

"ONE AMONG MANY"

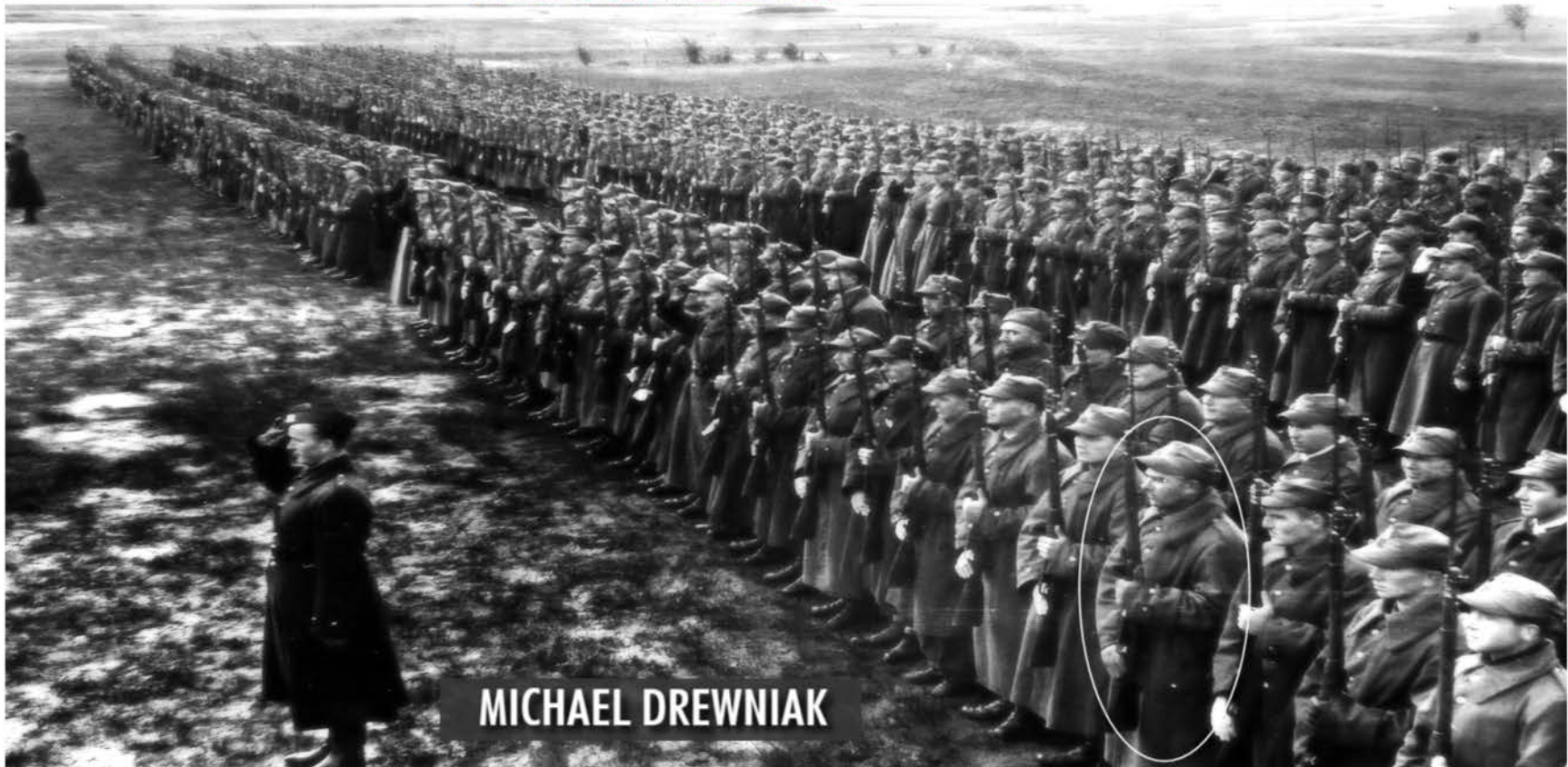
„Jeden z wielu”



FOLLOWING THE NAZI INVASION OF POLAND FROM THE WEST AND THE SOVIET INVASION FROM THE EAST, THE IMPACT UPON ONE YOUNG MAN FROM A QUIET VILLAGE OF POSTOLOWKA, POLAND BECAME A NIGHTMARE IN AN INSTANT AS IT DID FOR MILLIONS OF OTHERS.

THE UNFORESEEABLE JOURNEY OF ONE YOUNG MAN

JAN DREWNIAK



MICHAEL DREWNIAK

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For our children and grandchildren to remember.

MICHAEL DREWNIAK

August 2024

DEDICATION

Firstly, this book is dedicated to my father, Jan Drewniak which is a supplement to his own Personal Memoirs. It shows a little more detail in his Journey through those extraordinary times.

Secondly, this is also dedicated to those many brave Polish soldiers who were never allowed the opportunity of telling their storey or could not talk about their experiences after the war.

Let this be a most humbling token of remembrance.

Michael Drewniak

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In preparing this book, historical excerpts and/or photos were used from the following references:

- The Memoirs of John (Jan) Drewniak** – *personal recollections of his experiences during WW2*
- Military records of Jan Drewniak** – *Ministry of Defence APC Polish Inquires Ref: 3/1919/30/III/APC/POL*
- Jan Drewniak** – *personal photos from WW2*
- Kresy-Siberia Virtual Museum** - [Home - Kresy Siberia \(kresy-siberia.org\)](http://www.kresy-siberia.org)
- Polish 2nd Corps Virtual Museum** - [Polish Second Army Virtual Museum \(2korpus.org\)](http://www.2korpus.org)
- Anders' Army** – **Wikipedia** - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anders%27_Army
- Blog of Dirk de Klein – History of Sorts** - *excerpts from the Blog relating to the Soviet invasion of Poland and it's leading up to the formation of the Polish Army in the USSR.*
- Hoover Institute of Archives** – **800/1/0/-/87 Scans 249, 250 & 251** – *excerpts from the Documents of Wladyslaw Anders – Statements of Poles in the Soviet Union, 1940-1943 (translated to English)*
- Search Archives: <https://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/>
- Searches on the Internet Archives** – *various sites*
- Imperial War Museums** - [Imperial War Museums \(iwm.org.uk\)](http://www.iwm.org.uk)
- World War Two Facts** - [Battle of Monte Cassino | World War 2 Facts](http://www.worldwar2facts.com)
- Google Maps** - <https://www.google.com/maps>
- The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum** - <https://pism.org.uk>



INVASION OF POLAND, FALL 1939

German troops invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, triggering World War II. In response to German aggression, Great Britain and France declared war on Nazi Germany.



