

## Witold Ludwik Grzesik (1912-1974)



France, 1944.

I was born in Klimontów about twenty miles NE of Kraków, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1912. By the age of five, I was already an orphan. My elder sister, Józefa, who was married, took me into her care. After finishing my military service in 1931, I decided to become a regular and trained as a mechanic and driving instructor. At the outbreak of WWII, I was posted in Grodno (presently on the Polish Byelorussian border) as corporal of the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Battalion.

My first encounter with enemy forces was in East Prussia. Due to a lack of ammunition and fuel, we were forced to retreat around the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1939. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, I managed to visit my sister for a few hours and parted with my family, never to see them again. Our orders were to head for Romania and then for the Adriatic coast. We were shipped from Yugoslavia to Marseilles and from there on to Great Britain, where the Polish Armed Forces were reorganized. I became part of the Second Tank Regiment, based in Scotland, under General Stanisław Maczek.

I took part in the battle of Falaise in 1944, where I was wounded and suffered severe burns (my tank was hit by fire). Bound with bandages almost from head to toe, I spent the next few months in a French hospital. My regiment moved on to Belgium, Holland and Northern Germany liberating, among others, the Dutch town of Breda from Nazi occupation. To this day, one of Breda's squares is named after General Maczek, who, after living to be 102 years old, died in Edinburgh in 1994 and was buried amongst his soldiers in Breda. This was his wish: to lie with those who had fought under his command.

I was awarded the "Krzyż Walecznych" cross and allowed to wear insignia with one star on account of having been wounded. After demobilization in 1946, I married Janina Jakóbczyńska, who was also a member of the Polish Forces; the wedding took place in Dumbarton on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1948. Soon

afterwards, we moved to England and settled in Rotherham, where our first child, Tadeusz, was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1949.

I found employment in the Midland and Low Moor Iron and Steel Co. in order to support my family to which a new member was added when our daughter Maria was born in 1954.

The remaining paragraphs are available in the book.

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Witold Grzesik died of a massive heart attack on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1974, having just driven his car into the garage at his home in Deepdale Rd. He was buried on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January at Herringthorpe Cemetery. The service was taken by his son, Tadeusz, who was ordained a priest in 1972, working as a curate at the Polish Church of St. Andrew Bobola, in Shepherd's Bush, London. After his death, Janina moved house in 1981 to Cheam, South London where she lived together with her daughter Maria, a teacher at the Ursuline Convent School in Wimbledon. Janina died in Cheam on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1996 and her ashes were buried in her husband's grave in Rotherham.

This account has been kindly provided by Rev. Dr. Tadeusz Grzesik – son of Witold Grzesik.



Before the War with the unit in Poland, Witold is standing in the centre, left of the high-ranking colleague bedecked with medals.



Witold Grzesik (third from right) with his unit, standing next to an armoured **vehicle**, near Vilnius, 28.06.1936.



Army I.D., issued by the authorities, Grodno, 07.04.1938.



Witold Grzesik, first on the left saluting, Blairgowrie, Scotland, circa 1945.



Witold's wife Janina Jakóbczyńska (in the hat) with the Polish Volunteers, Scotland 1945.



Janina and Witold Grzesik, Scotland 1948.



Christmas at the Rotherham Steel Works, where Witold (third from right) worked, 1955.



Mr Władek Grabowki (left) and Mr Witold Grzesik (both standing). His daughter, Maria and wife, Janina are seated, the event was Polish doughnut day @ late 1960s.