

# CANADIAN HERO IN POLAND

## STORY OF HUBERT BROOKS, Wing Commander

*He was one of only five R.C.A.F. officers awarded the Military Cross in World War II. He won the medal for his determined efforts on three occasions to escape from a German prisoner-of-war camp, the last of which was successful. For his service in the Polish Underground Army in the next two years Sqdn. Ldr. Brooks was also awarded the Polish Silver Cross of Merit with Swords. And for his "generous courage and bravery" in leading 40 fellow partisans out of a German encirclement he was awarded the Polish Cross of Valour.*

*This is his story of his escapes from Stalag VIII B and his years as a Polish partisan told in his own words.*

### PART II

When we returned to the marshalling yards that evening we couldn't find our coal train. We settled instead for a flat car of cut lumber in which we found a reasonable hiding place - so we thought. No sooner were we settled in the lumber than the car was hauled up a rise to an inspection platform lit by strong spotlights. The freight cars were coupled together, then suddenly, one of the yard men began to shout; "Russians, Russians!" and we were immediately surrounded by Austrian workers and railway guards.

Sidi and I were turned over to a detachment of S.S. troops and later sent to a French P.O.W. camp near Wiener, Neustadt. The French prisoners were well treated and so laxly guarded that 10 or 20 escaped every night. We decided we would escape again too.

We had already pried loose one of the window bars of our punishment dugout and were at work on the second bar when the guards caught us. For some reason they were extremely angry and began to beat us brutally with their butts. The drubbing they gave us and the double guards they posted night and day squelched our dreams of a quick escape, and a week later we were taken back to Stalag VIII B. As before, I was sentenced to 14 days solitary confinement. I resolved to make my next escape bid a successful one.

Sgt. John Duncan, of the 51-st Gordon Highlanders, was the man I teamed up with for the third bid for freedom. He was a seasoned professional soldier who has already survived a year on the lam in France after Dunkirk. He would not have been in Lamsdorf at all if it hadn't been for a jealous woman who betrayed him to the Nazis when she saw him starting to take an interest in another girl.

Poland was our destination again and so, in November, 1942, we got ourselves posted to a small working party of 20 men in a sawmill at Tost. We'd been there only a few days when the Jerry non-com approached my Scot friend and I. "I know you two want to escape", he said, "and I'm just warning you, if I catch you trying to escape I'll have to shoot you."

We weren't bothered by his threats, but what did worry us was the knowledge that there was an informer among the P.O.W.s. How else would the German Feldwebel have been so sure we planned a break? It was imperative that we find out who the informer was - and deal with him. Only then could we safely make our bid for freedom.

We narrowed it down to five men, each of whom had the opportunity to contact the Germans privately. One was our camp cook, who was playing around with a German stenographer in the mill office; another was the interpreter and a third was a private who bribed his way out of camp almost every night to comfort one of the village fraus whose husband was away at the Russian front. During December, the lonely frau had a visit from the Gestapo who charged her with un-German behaviour. The private didn't leave camp at nights much after that but he did discover that our interpreter was informing on all of us.

The interpreter had an accident a few nights later and had to be sent back to Lamsdorf. Now we could plan our escape without fear, but the first snow had already fallen and it was impossible to think of making our break until spring.

That bleak January of 1943, 16 of our fellow prisoners, almost the entire work party at the sawmill, went on strike and refused to work. They were sent back to the main camp at Lamsdorf. The four of us who

remained were given the best jobs. I became the helper on a truck which delivered pit props each day to mines in the area. Instead of coming back empty we'd load up with coal which we delivered to households in Tost. The people would often tip me one or two marks for unloading their coal and when we were done, Karl, the German truck driver, would often suggest a quick beer at the nearest tavern. Karl was a friendly soul and as long as I didn't get him into trouble he didn't bother much about what I did or whom I spoke to.

By the end of the winter I had managed to obtain detailed maps of the entire area as far as Cracow and one Pole I'd met unloading lumber at the pitheads had given me an address at which to contact the underground in the city of Czesochowa. As spring approached, Karl became apprehensive. "What's the matter?" I asked him one day when he seemed uneasy.

"Black Peter," he said (for this was the name he called me by and certainly I was always black from the coal dust), "Black Peter, if you escape, please don't do it from my truck!" "Escape?" I replied, "why should I want to escape?"