INTRODUCTION

My name is Michael Drewniak and I am the third son of Jan Drewniak who this book is about. My father never talked about his experiences during **World War Two** and the struggles he went through as a young man. He was of Polish descent and was "**one among many**" who were displaced and exiled from his homeland. He was taken from his home by conscription by the Soviet NKVD to serve in an army who invaded his country. Then immediately removed and put into forced labour deep into **Siberia, USSR**. Eventually he joined the 2nd Polish Army when tides were turned when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. During my retirement I made it my mission to find out more about what my father went through and to make sure that my children and grandchildren know what kind of person their grandfather was and what he had to go through in order to survive, and have his freedom, which most of us take for granted. My father did write his own personal memoirs called **The Memoirs of John (Jan) Drewniak**, which I have recorded in a book format with pictures added for any to read. It has been given to my siblings and our children to pass on to their children. I have also been sharing it with many descendants of Polish Soldiers all over the world whom I have had the opportunity to do so. His memoirs are now recorded in the **Wall of Tribute and Hall of Images** in the **Kresy Siberia Virtual Museum** - <https://kresy-siberia.org/> It serves as a testament of his contribution to the victory achieved for the World's freedoms we enjoy today. This book that I have put together is a supplement to my father's **Personal Memoirs** showing a little more in detail his Journey through those extraordinary times.

* * * *

DEPORTATION

Italicised excerpts taken from Blog of Dirk de Klein – History of Sorts



Following the Soviet invasion of Poland at the onset of World War II in accordance with the Nazi-Soviet Pact against Poland, the Soviet Union acquired over half of the territory of the Second Polish Republic. Within months, in order to de-Polonize annexed lands, the Soviet NKVD rounded up and deported between 320,000 and 1 million Polish nationals to the eastern parts of the USSR, the Urals, and Siberia. There were four waves of deportations of entire families with children, women and elderly aboard freight trains from 1940 until 1941.

These civilians included civil servants, local government officials, judges, members of the police force, forest workers, settlers, small farmers, tradesmen, refugees from western Poland, children from summer camps and orphanages, family members of anyone previously arrested, and family members of anyone who escaped abroad or went missing.

Their fate was completely changed in June 1941 when Germany unexpectedly attacked Soviet Union. In need of as many allies it could find, the Soviets agreed to release all the Polish citizens it held in captivity. Released in August 1941 from Moscow's infamous Lubyanka Prison, Polish general Wladyslaw Anders began to mobilize the Polish Armed Forces in the East (commonly known as the Anders Army) to fight against the Nazis.

Forming the new Polish Army was not easy, however. Many Polish prisoners of war had died in the labor camps in the Soviet Union. Many of those who survived were very weak from the conditions in the camps and from malnourishment. Because the Soviets were at war with Germany, there was little food or provisions available for the Polish Army. Thus, following the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941, the Soviets agreed to evacuate part of the Polish formation to Iran. Non-military refugees, mostly women and children, were also transferred across the Caspian Sea to Iran.

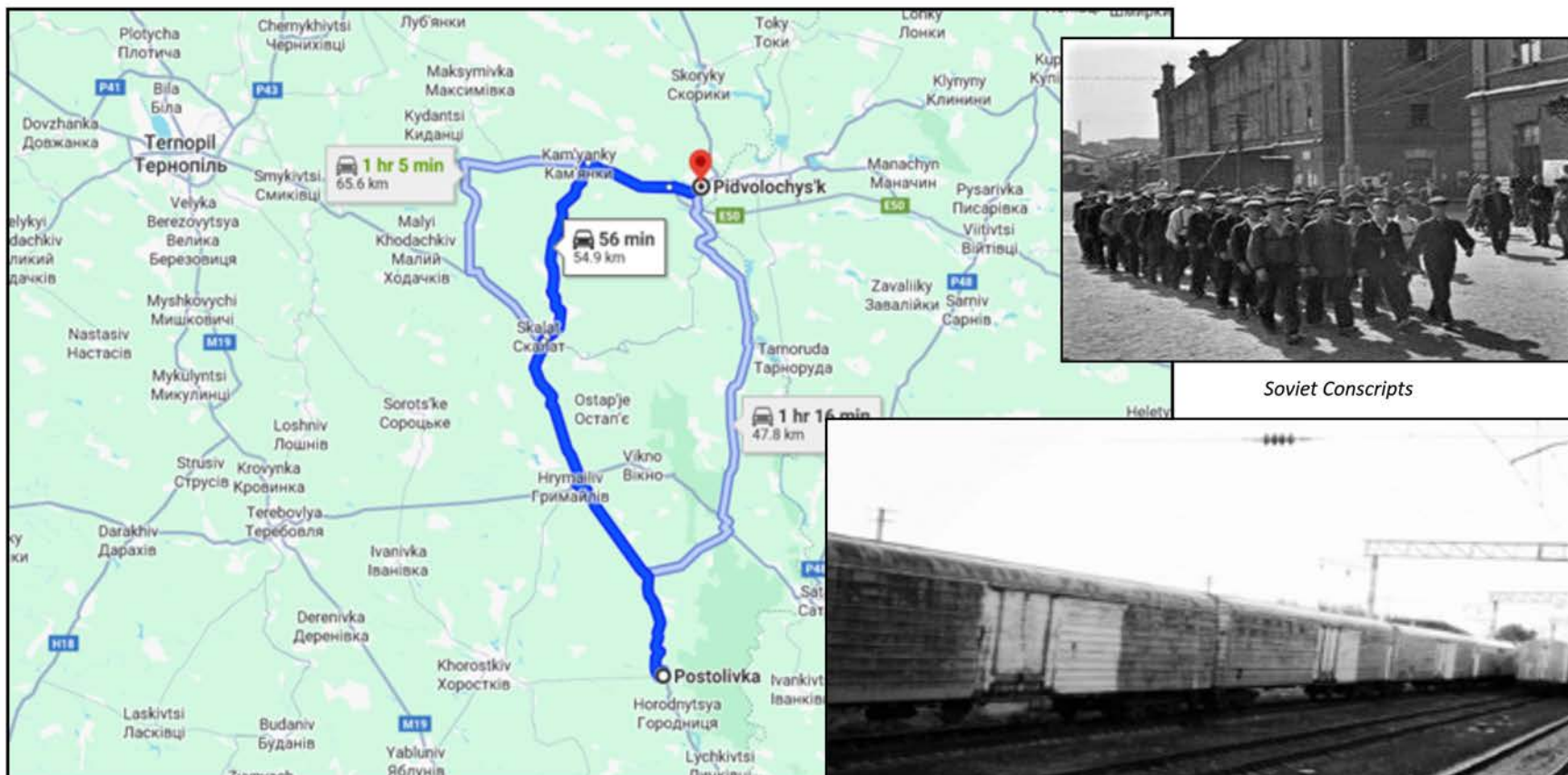
Those who were able bodied young men were taken from their homes and families, not for deportation, but conscripted by the **Soviet NKVD** for the addition to the **Red Army**. Many with the same fate as **Jan Drewniak** as you will soon read about.

