



Polish P. O. W. Issues And Their Link With the Underground

by Walter Wusza

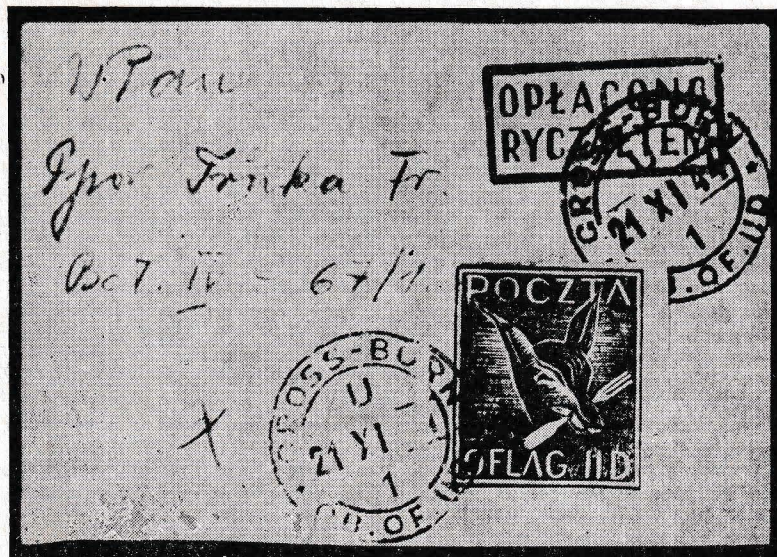


Fig. 1—The card that commemorated a meal at Gross-Born camp and distributed to the lucky few who shared it.

When on August 29, 1939, my wife and I closed up our home in Gdynia, Poland, to return to America, where between 1916 and 1934 I had been editor of various Polish-American papers, we little guessed that it would be eight years before we reached our destination. We had stored our household effects in Posen pending shipment to the United States, and were ourselves in the city of Warsaw to get passports from the U. S. Consulate,

when the Nazis invaded Poland on September first.

On that very first day of the war Nazi firebombs set the warehouse ablaze that held our furnishings, and all of our belongings were destroyed, including paintings, heirlooms, and various other treasures, even a safe. But that proved a minor disaster in comparison with what was to come to us in the war years ahead. So, too, was the confiscation of our house in



Commemorative of the 1919 uprising of Posen against the Germans. Issued Dec. 27, 1944.

Gdynia, which followed shortly after. Scenes of horror, days and nights of terror, mental torture such as we could not then have imagined, were to be our lot. Still, we were to be more fortunate than many other Poles, my wife and I, for though I eventually joined the Underground and was often under suspicion and questioning, we managed to outsmart our foes. Each time the Gestapo sent me an "invitation" to visit them, I succeeded in coming away a free man, though I shall never forget the dreadful anguish of those interviews. Particularly poignant in my memory always will be the time I was "invited" to room 351 in the Gestapo building. We of the Underground had grown to know that one whose "invitation" bore that room number would almost certainly not return, nor be seen or heard from again.

None but those who have experienced it can know the feeling that encompasses the human who must answer, as though willingly, a summons with such ominous portent. The impulse to give way to stark terror and flee must be replaced by a stolid attitude that simulates innocence and a certain degree of stupidity. As I climbed the stairs to reach my inquisitors, my legs felt like rubber beneath me. Yet, when I reached my destination, my face must not register nor my eyes betray my fear.

How I managed to maintain a calm and confident bearing in the period that followed I shall never know, but when after many anguished hours I was told that I might go home, my calm suddenly left me. I could scarce-

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ly believe that I had heard aright, and I guess it was lest I hadn't, or that they might change their minds, that I arose like a shot and flew out the door with such winged speed I almost knocked down a guard stationed there, and who probably thought I was a German. I leaped down the stairs several steps at a time, and sped to my wife, who greeted me like one returned from the dead.