There were a good many P.O.W.s who felt there was no good reason. Escapees weren't particularly popular. They too often spoiled a good thing. The owner of the sawmill at Tost, for example, used to fetch us out a barrel of beer every Saturday evening and there were other small treats and privileges given us so long as we worked hard in the mill and didn't make trouble for anyone.

The moment there was an escape, the guards got hell from their superiors and they in turn passed it on to the P.O.W.s, discipline stiffened and the barrels of beer went to the guard house instead of the compound.

Undeterred, John and I completed our plans and chose May 10, 1943 as the night for the break. I had to succeed, for this I knew was my last chance. I would never have another opportunity to escape if I failed now. After three bids, the Germans classed P.O.W.s as incorrigibles, which qualified them for immediate transfer to special punishment camps.

There was no thunderstorm raging this time to cover our departure. Instead, one of our fellow prisoners sat on the steps of the hut obligingly plucking his mandolin and a second man stood by him softly singing. We plunged our hacksaw blade into and attacked the window bars. Shortly before midnight we climbed out, crossed the lumber yard and vanished into the night. As usual we travelled by night and slept in the woods by day.

One day we were woken abruptly by the rumble of cart wheels and peered up cautiously from the underbrush where we lay to see a farm cart pull to a halt 200 yards away. The farmer climbed down and began walking directly toward us.

It seemed as if once again I was to be recaptured, but the man soon reassured us. "I am a good Pole. I saw you when I went off to the fields early this morning and I said to myself, let them sleep," he explained in Polish and broken German. We showed him our small Union Jacks. "Now I'm going in to the village to fetch the school teacher and some food."

That night we were hidden in his farmhouse and two days later we were introduced to a pair of Polish smugglers who would take us across the border. Their contraband this trip was a couple of German milk cows who mooed alarmingly most of the way. Our smuggler friends, however, were totally unconcerned and soon we crossed over from Germany into German-occupied Poland.

It was a fine distinction and in many ways we were no safer on one side of the border than on the other. What cheered us was the knowledge that we were no longer alone. Although nothing had been admitted openly we knew we had at last contacted some friendly Poles and probably the Polish Underground Movement.

My chances of escaping to England and rejoining my squadron were as remote as ever, but from here I could fight. For a year now I had masqueraded as a New

Zealand soldier; the time had arrived to act like one.

As soon as we crossed the border the smuggler who was a watchmaker by trade, took us to his home. The small house was no more than 300 yards inside Poland and our host remarked that the German frontier guards often dropped in to have their watches repaired. "Don't worry," he added. "You will be all right here until arrangements can be made to send you to Czestochowa."

I refused to think of the possibility of recapture, now that I had come so far and now at last that I had made contact with the Polish underground. A year had now passed since I bailed out of the burning Wellington and became a prisoner of war, a year in which I had exchanged identities with Pte. Frederick Cole of the New Zealand Army; a year of sweating in the coal mine and the sawmill and on the railroad gang when I might have been sitting quietly in the air force compound at Stalag VIII B taking a correspondence course in something or other. Three times I had escaped and twice I'd fallen into German hands again. Not this time, if I could help it. My companion, Sgt. John Duncan, of the 51-st Gordon Highlanders, felt the same way.

Once they were sure of our identity the Polish Underground contacted London to find out what they wanted done with us. Back came a reply from London instructing us to remain in Poland until further notice. Eventually the underground proposed the following alternatives: We could lie low for the rest of the war depending on the generosity of some Polish family; we could join the civilian underground in the city or we could go up into the hills and join the Polish partisans fighting in the Armia Krajowa. We chose to fight in the hills.

When the German frontier guards did come to the watchmaker's house we were in the kitchen bending down to put a pair of cycle clips on our newly-acquired civilian pants. The two guards caught me by surprise as I straightened up. I looked them in the eyes, said good morning as cheerfully as possible in German and sauntered out into the garden. The nonchalant smuggler of contraband cows and escaped P.O.W.s was quite right. There was nothing to worry about.

Two weeks later our guide tucked a folded newspaper under his left arm and

took us from the Polish textile centre of Czestochowa to Olschyn (Olkusz). There we were wordlessly handed over to another partisan carrying a similarly folded newspaper.