CHAPTER 1

CONSCRIPTION AND EXILE INTO RUSSIA

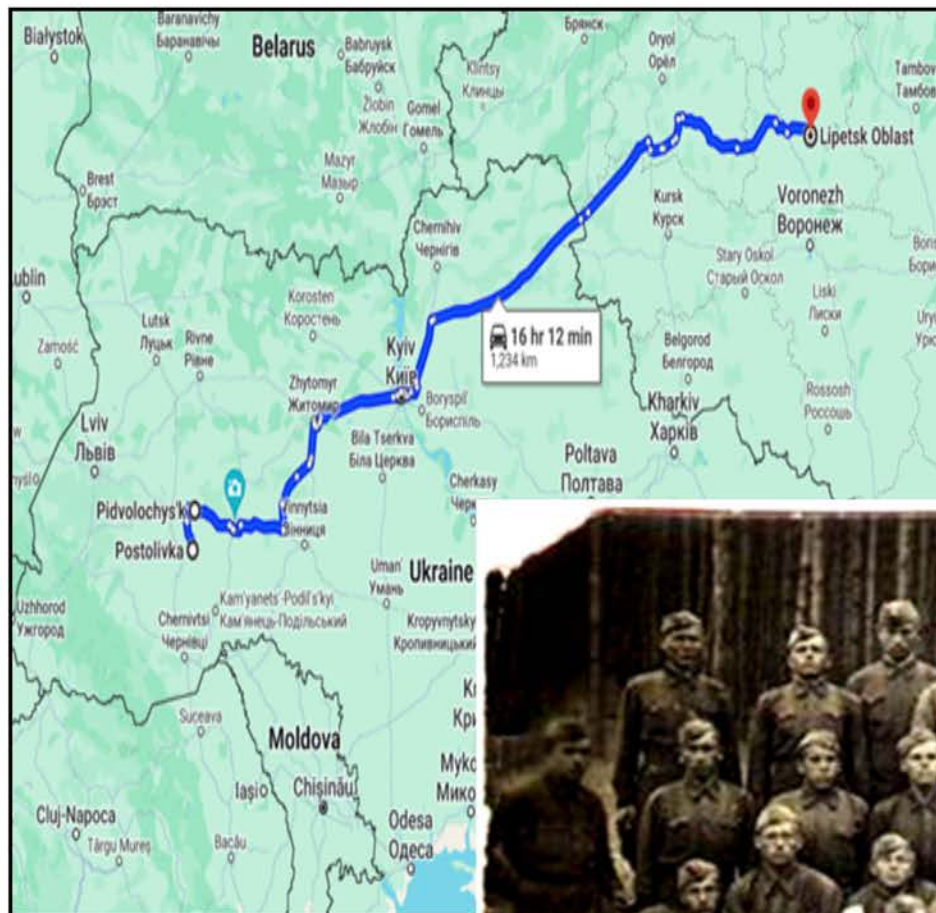
The beginning of **Jan Drewniak's** exile into Russia occurred on **17 of April 1941**. Together with him, many recruits born in the years of 1917, 1918 & 1919 in the **Tarnopol** region were called by the **Soviet NKVD** Recruiting Commission to present themselves at an appointed location. **Jan** received orders from the Soviet Army to present himself, in good clothes and rations for 6 days. **Jan** and 3 others from the town of **Postolowka**, made their way by horse drawn wagon to meet at a train station in **Podwoloczyska, Tarnopol, Poland**: now, **Pidvolochys'k, Ternopil, Ukraine SSR**.

PODWOLOCZYSKA, TARNOPOL, POLAND



They were marched to the train station, entrained there, loaded into boxcars and travelled into Russia. During the journey they were given one loaf of bread for every seven men and one can of fish for every six men. The journey was long and arduous in cramped quarters.

LIPETSK OBLAST, RUSSIA



On **21 of April 1941** the train arrived in **Lipetsk, Russia**. Unloaded, the recruits marched through town and different groups were separated and assigned to various military units stationed there.

It was possible that Jan was attached to the **Soviet 4th Infantry Regiment – 3 Strelkov Aya Rota (3rd Rifle Company)**. The 3rd Rifle Company would have been involved in various operations on the Eastern Front, facing the challenges of the harsh conditions and intense combat during the early years of the war.

Training started immediately. It was intense, food was bad, and soldiers monthly pay was 8.1 rubles (*13 cents in our currency*)



Stalin had killed so many Polish officers at **Katyn**, because they were not to be trusted, he was short of military leaders and instructors to train his new recruits.

The Russian Company Commander gave **Jan** a Platoon to train.

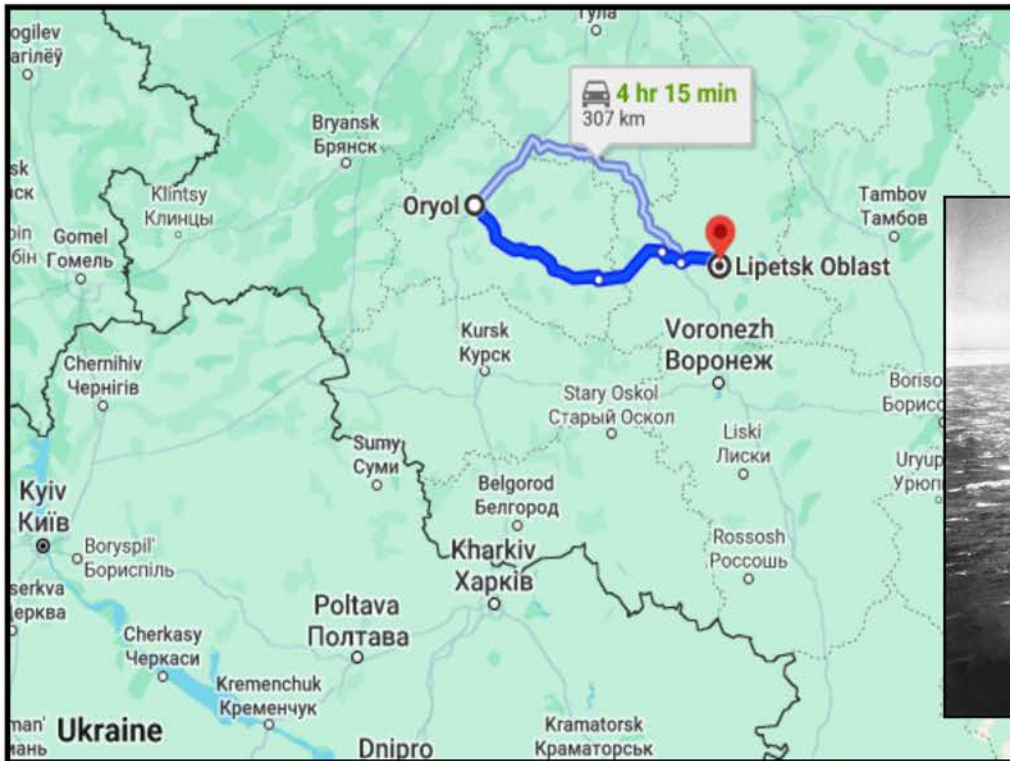
Soviet 4th Infantry Regiment – 3 Strelkov Aya Rota

Jan Drewniak (center right, 2nd row)

Three months had passed and successively, all Polish nationals were called before the staff officers and questioned. They were asked the following questions: what their profession was, if they held membership in Polish organizations, whether they had any family members living abroad (*United States, Germany, etc.*). The interrogations were repeated several times. After the invasion of **Germany** into **Soviet Union**, the soldiers were sworn in and then they received arms.

