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Patron Saint Helps Polish Soldier As Told To LEOPOLD LORENTZ

(The following article was submitted by Mr. Edmund Lorentz of 339 Ave. D, Rochester. It was prepared by his son Leopold, a member of the Canadian Overseas Forces in Scotland.)

It is the story of the escape of a young Polish refugee, now a Corporal-Cadet with the Polish Forces in England, as told to Leopold Lorentz. The name of the hero is Joseph. The name of Joseph, his full name cannot be given for the obvious reason that members of his family, perhaps still living in Poland, might suffer dire consequences. At the outbreak of the war in 1939 Joseph was a student at the famous Krakow University.

Mobilized two months before that fateful September of 1939, I left my family and have never seen them since.

I was through all of the Polish campaign. But spirit and heroism alone could not hold off the mad Luftwaffe and panzers. When Russia came in from the east, all was lost. We had orders to withdraw southwards.

It was on September 21st when we paused at a Hungarian frontier and turned with tear-filled eyes for a last look at the beloved motherland. In the distance, towns and villages were in flames. Great columns of angry smoke rose skyward calling for vengeance.

A Hungarian Prison Camp. The Hungarians confiscated all arms and in accordance with international law we were interned. I was taken to Komaron (an underground fortress in the last war) on the banks of the Danube about 80 miles north of Budapest to begin a new and dreary life in a concentration camp. Two bowls of thin soup per day, a bed of straw scattered sparingly over a cold, damp cement floor. No exercise and impossible to keep clean.

I am sure it was only by the grace of God I survived. It was early in November when I received first news from home. All of us were weak and sick already but I was encouraged for my parents and sisters were safe. My brother, a soldier too, however, was in a German prison camp. He was worse off than I.

I kept contact with my people until I left for France. My very last word was my mother's blessing on the way. I have had nothing since then. Soon after the Red Cross provided us with a radio, we heard of the Polish Army forming in France and decided that somehow we must join our luckier comrades there. We knew the difficulties of this task; far from the Polish Embassy in Budapest and constantly watched by the Hungarians, then sort of secret allies to the Axis.

Careful work brought its reward for there came a day when at last we had forged documents. All in readiness, that night twelve of us university students dug a tunnel through the wall, sped down the corridor and out of the fortress. Far out of town friends greeted us in a tiny peasant cottage. We divided what odds and ends of civilian clothing there were, separated and headed for Budapest. There our Embassy provided papers enabling us to be sent to a camp for Polish civilians just at the Yugoslav border where awaited me the most trying anxiety of all.

Crossing "Green Frontier" Because the Hungarian border guards wore green uniforms the Yugoslav boundary was called the "Green Frontier." I, being a Pole of military age, could not get a passport and so there was no other way but to cross the River Drava, over 200 feet wide and covered with ice. The greatest problem was to get a guide to help us make to the banks unseen, a dangerous job as sharp-eyed sentries were posted almost every fifty yards. And though this was extremely hazardous, hundreds of Poles and Czechs crossed that "Green Frontier" each week. Once the ice gave way and many were drowned. Still others followed, without pause.

No large permitted. Documents must be concealed in socks. Three Polish officers recently out of Poland who had been teaching us some French the past few days went to cover our escape as much as possible.

All in readiness we followed after our guide. Tramping in Italian style, helping each other plough through the deep snow, we were well on our way when I made an appalling discovery. In all the hurry and excitement I had somehow lost the purse. The precious purse with my documents and the treasured ten pengos note.

This was disheartening to me and I was afraid to tell my comrades about it. As we trudged along without interruption, however, I became more and more convinced that this last addition to all our troubles must be a good omen. When our party halted for a short rest, I announced the loss to my friends. Of course, they were furious and angry with me but only for a short time as things began to happen quickly.

It was I in the morning when we reached the banks. The spring thaw had just begun and floating ice was already on the Drava with only one place narrow enough to cross. Our guide tested the ice. It was relatively strong but there was a break about three yards off the other shore. With a rope for safety, we crossed hastily one after another six yards apart. You could hear the beating of the next man's heart and you let out a great sigh of relief when the waiting Yugoslav guards pretended to arrest us and escorted us to the nearest village. Tired, frozen, covered with mud we reached the hamlet at dawn. The honest peasants gladly helped us make beds and brought us a good warm breakfast.

We found out later that we were the last group lucky enough to cross by ice. The next lot, a week after us, had to cross in small boats. We were very grateful for our good fortune as some of our countrymen had been caught and repeated that expedition even five times.

Our friendly hosts kept us until the 17th of March when we left by train for a port on the Adriatic where the "Warsaw," a Polish passenger ship, was waiting to take us to Marseille.

Paris Sunday, March 18, we landed in Trieste. The Italians were parading gaudily. The city was all bands and uniforms and everyone stating that war will be declared on the allies very soon. Everyone confident of a rapid victory.

France and More Disappointments On the day of my patron saint, Joseph, I docked at France, March 19.

Our authorities took us immediately to the Polish camp at Coetquidan which remembered Poles from the last war. I had heard much about France in Hungary but was soon disappointed. There was a lack of discipline in the famous French Army, the civilians were frightened of German bombing and said openly they could not stand the hammering our Warsaw bore.

There were almost a 100,000 of us in France. Two complete divisions went to the front, the last soldiers of any army to leave the Maginot (most of them interned in Switzerland now). Our famous Carpathian Brigade was sent to Norway, the men who wrested Ankenes from the Germans. We waited for arms from America. They never came.

Events moved quickly. The Germans occupied Holland and Belgium. When they broke through to Paris, France was done. That was a tragic time for us who had placed our last hopes on France. We accepted Petain's "Cease Fire" with grief.

How overjoyed we were then to learn that our General Sikorski had been to London and made arrangements to embark the Polish forces to Britain to carry on the fight. Taking weapons from the French, we forced our way to the port towns where the British Navy was to pick us up. On the eve of June 19 we reached St. Nazaire after a day and night march. German bombers in strength blitzed the port and our camp heavily. The ship supposed to take us was hit and once again the future was black. The men brought us information that we could get on board ship at Crobie, twenty miles north. We fought the French and took lorries, reaching Crobie in an hour. Three silhouettes of British de-

stroyers on the horizon was an encouraging sight indeed. It was ebb tide and the giant ships could not sail in. We had to go in.

(Continued on Page 9)

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