I was guilty enough, heaven knows, according to Nazi standards, for my papers showing me to be a book-keeper were false, and I was actively working for Poland with the Underground. In fact, my former connection with the city government would have been enough to send me before the firing squad, for as press advisor I had written an article in the Posen Polish daily "Nowy Kurjer" entitled "Every German is a Spy," and this had appeared just two weeks before the onset of the war. In it I had attacked the Germans living in Posen so strongly that the Polish censor ordered the issue confiscated, but only after many copies had been sold. But I seemed to bear a charmed life. One day as I walked down a Warsaw street with my pockets bulging with 160,000 marks in 50 and 100 mark denominations which I had converted for the Underground, and which were designated for the Underground in Posen, I suddenly noticed that a few yards ahead of me a man had been stopped and was being searched by the Gestapo. To be caught with that money would have meant certain death for



Small village church built in distinctly Polish architecture. This is a very rare stamp—only about 150 were issued



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Znaczk¹.

Kl¹sza projektowa¹ wykonan¹.
(a,d) ppor. Gw¹adka Kar¹n
(b) ppor. Wolczyñsk¹ Jan
(c) ppor. Wolczyñsk¹ ppor. Bulzack¹
Jan Wac¹aw

2. I. - 5. III. 1944. Papier maszynowy gruby.
1. 20 fen. (a) zielan cynobrowa ☐
2. II. 1944. Papier: jasno-brzowy pakunkowy pr¹zkowany
2. 5 fen. (b) ciemna ultramaryna²) ☐
3. 5 fen. (b) czarny ☐
3. II. 1944. Papier maszynowy ci¹nk¹.
4. 10 fen. (c) ci¹mny karmin ☐
5. II. - 5. III. 1944. Papier: ci¹mno-kobaltowy gruby
sztywny.
5. 20 fen. (d) czarny ☐
6. II. 1944. Papier: bia¹y pakunkowy pr¹zkowany.
6. 10 fen. (c) ci¹mny karmin ☐
7. II. 1944. Papier: szary oraz bia¹y g¹dk¹e.
7. 20 fen. (f) 35x26 mm oliwkowy ☐
8. III. 1944. Papier: bia¹y g¹dk¹.
8. 10 fen. (c) ci¹mny karmin ☒
9. 10 fen. (c) ci¹mny karmin ☒
9. 20 fen. (f) 35x26 mm oliwkowy ☒
10. 20 fen. (f) 35x26 mm oliwkowy ☒
10. III. 1944. Papier maszynowy ci¹nk¹.
10. 20 fen. (f) 35x26 mm oliwkowy ☐

²) raz b¹d¹ na ¹lgoć. Znaczk¹ n¹s wolno mo-
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A page from the catalog of emissions at Oflag P.O.W. Officers Camp in Gross-Born. Illustration (b) is the rarest of all the Oflag issues. Its design shows three figures, representative of the characters in a play the men had put on in the recreation room. (Fig. 2) (Oflag is the combined form for the German "Offizierlager"—Officer Camp.)

me. The impulse to cross to the other side of the street was vetoed by sight of German Gendarmes there. To turn back in my tracks would unquestionably have aroused suspicion, so I had no alternative but to brazen it out. Deciding on a bit of bravado as my best strategy, I stopped beside the searching party and pretended inquisitiveness. "What do you want?" snapped the Gestapo agent, unquestionably fooled by my artlessness into thinking I was a German. "Get out of here." The command gave me the excuse to do what I so much longed to do—take to my heels.

So much for these typical experiences; I cite them because they are part of the story of the Prisoner of War Camp issues which we will discuss in this article. These are the kind of experiences which men of the Underground had in their fight for Poland, only all of them were not so fortunate as I was; some suffered indescribable tortures, some death.