However, soon after another series of interrogations was undertaken. After these, many of the Polish nationals had to return their arms and change their uniforms for less quality clothing. Because **Jan** had relatives in **Canada**, he was among these latter ones and removed from the army and placed into the work camps.

OREL ORYOL OBLAST, RUSSIA



All these men were sent to **Orel (Oryol), Russia** where on the **10 of July 1941**, they were formed into a new work unit. New superiors were assigned to them and drills without arms began. There was a small forest nearby where the men lived in dugouts, underground.

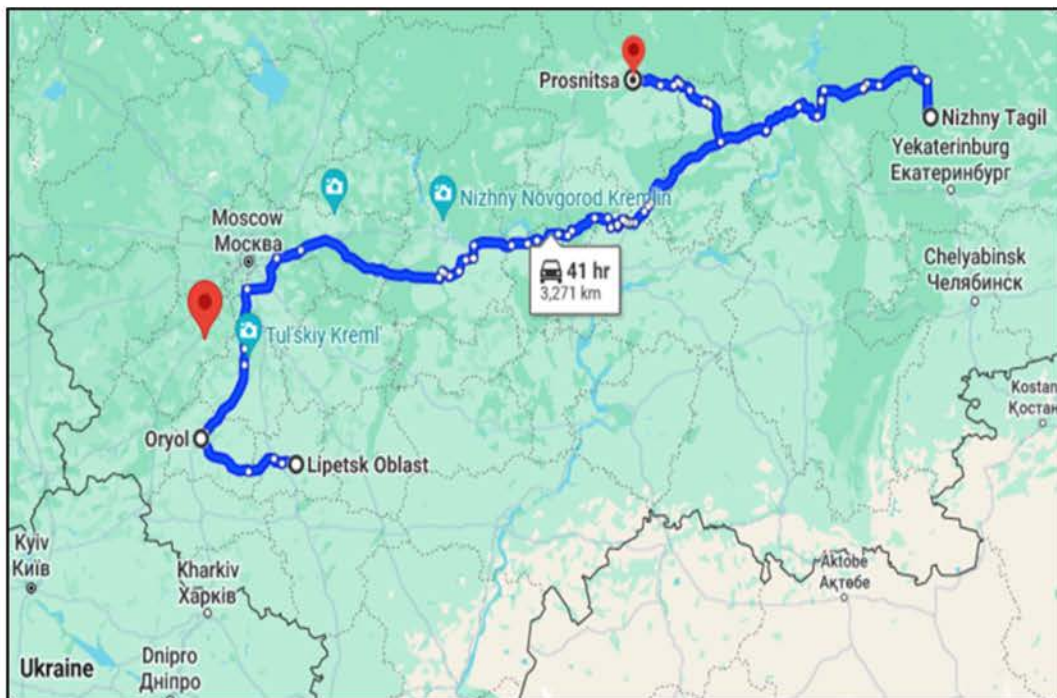


Operation Barbarossa

On **15 & 16 of July 1941**, **Orel** was bombed by the **German Luftwaffe**. **Hitler** had turned against the Soviets and **Nazi Germany** invaded the **Soviet Union** in what was called **Operation Barbarossa** which began on **22 of June, 1941**. It was the largest and costliest land offensive in human history, with around 10 million combatants taking part, and over 8 million casualties by the end of the operation.

During the bombing of **Orel**, all men were led out of town into open fields and made to remain there for 24 hours without any food leaving behind all their belongings. Sleeping outside in the fields on bare ground.

PROSNITSA KIROV OBLAST, RUSSIA



On **1 of August 1941**, the entire party of recruits were sent to **Sverdlovsk Oblast, Russia**. After arrival there, a part of the men was separated and left in the town, the rest, **Jan** included, were taken to **Prosnitsa, Russia**.



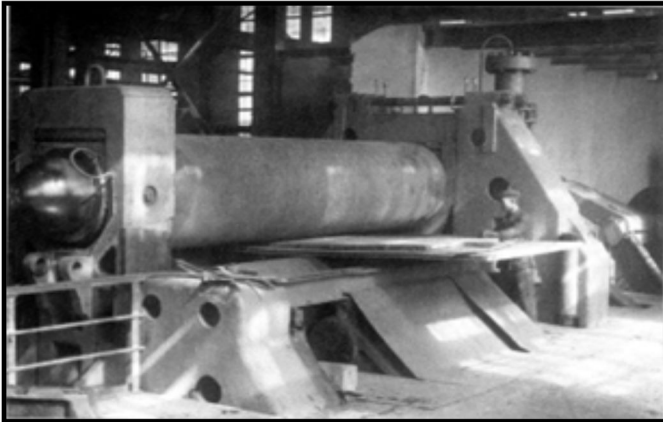
There they were engaged on the construction of an airfield. Approximately 2,000 soldiers were assigned here. They had to dig earth, remove stones which they had to crush by hand to lay down for the airfield.



"Winter came," Jan recalls, "living in tents it was very cold. There was no mattress or blankets to sleep on – just the ground." They had to go to a nearby village to steal straw to sleep on. The next day they dug holes in the ground six feet deep and ten feet by twenty feet. The top was covered by timbers and dirt. Jan recalls, "we built a stove, using stones and there was lots of wood in that place. A fire was started, and it made it warmer inside." Food was very poor; fish soup & bread every day.

Prosnitsa was one of the many forced labor camps in the Soviet Union during World War II, part of the larger Gulag system. These camps were notorious for their harsh conditions and the grueling labor imposed on prisoners, who included political dissidents, prisoners of war, and ordinary criminals. The Gulag system, which included camps like **Prosnitsa**, was used to provide free labor for various industrial and infrastructure projects. Prisoners often faced extreme conditions, including severe cold, inadequate food, and brutal treatment.

On **22 of August 1941**, their part of the work was accomplished so they were moved to **Nizhny Tagil, Sverdlovsk Oblast, Russia**. **Jan** recalls, *“We were loaded on a train in boxcars like cattle. Thirty men to a boxcar, we headed east.”* The further east they travelled the colder it got. When they arrived, there were no buildings to live in. They were moved into underground dugouts as before. Twelve men to one dugout.



At **Nizhny Tagil** the men worked in day & night shifts in the steel manufacturing plant which was used to build various military equipment such as tanks.

Jan recalls, *“One day, the Russians asked if anyone knew how to repair boots. My friend and I volunteered and took the job. Instead of going to work at the factory, we stayed in the camp and repaired boots. We received a little bit more food for the two of us which were given in separate portions. Every night, we would go to the factory to unload the heavy cold sheets of steel which were used to build army tanks. It was so cold that our leather boots would freeze to the steel when you stepped on the sheets.”*

The tasks were high, and the food was scarce; many men died because of it. A lot of men who for one reason or another (*e.g. crippled with frostbite, or sick with Typhoid*) were not able to work anymore, their uniforms were taken away. Then they were driven away and told to find work and food for themselves.

