

Stefan Pejko (1914- 1979)



How It Really Was...

Stefan Pejko was born on the 2nd of January 1914 in Zurawica, a village in Przemysl County, Poland. He was my half-brother. In his youth he belonged to the shooting club in Zurawica and was also a goalkeeper for the "Zurawianka" Football club from the very beginning of its creation. He was also active in the volleyball team and a good middle-distance runner.

He was called into army service in 1935 in the Legion Regiment w Staszow; about 120 km northeast of Kraków. This Legion prepared units for service in the Korpusy Ochrony Pograniczna (Border Protection Corps). After his training he was transferred to the Straz Graniczna (Border Guards) in the town of Sarny specialising in communications. After ending his army service (2-years) he returned to Zurawica, where he worked in the 2-battalion Pancer division's workshop. He was still a goalkeeper for Klasa-A- club side (non-league) WSKS "PNCERNI" in view of the takeover of the "Zurawianki" side by the regiment.

As war was looming, he received his mobilisation card on the 30th of August 1939 and on the very day he said farewell to his family we walked from the brickworks in Buszkowice do the 38 Pulku Piechoty (38 Pulch Infantry) in Przemysl. After he donned his uniform, I took his civilian clothes and after an emotional farewell with my brother, I returned to Zurawica. The further fate of my brother

was an unknown to me. In December 1939, my mother received a card from a German Prisoner-of-War Camp that he was alive and healthy; "Ich bin gezunt".

What happened later is an unknown because I was arrested by the border guards in Przemysl. And so, "on the road" to General Sikorski's army and on to Siberia, where I was until the Sikorski-Stalin arrangement where I joined the Polish Army in the USSR. Of course, during this time, I had no contact at all with home or with my brother.

After returning to Poland in 1947 my mother told me that my brother Stefan (later confirmed by my brother) had joined the German SS Galizien in Polish known as 'Hałyczyna'. After returning from German captivity, Stefan took on work in the barracks as an ordinary labourer; in these times many Poles as well as Ukrainians worked for the Germans at different levels.

....

After WWII, Stefan made his way to England and settled down in Rotherham in 1946 at the Miners' Hostel on Herringthorpe Valley Road. He married Katarzyna in 1951 finding employment as a miner at Barley Hall Colliery from 1947 to 1978. In 1952, son Derek was born and the family left to live in a house in Dalton, Rotherham for a short while. Eventually, Stefan put down for a mortgage and bought his first house in Shaftesbury Square, Eastwood next to the Sliwa family. In 1959 the family moved to Dixon Street in the centre of Rotherham where he lived up to his death in March 1979 just after working at the colliery most of that time together with other Poles and Hungarians who come over in 1956 after the Hungarian uprising.

This account was put together from a first-hand account provided by Stefan's brother, Wladek and from discussions with Stefan's son, Derek. The brothers both met a year before Stefan's death (1979). It took many years of trying to get a visa to England from (then) Communist Poland as Wladek worked for the Polish railways. Both were awarded the Cross of Valor and the Monte Cassino Cross. Wladek passed away in 2013.

Images: top LHS Stefan with Mrs Grabowski at the Polish Club; top RHS with wife Katarzyna. Middle LHS at the top of Wharnccliffe Road, near the centre of Rotherham. Middle RHS: Stefan with colleagues Marian Macko and Jozef Reuter. Bottom LHS Franek Heczko, Jan Rybak, Derek Pejko (son), Stefan Pejko and Jozef Reuter. Bottom RHS Derek Pejko, Stefan Pejko, Mr Ossowski, Basia Stefanik and Wladek Stefanik (Stefan's half-brother). Photos taken in the 1970s.

