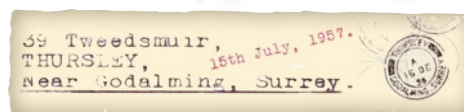

From the acclaimed website of

Tweedsmuir Military Camp

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10 May 2010

A Long Journey from Poland to Chicago, Illinois, USA - A Story from Ed Burczy

It was midnight, very dark and bitterly cold. The Burczy family were told to leave their home by soldiers who wore long green overcoats to protect them from the frost. One soldier was kind as he allowed my mom to take a few extra things for me as I was very young.

The whole family, that is my mom and dad, my four aunts my grandparents and I, were shipped out of Poland to Kazakhstan on cattle trucks. The trucks had narrow slits in their sides and an upper platform that you could reach by a ladder. I spent most of the journey on that platform, urinating as and when I had to. As I remember, the journey lasted for three days.

Soon after we arrived at our place of destination, granddad died and was buried in ground that was rock hard from the frost. I remember my dad cutting a tree trunk and making a cross for the grave.

My mom, it seems to me now, had a hard time with me as I was small and food was in short supply. She endeavoured to find eggs, bread, vegetables and the like to feed me. My aunts sometimes allowed her to feed me with their food rations. It was a very difficult time for us all: the loss of granddad, the cold, the misery and the total uncertainty of the whole situation must have played on their minds as they tried to keep afloat on a tide of fear.

When the Eastern Front opened, the Russians allowed the Poles to make their way out of the USSR. There was no transport provided. We had to make our own way to freedom. Dad made two sledges, one for mom, himself and me and one for my aunts. To this day, however, I remember only two of my aunts coming with us. It was much later, when I was 68, that I learnt the other two aunts had remained in Russia and were resettled in northern Poland after the war.

I particularly remember the journey out of Russia as we made our way along narrow tracks through a dark tunnel of trees. My two aunts who came with us took turns pulling the other one on the sledge. Occasionally a truck would drive by and dad would barter with the driver, offering him a pair of trousers, a jacket, sometimes money in return for a ride on the truck.

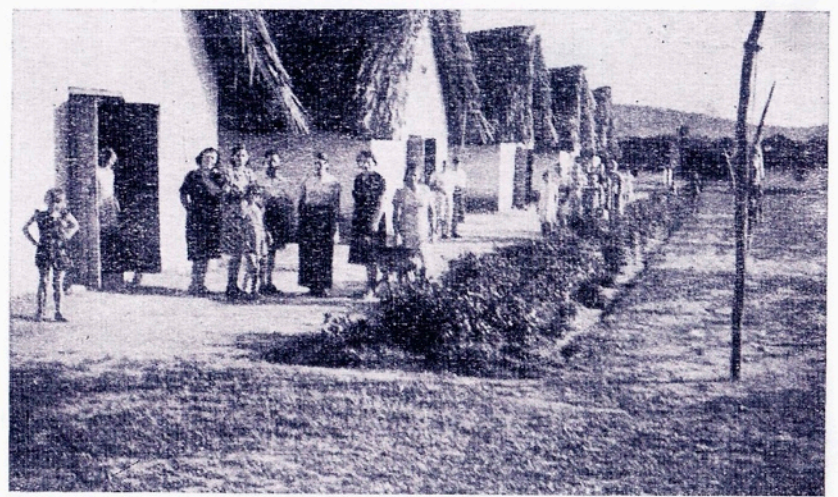
When we arrived at our muster point for the newly formed Polish army, my dad enlisted. I remember him standing in front of me in his khaki uniform as his old clothes were burnt on a heap of other people's clothes. He was then transferred for training that saw him travel through southern Europe, the UK and eventually Normandy in France. I will never forget the time he waved to mom and me as he was transported off by truck. Both mom and I cried. I learnt later that dad served in 1 Armoured Division, 1 Polish Corps under General Maczek. My two aunts also joined the Polish army, leaving mom and me to comfort each other.

Eventually my mom and I were shipped out to Africa. We spent various lengths of time in places like Tanzania, Tanganyika and finally Mombasa. The barracks in Mombasa were communal where both children and their mothers slept in the same large room.

Mombasa was heaven! There was a pier like the kind you might see in a film about *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The sand was a pure golden yellow, soft and warm. I had an excellent time there. As soon as I woke up (usually around 5.00 or 6.00 in the morning) I'd put on a pair of shorts and a vest and go fishing. I

made my own fishing line, which was tied to the end of a stick, and a weight I made from a piece of used toothpaste tube that I wrapped around the line (for those of us who remember, in those days toothpaste tubes were made from lead)! I used to catch yellow and green coloured fish, which I threw back into the water. In the evenings I would go swimming with other kids in the camp.

I have taken the liberty of attaching a couple of pictures of the camps we stayed in. I hope you will be able to use them.



Osiedle Polskie Kondoa.



My schooling in the camps was very basic. I remember older people, they may have been teachers or not, teaching us Polish history and writing, while religion was taught to us by a priest. But above everything else the best moments were when a letter would arrive from dad, and mom would read it to me.

When we arrived in the UK, I went to Polish school then afterwards English school. This was in Liverpool, which after East Africa was cold and damp! We were part of the Polish Resettlement Corps dependants. By this time dad had returned from the war, landing in Liverpool where we all met up for the first time in 5 years.

As a family we moved to a camp in Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh just north of Southampton in England. My two aunts who had joined the Polish army at the same time as my dad, also came to live in England. One of them, as I recall, settled in camp Tweedsmuir, Surrey before moving to London, the other one in a camp near Spondon, Derbyshire. I think my second aunt's family moved later from Spondon to Derby.

Mom, dad and I lived in Chandler's Ford from 1947 to 1951. In 1951 we emigrated to America, settling in Chicago, Illinois. When I was older, I asked dad why he and mom decided to relocate to the USA. He explained that they saw no future living in a Nissen hut, which we had done for 4 years. The opportunities of setting up home in a completely new place was exciting, he said.

Dad had set up a printing business in Chicago, which did very well. When he retired I took the business over and it went from strength to strength. Eventually I sold the firm and established a real estate partnership. Now I am also retired, both my mom and dad have died and I too have a family.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you.

Ed