The Prisoner of War issues which we are covering here are those from the Oflag Gross-Born IID, and Neu-Brandenburg IIE camps. The men who were imprisoned in these camps had all been reserve officers in the Polish army. They were accomplished men, and many among them had won considerable recognition in the arts and sciences and in industrial life. It was natural therefore, that these men of intelligence and ability should have found a way to aid Poland despite prison wall or iron bars or isolation in remotely located camps. The artists among them conceived the designs for stamps, cards, and covers; the engravers tooled out the designs from rough materials with a skill that itself illustrates their exceptional talent. And a way to make those issues bring aid and comfort to the widows and orphans through contact with the Underground was the brainchild of all of them. For the proceeds from the sale of these stamps and other philatelic issues were used as a social fund for the orphaned and widowed of Poland's conflict with the enemy.

Among the noted men in these camps who helped to produce the stamps was Lt. Antoni Czerniewski, famous artist and painter, a graduate of the Academy of Arts in Vilna. He designed some of the issues of Gross-Born IID. Today he is in New York, doing some paintings for St. Stanislaus Church

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Depicting widow and orphans

there. There were also Lt. Malisz, a renowned architect; Lt. Wolczynski, well known Polish artist; Lt. Marian Gwizdka, famous painter. Among the engravers of the stamps was the great sculptor, Jaroslav Glinski, and the civil engineer and architect, Lt. Bulzacki.

The stamps were produced ostensibly to carry mail within the camps. There were over 5,000 men imprisoned at the Gross-Born camp alone and distances between them were often great. So long as the designs were not objectionable to Nazi sensitivities, and because their real purpose of contributing to Poland's unfortunates through the Underground was not known, they were permitted. The designs were not always acceptable to the Germans, however, and in such cases confiscation, and sometimes punishment followed.

The Underground made contact with the prisoners by sending members of the Underground forces to the towns nearest where the camps were; there they would await an opportunity to strike up acquaintance with guards from the camps who came to town to buy supplies, etc. By means of bribes they were able to make the desired contacts, and thus inter-communication became possible.

Crude Materials Used by Prisoners

Not having any of the facilities customarily used for stamp production, the imprisoned men were obliged to make their philatelic souvenirs from whatever crude materials they could garner from within the camp, and with such tools as their ingenuity could devise and improvise.

Woodblocks were made from waste wood picked up from the camp site, the engravers carving the designs by



DNI MORZA (Days of the Sea). Before the first World War, Poland was cut off from the sea, and in that war she attained access to it. The above P.O.W. souvenir sheet commemorates that event.

hand with safety razor blades. It is a tribute to their genius that the scenes and figures in these designs are so well defined, despite the conditions under which the woodblocks were produced.



Coat of Arms of Warsaw made on wrapping paper

The paper too on which the stamps were printed was varied, and to say the least, unfit for the purpose. Wrapping paper, newspaper, tissue paper, lined writing paper, and even toilet paper was used. The stamps were printed separately and by hand, sometimes on wet, and as various kinds of paper shrink in varying degrees while drying, there is as much as a five per cent difference in the size of some issues.

The reasons for their issue, the events which the stamps commemorated, were sometimes as odd as the methods by which they were produced. In Figure 1, for instance, we see a postcard with a stamp whose design pictures a fox with a fork between its jaws. This commemorates a meal which some of the prisoners at Gross-Born had one day when one of them caught a fox. To you fox meat may not be a delicacy, but to these poorly-fed men such a meal was an occasion for commemoration, and thus, the postcard. Each of the men who dined off the fox received one of the postcards as a souvenir.

(Continued in the next issue)

WALTER WUSZA



Walter Wusza is shown here as he appeared following a grueling experience in January, 1942, when the Nazis picked up some 300 men in Warsaw with the view to getting some slave labor for Germany. They were herded into a yard and kept nine hours in a 20 below zero temperature before the investigation and questioning of the men began. Because the author had papers showing he was working for a German house (they were actually false papers), he was released and allowed to go home. The next day he developed a high fever, and it was 106 days before he was able to leave his bed. Today in America, six years later, he looks half the age that one would have guessed him to be when this picture was taken.