On **24 February 1942**, a commission arrived which allowed the Polish nationals to enlist with the Polish Army in accordance with the **Polish-Soviet Agreement of 30 July 1941**. The Polish nationals were released and began to make their way to the recruiting place in **Buzuluk Orenburg Oblast, Russia**.



A sample of NKVD release document from the Gulag for the release of prisoners.

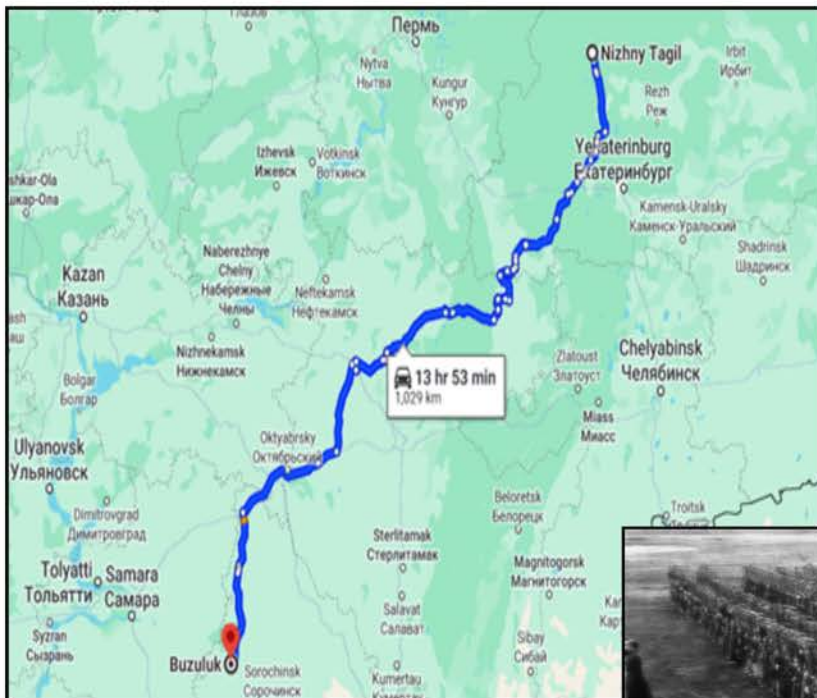
Jan recalls, “we waited three days and then, the train was ready to take us to **Buzuluk** where the Polish army was organizing. Again, we were in the box cars! Forty men to a box car. We were so crowded with no place to sleep.” “For two weeks we travelled with very little food, just a little dry bread.”



Every time the train stopped, they would go out and search for food.

Jan recalls, “... we looked around to see if there was anything on the next track. One night we discovered that a box car next to ours was transporting dried peas and everyone made a dash for those dried peas. Soon after, everyone was cooking peas. I think that those peas saved us from starvation!”

BUZULUK ORENBURG OBLAST, RUSSIA



After two weeks of an arduous journey, it must have been breath of fresh air upon their arrival at the recruiting station, along with thousands of Polish nationals from various locations within the **Soviet Union**. The formation began organizing in the **Buzuluk** area, and recruitment began in the **NKVD** camps among Polish POWs. By the end of 1941 the new Polish force had recruited 25,000 soldiers (including 1,000 officers), forming three infantry divisions: 5th, 6th and 7th.



Polish volunteers to Anders' Army, released from a Soviet Gulag camp

Jan Drewniak enlisted in the new 2 Polish Corps in **Buzuluk, USSR** on **March 14, 1942** as pictured below.

The men received new British equipment, new clothes, blankets and much better food.

Organization of transport out of **Russia** had begun as early 1942, as the **Soviet** and **British** governments looked to bolster allied positions in **Iran**, the Polish Army began its relocation to the southern reaches of the **Soviet Union**. **Anders** left the Siberian town of **Totskoye** on January 15, 1942, and within the week was in what was to become the new headquarters of the Polish forces, a town outside **Tashkent** called **Yangiyul**. Then they were going to cross the **Caspian Sea** to **Iran**.

Jan Drewniak's incarceration with the Soviets had ended and another chapter of his life was to begin as a Polish soldier.



Jan Drewniak (4th from right)

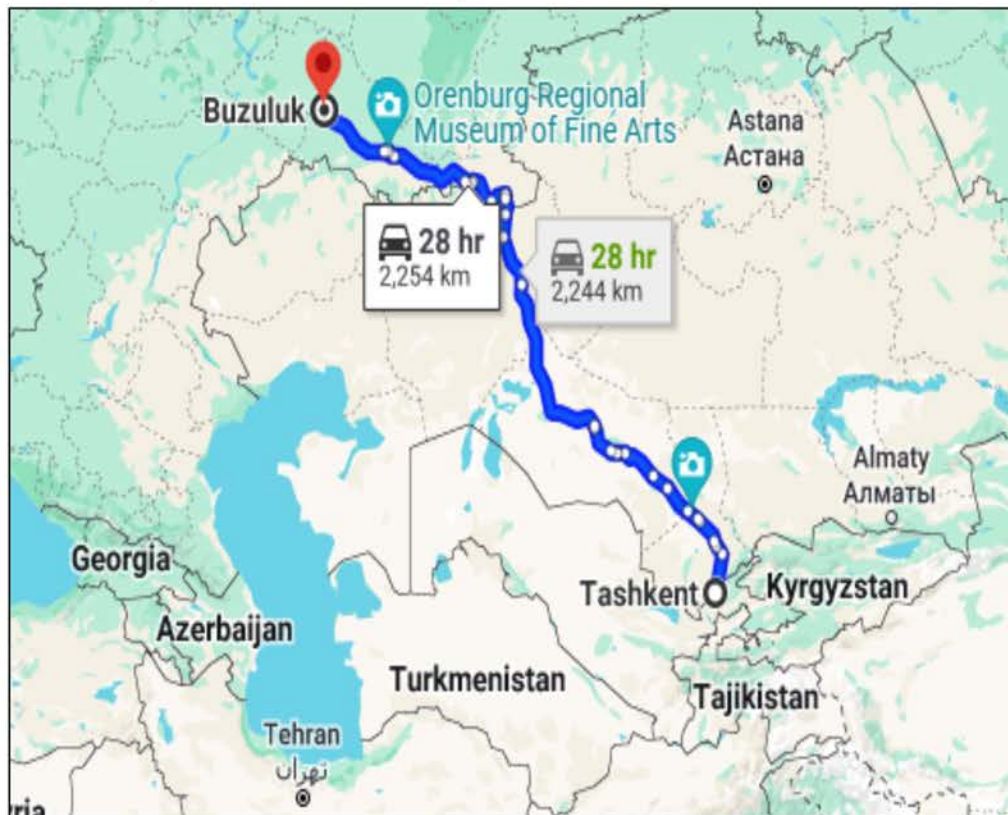
"ONE AMONG MANY"

CHAPTER 2

EVACUATION FROM USSR TO IRAN

Now that **Jan Drewniak's** incarceration with the Soviets had ended and as a Polish soldier of the 2 Polish Army, he was posted to the 10 Engineers Battalion, 10th Infantry Division. They had to make their way from **Buzuluk, USSR** to their new headquarters set up near **Tashkent, Uzbekistan**. The Starting point was **Jangijul** (now **Yangiyol**), **Uzbekistan**, south of **Tashkent**, the headquarters of the Ander's Army. This evacuation was organized by **General Władysław Anders**.

