resource. capable and patient and

kind. And *daring* - for next door lived a *Volksdeutsche*, a German spy. If the good lady had been caught in such an act, she would have been instantly shot.

All this time I was getting instruction from the A. K. organization as well. This group had come into being very shortly after Poland was overrun by the Germans and had extended throughout the length and breadth of the country. I linked up with a group which had been organized south of Cracow. Consisting of only forty members at the start this detachment had gradually spread its activities over an area of five thousand square miles ... from the towns of Myslenice and Zakopane to the north and south, and Babia Gora and Grygow to the west and east. The country was mountainous, -forest-clad and sparsely populated. As the months passed, our detachment grew larger and larger, its membership embracing everything from simple mountain lads to university graduates. As soon as the detachment grew from forty to one hundred and twenty members, a company was formed. I was placed in charge of a group of forty. Having little to carry on with we were desperately in need of arms. And we got them, the main source of supply-an involuntary source, I confess -being the Germans. Frequently we made attacks on German garrisons, and our stock of arms grew surprisingly.

In due course our brigade had increased to four battalions, four companies to a battalion, our sphere of operation being confined to the Limanowa district of Southwestern Poland. Many were the objectives assigned to my section: the sabotage of a railway; the liquidation of German agents; ambushing a convoy; confiscation of Polish food supplies en route to Germany, such as cattle, grain, potatoes, and so forth. Included in the list of battles, the following seem to deserve special mention: The fight with German storm troopers at Kamienica, where the whole company surrendered and we got their arms and supplies; the Battle of Lacko, where we disarmed a body of twenty *Todt-Organizations* (Todt was the famous constructor of the Siegfried Line); the famous Battle of Wisniowa and Lipnik, where we fought for almost a week, destroying several tanks and armored cars, and wiping out over one hundred of the German soldiery; here we fought against a force of more than three thousand Germans, but we withdrew only when the enemy received reinforcements. Two days later, my forty men and I were surrounded by the Germans in the mountains of Stecin; however, we succeeded in withdrawing without a single casualty. For this I was awarded the Cross of Valor-- corresponding to the British D.F.C. And there was the battle of Szawa lasting over a week. Here two of our battalions were attacked from both east and west by more than five thousand German troops. They withdrew finally forever, on account of the Russian offensive in January, 1945.

But our victories were costly. Invariably, German sadism and vengeance were wreaked upon the local civilian population. There was not merely *one* Polish 'Lidice.' The towns of Wisniowa and Lipnik, for example, were burned to the ground, and many peasants were burned alive. The entire village of Porabka was wiped from the face of the earth, twenty-five of the villagers being locked in a barn and cremated alive; several children, two or three years old, were bayoneted and tossed into the flames. But why do I single out these instances?--They are merely typical of what happened all over Poland. Yet in spite of such terrorism, we still received every assistance and cooperation; precise information regarding the Germans' movements was cheerfully supplied. Finally, the Huns became so apprehensive that they did not dare to appear on the streets at night.

Traitors among the Polish population were rare, though I confess a few such fifth columnists were recruited from the so-called *Volksdeutsche*. Needless to say, such traitors, when caught, were shot without mercy.

It is my firm belief that the A. K. was the strongest and most efficient organization of its kind in the whole of Europe. As a member of the A. K., I received a cordial welcome from *all* of the Polish people, regardless of class; the same friendliness from peasants as from members of the intelligentsia. Polish hospitality was unbounded. Let a Pole learn that you were American, Canadian or British, and he would give you the very shirt from his back.

At the approach of the Russians, our A. K. Brigade disbanded. I reported to the Russian military authorities and was granted passage via Lwow and Kiev to Odessa. After a journey of two months I reached British soil.

It was in January, 1945 that I left Poland. I arrived home in Canada in May, 1945.

During those two years spent with the A. K. in Poland, I had a really good time-and plenty of scope to lock horns with the Germans. In Poland, too, I made many fine, loyal, patriotic friends. I sincerely hope that future circumstances may not debar me from seeing those good friends and beautiful Poland again.