For the next three months we lived in the attic of a house occupied by two old maids. They had lived for some years in Paris and had taught school there, but both were long since retired. The elder and spryer sister was 80 and the younger 78. Each morning throughout the summer the elder sister would climb the stairs to our attic with our breakfast and then with the aid of a child's blackboard give us our Polish lessons. She taught me in French, a language I knew from my childhood in Montreal, and I in turn translated everything into English for John Duncan. It was a laborious business but we had plenty of time on our hands.

The house next door was occupied by a family of Volksdeutsche, the term Poles used to scornfully describe Quislings and collaborators. We therefore had to be extra careful never to show ourselves in daylight. At night we would slip downstairs and take a few minutes exercise in the garden.

A short distance from their home was a Jewish concentration camp and as we sat on our cots in the attic listening to the courageous old lady quietly declining Polish verbs we would hear the clatter of machine guns at the daily execution hour. By August we were ready to move south and to join a unit of the Armia Krajowa (the Polish Underground Army) in the hills. Our papers were all in order. There was no longer any need for me to masquerade as a New Zealand private and I had become an R.C.A.F. flight sergeant once more. Now I found I was a Polish labourer born in Cracow and presently working in a jam factory. That at least was the information on my new identity card.

It must have been a plausible occupation, for when we boarded the train to Cracow the German railroad police checked me through without any hesitation. We spent a nerve-wrecking day dodging street patrols in Cracow, doubling back and forth across the city until it seemed as if we must have visited every underground hideout there was.

A few days later, in the foothills of Carpathians, we met Capt. Borowy, then commanding officer of the

Terenowka.(reserve units) in this area. Borowy was not his real name. Like all the partisans, he used an underground cover name. The Captain, John and I were to travel together to our new home in Mogolica-Turbacz Gorc area.

I was known as Pan Hubert - Mr. Hubert - for I had no relatives within hurting distance of the Germans. At the start I thought that I did fall into enemy hands they would simply send me back via Stalag VIII B to a punishment camp. Later it became very obvious that capture would bring immediate liquidation.

It was October and there was already snow on the peaks of the Carpathians when we reached the hideout of our partisan unit. It was a rough dugout built into the hillside and most of the 40 A.K fighters were sitting there eating supper when we arrived. Our

eyes goggled at the plates set before us. They must have contained at least two pounds of beef stew. After our steady diet of black bread and meagre German rations, it was an incredible feast. "We can live like this forever and ever", I exclaimed. "You'll be tired of meat before long," the partisans replied; and it was true that we seemed to have meat at every meal, beef and venison and pork.

They were a motley crew we had joined, clad in an odd assortment of clothes and fragments of uniforms. A single ancient machine gun, half a dozen .303s, a pair of double barrelled shotguns and a handful of unreliable revolvers and grenades were their entire armament. The youngest of the partisans was 17 and oldest no older than John's age, 38. There were university graduates and farm boys from

the valley below, professional soldiers and civilians from the city. And there were also the Gorals, the hardy, independent mountaineers of the region who crowned their own king and possessed an uncanny knowledge of the countryside.

They had one thing in common, these men. Everyone of them was wanted by the Germans. When that kind of person got into action he knew there was no point in ever giving in.

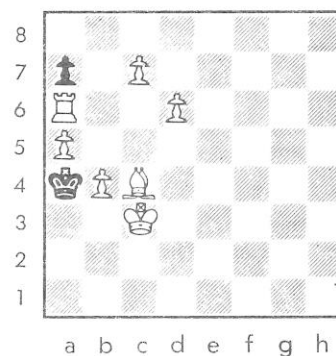
**PART III and conclusion in next issue**

## Chess/Szachy

by Jaroslaw Czypinski

The pope, John Paul II, is an avid chess player. In particular he is a great devotee of chess compositions and in his youth he even had a few problems of his own published.

Here is one of these:



White to play and mate in 3

1 c8N! Ka3 2 Nb6! ab 3 ab mate.

Not a bad combination for a Pope!

But is it hard to learn how to play combinations?

Sometimes novices are so staggered by the grandiose combinations of grandmasters that they say to themselves: 'How can I possibly ever play like that; think of such fantastic ideas during the game - ideas which are also good! But this approach is completely wrong.

For firstly, the gods help those who help themselves. Secondly, grandmasters aren't born but made. And thirdly, any chess player can learn to play combinations - and not badly at that!

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