BUZULUK, USSR TO TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN



The route from **Buzuluk** to **Krasnovodsk** (now **Turkmenbashi**) during the evacuation would have been quite challenging. Here's a general outline of the likely path:

Buzuluk to Tashkent: The evacuees would have traveled by train from **Buzuluk**, located in the **Orenburg** region, to **Tashkent**, the capital of **Uzbekistan**. This journey would have taken them through the vast steppes and deserts of **Kazakhstan**.

From their military base at **Jangijul**, the soldiers and deportees were taken initially by cattle wagon to the local train station. Then 5-6 days by train from **Tashkent** to **Krasnovodsk** to begin a ship journey across the Caspian Sea to **Pahlavi, Persia** that would last typically 2-4 days.

TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN TO KRASNOVODSK (TURKMENBASHI), TURKMENISTAN



Tashkent to Ashgabat: From **Tashkent**, they would continue by train to **Ashgabat**, the capital of **Turkmenistan**. This leg of the journey would involve crossing the **Kyzylkum Desert** and the **Karakum Desert**. A journey that would take them through the heat of the day in very close quarters would be unbearable for some, and most certain many would not make the journey, especially the elderly and the sick.

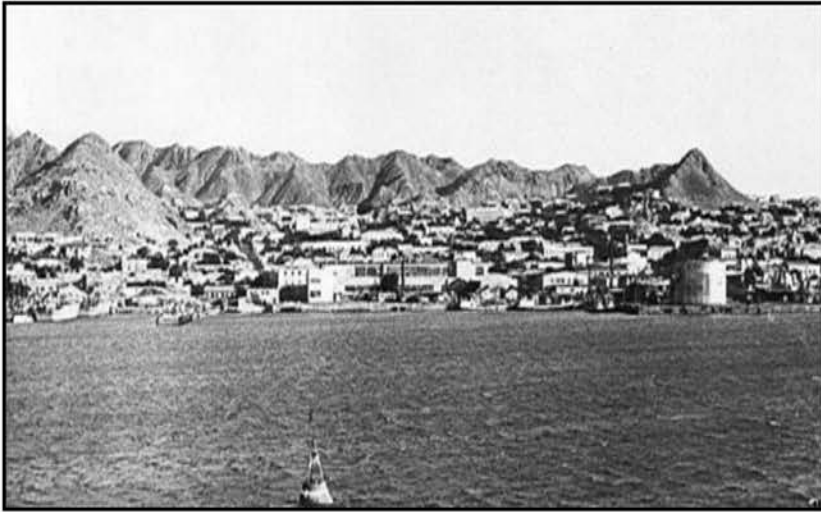


Karakum Desert



Ashgabat Railway

Ashgabat to Krasnovodsk: Finally, from **Ashgabat**, they would travel by train to **Krasnovodsk**, located on the eastern shore of the **Caspian Sea**. This part of the journey would take them through the rugged terrain of **Turkmenistan**.



Krasnovodsk in 1942

The journey was arduous and fraught with difficulties, including harsh weather conditions, limited supplies, and the constant threat of disease. Despite these challenges, the evacuation was a critical operation that saved many lives.

The evacuation led by **General Władysław Anders** took place in two main stages in 1942.

First Stage (March 24 - April 4, 1942): Over 33,000 soldiers and around 11,000 civilians, including many children, were evacuated from Krasnovodsk across the Caspian Sea to Bandar Pahlavi in Iran.

Second Stage (August 10 - September 1, 1942): More than 43,000 military personnel and about 25,000 civilians were evacuated, again crossing the Caspian Sea to Iran.

Jan Drewniak was evacuated during the **First Stage** called **Wave 1** on a Ship called:



Extract From "The Ross Report"

According to the Ross Report, here is who was on this ship;

DIVISION	UNIT	OFFICERS	O.R.S.	ATS	TOTAL	SCOUTS	ADULTS	CHILDREN	TOTAL
8th Division	19th Infantry Regiment	128	1718	29	1875	-	330	-	2205
8th Division	Army Base Unit	118	789	40	947	-	50	167	1164
10th Division	Various Infantry	25	551	-	576	-	-	-	576
TOTAL		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3945

Jan Drewniak was evacuated during the **First Stage** called **Wave 1** on one of the ships called the **STALIN**. Jan was part of the **10th Division Infantry Regiment**.

Jan recalls, "The ship was ready and waiting for us. Soldiers, civilians and families were loaded onto the ship, healthy or sick."

Ship Movements: From passenger testimonies and any other available data the best educated guess of the ships movements.

Embarked: 30/03/42 Time: Afternoon/Evening

Departed: 30/03/42 Time: Late afternoon/evening

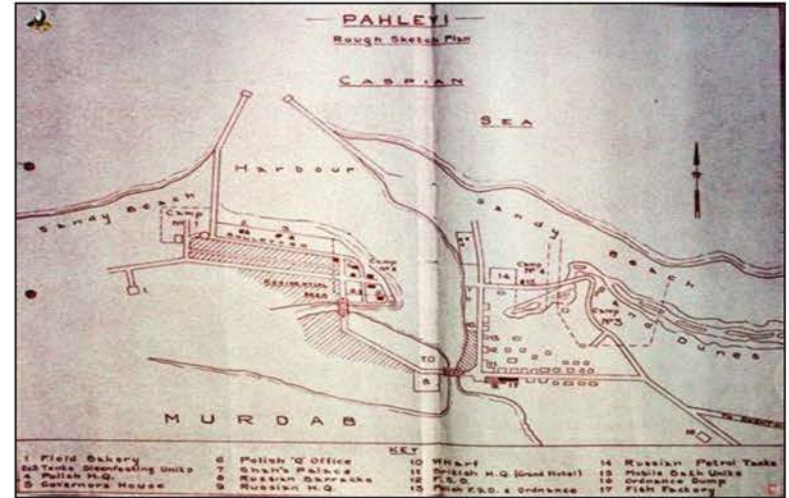
Arrived: 31/03/42 Time: Late evening.

KRASNOVODSK (TURKMENBASHI), TURKMENISTAN TO PHALAVI (ANZALI) IRAN



Pahlavi Harbour - dis-embarking

Jan recalls, "After two days, on the Caspian Sea, it was so crowded on board the ship that people were sleeping on deck; men, women and children were using the same toilets. There were always long line ups for the toilets. Drinking water was scarce and the people were pulling up and drinking sea water! After that there was a lot of diarrhea attacks."