NEW MEMBERS

- | | |
|--|------|
| Rev. Stephen Bartkowski
Holy Cross Rectory,
Biruta Street
New Britain, Conn.
(E. P. P.) | #349 |
| William F. Gorkiewicz
9333 Gallagher
Hamtramck 12, Mich.
(U. S., EPP, & Genl. For.) | #350 |
| Van Balmas
278 Fenton St.
Buffalo 6, New York
(U. S. & EPP) | #351 |
| Miss Halina Skupiewski
372 St. Peter Ave.,
Stamford Centre,
Ontario, Canada.
(Belgium, Lux. & EPP) | #352 |

- | | |
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2229 N. Latrobe Ave.
Chicago 39, Ill.
(U. S., EPP, Can. & New Fdld) | #353 |
| John Crimslik
8 Murray Street
Filey, Yorkshire, England
(EPP) | #354 |
| Frank L. Przybysz
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New Britain, Conn.
(U. S., EPP, Fra. & Germ.) | #355 |
| Gus Rosendale
32 So. Kedzie Ave.
Chicago 12, Ill.
(U. S., EPP, Aust. & Germ.) | #356 |
| Andrzej G. Lipski
Lubomiskiego 25/6
Krakow 1, Poland
(EPP, & Mint. sheets) | #357 |
| C. B. Russell
209 So. Third St.
Columbus 15, Ohio
(EPP) | #358 |
| Mitchell Lisiewicz
32 Ashburton Ave.
Yonkers 2, N. Y.
(U. S., EPP) | #359 |
| Alexander Brusnicki
29 Washington Rd.
Springfield, Mass.
(EPP & Austria) | #360 |
| Joseph Przastek
868 Eastern Ave.
Schenectady 8, N. Y.
(Poland & FDC) | #361 |
| Vernon E. White
410 Fairway Terr.
Cedar Rapids, Iowa
(Poland, Germ. & Switz.) | #362 |

CHESTER MIKUCKI IMPROVING

at the present time, making a splendid recovery, and we hope to have him at our meetings within the next two or three months. In the meantime, Chester would like to hear from our members, his friends. His address is, Chester J. Mikucki, Room 255-E-2 North, Hines, Illinois. Drop him a line.

NEW ISSUES

by Jack Domar

In addition to the 50 Zloty green and the 100 Zloty orange, airmails reported in Issue #61, Feb.-Mar. issue of the BULLETIN, an additional value, 75 Zloty black has recently been received. No information as to the First Day of release.

A 15 Zloty sepia commemorative stamp has appeared with the inscription "Wiosna Ludow" and the dates "1848-1948" to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Spring Uprising. The design shows a young man in the foreground breaking a chain, symbolizing his release from bondage. In the lower left corner is a plow which is resting on the young man's knee, while in the lower right is the value "15 Zl." In the background are marching soldiers carrying a banner. No First Day information is available, although the copy before me indicates it was cancelled March 22, 1948.

In addition to the stamp, a 6 Zloty Post Card, stamp in red, also was issued. This is apparently a stamped greeting card issued because of the shortage of paper to supplement the ordinary greeting cards. Two different designs have been seen and how many others have been issued is not known. Both bore the inscription "Wesolych Swiat" (Joyful Holiday) and were released for the Easter season.

BULLETIN ON MONTHLY BASIS NOW

We are happy to announce to our members that the BULLETIN will be published every month from now on, with the exception of July, when the editor takes a vacation.

We are indeed indebted to our printer, Mr. Harlan Miller, without whose splendid cooperation, we probably would not even have had a BULLETIN. Printers are very hard pressed these days and not many of them are in a position to take on any extra work. We are indeed happy that Mr. Miller could see his way clear to print the BULLETIN every month.