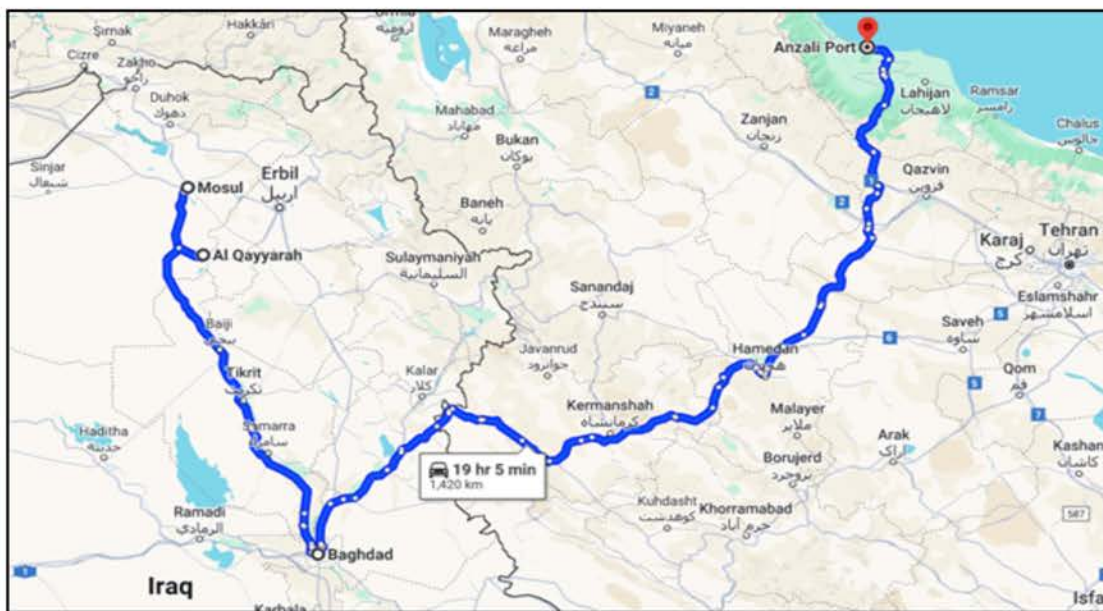


Pahlavi Harbour



They arrived the next day late and landed in the harbour at **Pahlavi, Iran**. Soldiers and civilians and their families were assisted in dis-embarking the ship. They were taken to the nearby camps they were fed late that evening. Jan recalls, "I felt blindness, and I could not see. This was caused from malnutrition and the affliction lasted for about a week. Later I regained my eyesight after eating the better more nutritious food." A very common cause from the lack of nutritious food, some near starvation and some had worse symptoms.

Leaving **Pahlavi, Iran** the army travelled through the city of **Baghdad, Iraq** to **Al Qayyarah** and **Mosul**. They met up with other soldiers from the Polish army and stayed in **Qayyarah** for quite awhile. This is where **Jan** had completed his initial military training.



*Jan Drewniak, Private
1919/30/III*



They travelled from **Qayyarah, Iraq** to **Damascus, Syria** then onto **Palestine** staying in **Haifa**. Here they were to meet up with the remaining Polish Army which came under British Command.

Jan was now in the **Reserve Command, Polish Land Forces** in the **Middle East, 26 April, 1942**.

By **12 May, 1942** **Jan's** posting was now with the **Engineers Command, 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division, 1 Company**. He became a **Senior Sapper** of the **3rd Sappers Battalion**.

While in **Palestine**, **Jan** had the opportunity to visit most of the Holy places in **Jerusalem** and **Bethlehem**. Something I remember dad cherished and talk about very vividly for it was his faith in God that kept him going.

TRAINING IN IRAQ AND PALESTINE



**3 DSK 3 Sappers Battalion
Jan Drewniak (front left)**



Jan Drewniak (front left)



Christmas in Palestine (Jan Drewniak center)

Deaths during training





Jan Drewniak

3 DSK 3 Sappers Battalion



Jan Drewniak

3 DSK 3 Sappers Battalion

HAFIA, PALESTINE



Father Jan
Drewniak



Jan Drewniak

*Leisure time in the
Mediterranean Sea*



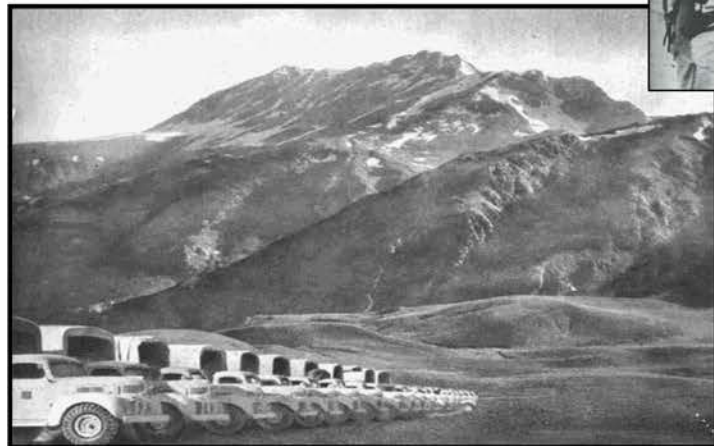
3 DSK 3 Sappers Battalion
Jan Drewniak Center 2nd row front

Jan recalls, "From **Haifa** we moved to **Lebanon** where we trained for war in the **Lebanese Mountains**. Then we knew that our **Brigade** was going to **Italy**. In **Lebanon** I completed my course for operating motorcycles".

During **World War II**, the **Cedars of Lebanon** served as a significant training ground for mountain warfare. The Polish Army, specifically the 2nd Polish Corps, trained in the **Lebanese mountains**. This training was part of their preparation for the **Italian Campaign**, including the famous **Battle of Monte Cassino**.

The rugged terrain of the **Lebanese Mountains** provided an excellent environment for the troops to develop their skills in mountain warfare, which proved invaluable in the challenging conditions they later faced in **Italy**. The training included activities such as skiing, climbing, and survival techniques in harsh mountainous conditions.

HAIFA, PALESTINE TO LEBANON MOUNTAINS



Polish Troops training in the Mountains of Lebanon



In the fall of 1943, the Polish 2nd Corps left **Palestine** for **Egypt**. They were to gather at the ports of **Port Said & Alexandria**. Now technically under **Middle East Command**. It was on December 7, 1943, **General Anders** gave the order for the 2nd Corps to sail for **Italy**.

HAIFA, PALESTINE TO PORT SAID & ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT



Further records obtained from **PISM** recorded that **Jan Drewniak** along with soldiers from his Division were entitled to wear the **Star of Africa** from being stationed in Egypt under operational command, not from combat in the desert.

The Polish 2nd Corps used several ships for their transport from Egypt to Italy. Some of the notable ships included:

- SS Batory** **SS Sobieski** **SS Pułaski**
- SS Lech** **SS Chrobry**

These ships played a crucial role in moving the troops and their equipment to Italy.

PORT SAID & ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT TO ITALY



The **3rd Carpathian Rifle Division**, part of the Polish 2nd Corps, was transported from **Egypt** to **Italy** on several ships. One of the primary ships used for this division was the **SS Batory**. This ship, along with others like the **SS Sobieski** and **SS Pułaski**, played a crucial role in moving the division to Italy, where they participated in significant battles such as the **Battle of Monte Cassino**.