Members are reminded that the BULLETIN doesn't get itself published—there is some work attached

to getting the material ready for the printer. So, how about a little help? Send in new items about yourself, or other members of Polonus. Did you win an award? Tell us about it. Do you know of some special accomplishment of a member of Polonus? Tell us about it. Can you write an article? Do so and send it in. Only if you take an active interest in the BULLETIN will it be the newsy, informative and helpful paper that you would like it to be.

The Editor.

APPLICATIONS PENDING

Hampel J. Aleksander
Suwalska 27
Lodz 7, Poland

Edward S. Jarosz
200 East 162 Street
New York 56, N. Y.

Bernard J. Sobczak
1813 Cortland Street
Chicago 22, Illinois

Herman W. Cotrell
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Hamilton Square, N. J.

Carl M. Hirschman
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Tadeusz K. Norski
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Blackpool, England

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TID BITS

It is again called to the attention of the members of Polonus that they exercise extreme care in the purchase of the "Krakow Issues."

This warning has been given before and it is repeated now. Do not buy these "Krakow Issues" unless they have been expertized.

The Experts Committee of the Polonus Philatelic Society stands ready to help you and will do so, if you send the "Krakows" to Chairman Frank Wolosewick, 4029 Warwick Ave., Chicago 41, Illinois.

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Bert Powell is writing a series of articles on specialist stamp societies. His column appears in one of the Czecho-slovak papers here in Chicago. Bert will eventually write about Polonus and perhaps you will see it in the BULLETIN.

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At the recent Lithpex, stamp exhibit of the Lithuanian Philatelic Society, Dr. Eisen won the Grand Award. Chester Schafer won a first award, M. E. Steczynski and Col. O. H. Schrader won special awards. We understand that Jack Domar and Col. Schrader were judges.

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At the exhibit of the Czechoslovak Club August Hrvnak won a second award.

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At the Austin show, where Bert Powell was one of the Judges, Ben Reeves won a first award.

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We understand that Col. O. H. Schrader and Lester Jankowski received the Chicago Philatelic Society's "Educational Award" for their exhibits at POLPEX 1948.

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A new stamp club was recently formed in Poland, and is registered under the name of "Klub Filatelistow W Gorzowie Wlkp." The correspondent is Dr. Leon Andrejew, ulica Chrobrego 23, Gorzow Wlkp, Poland.

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Col. O. H. Schrader gave his talk on Paper before the Hawthorn Stamp Club recently and also spoke on Tibet before the Ogden Hill Stamp Club. Polonus members certainly remember these fine talks and know that both Hawthorn and Ogden Hills had a very pleasant and instructive evening.

* * *

Ben Reeves spoke on his favorite topic "Don't be a chump, don't specialize!" and Lester Jankowski gave his talk "On my kitchen table" at a recent meeting of the Highland Park Stamp Club.

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Polonus members get around. How about sending in a few lines about your stamp activities. Send it in to the Editor, we should like to mention it in Tid Bits. Let the membership know what you are doing.

* * *

We hope you have noticed that there is no Members Mart this month. It has been temporarily discontinued. Know why? No ads. It seems members have ideas—one of them a column for ads, where members could offer their duplicates or what they wanted to dispose of—and then, when they convince the Publications Committee, and it wasn't an easy job, refuse to support it. Mind you, we are not wailing at its discontinuance, but we are somewhat disturbed that those who urged most strenuously that the BULLETIN devote a part of its space to ads of members offering the stamps of Poland, should when the opportunity is presented to them, fail to take advantage of it. If the members of Polonus want a MEMBERS MART they will have it.

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During the absence of Chester Mikucki, due to his illness, Adam Kloskowski is acting as the presiding officer at our meetings and is doing his usual and customary swell job.

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Our treasurer, Dr. S. M. Mioduszewski, 1176 Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago 22, Illinois, requests members to pay their 1948 dues as promptly as possible. Get your money in boys and girls.