Another Chapter in **Jan Drewniak's** Journey was about to begin.

CHAPTER 3

DEPLOYMENT TO ITALY

This next Chapter of **Jan Drewniak's** journey began with several Theatre of Operations during the Italian Campaign. We will begin with a synopsis of what just transpired and give a brief introduction of what was to come. A mix of excerpts from **Stan Skrzyszewski's** account (*written in italics*) with **Jan Drewniak's** recollections (*"written in quoted italics"*) from his **Personal Memoirs**.

The Polish 2nd Corps in Italy: A Brief Introduction

Polish 2nd Corps Virtual Museum - Author: Stan Skrzyszewski

The Polish 2nd Corps (2 Korpus Polski) was transferred from Iraq to Palestine in August 1943 where it completed further training. The Corps was under the command of General Władysław Anders. The Corps included the 3rd Carpathian Division (3 Dywizja Strzelców Karpaccich), the 5th Kresowa Division (5 Kresowa Dywizja Piechoty) and the Warsaw Armoured Brigade (2 Warszawska Brygada Pancerna). On September 3, 1943 Italy formally surrendered. The British 8th Army including the 1st Canadian Infantry Division and the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, began to cross over from Sicily to begin the invasion of the Italian mainland. The Germans moved more of their forces into Italy.

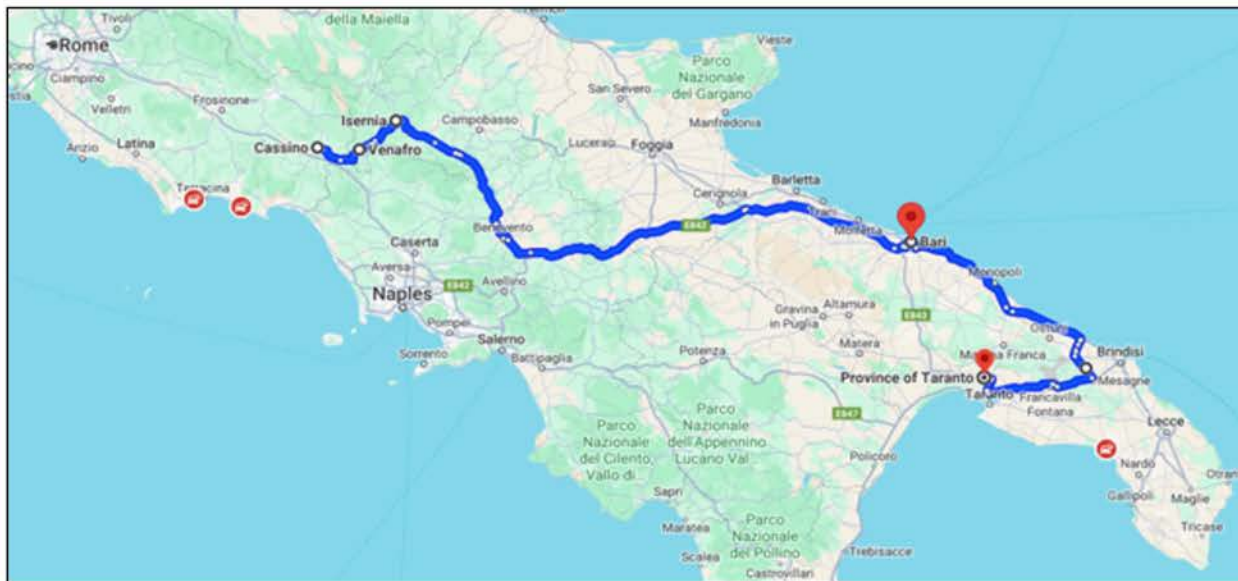
In the fall of 1943, the Polish 2nd Corps left Palestine for Egypt. On December 7 General Anders gave the order for the 2nd Corps to sail for Italy. They sailed from Port Said and Alexandria. From December 15, 1943 to April 1, 1944, 55,000 men and women of the 2nd Corps were transferred from Alexandria to Taranto in Italy. San Basilio became the training centre, and they had base camps at Bari and Brindisi.

The 2nd Corps became a key force in the Italian Campaign, fighting and contributing in significant ways to the Allied advance from the Gulf of Taranto to the final battle at Bologna. The 2nd Corps chose to fight in Italy for several reasons. The main goal of the Corps was always to fight their way back to Poland and to liberate their country. At one point Italy was considered the soft underbelly of the 3rd Reich, and as far as the 2nd Corps was concerned, a possible route back to Poland. Maybe more importantly was the need for the Polish forces to prove themselves. Russian propaganda continually proclaimed that the Poles were afraid to fight. The Italian Campaign would prove them wrong. For many individual soldiers this campaign was also a revenge fight, a chance to get even for all the death and terror the Germans had unleashed on Poland.



Map from Margaret Brodniewicz-Stawicki, *For Your Freedom and Ours*. (Vanwell Publishing Ltd, 1999), p. 189

TARANTO TO CASSINO



By February, units of the 2nd Corps took their positions on the Sangro River.

Their headquarters were established at Vinciatiuro. There were also British, French and Canadian forces spread across the Italian front.

Most of the action along the Sangro River front consisted of skirmishes with German units. While the 2nd Corps served along the Sangro River front 2 officers and 36 soldiers were killed and 18 officers and 199 soldiers were wounded.



Jan Drewniak (center right, 2nd row)



ITALY: EIGHTH ARMY SANGRO RIVER AREA

(Imperial War Museums)

Jan's first involvement in the Theatre of Operations was on the Rivers: Sangro and Rapido in the Southern Apennines from December 13, 1943 to April 23, 1944.

NEARER TO CASSINO

Jan recalls his movements from their initial landing: "From **Taranto** we moved up the **Adriatic** coast then onto **Isernia** and relieved the front line of British Troops. My company occupied a school gymnasium that was vacant. From **Isernia** we drove twenty kilometers every day to the front line at **Venafro**."

"**Isernia** at the time had been badly bombed and lay in ruins. Thousands of people had died under those ruins very close to where we were living."

It was here in **Isernia** that Jan met my future mother, **Lucia Materiale** and her family for the very first time.

"Our company stayed in **Isernia** for a couple of months. We fed a lot of people, old and young, those who had lost their families under the bombed ruins. These people used to sit under our kitchen window, everyday, waiting for some food."



Isernia, Italy

In March 1944, General Anders agreed to the proposal that the 2nd Corps was to assault the Abbey on Monte Cassino. American, British, Canadian and French forces were to attack along the Liri River valley. This would be the 4th planned assault on the Abbey stronghold. Indian and New Zealand units had attacked the Abbey in February and then later in March but had been unsuccessful. The Abbey represented a major obstacle to further advances up the Italian peninsula. The 2nd Corps was going to attempt to do what other forces had been unable to do.

Anders moved his HQ near to the town of Cassino. In April Polish units started to take up positions for the assault, relieving the 10th British Corps. On May 11, 1944 General Anders issued his famous order and the artillery began to fire all along the front and the 8th and 5th Armies began the assault. Two Polish divisions succeeded in taking some of their objectives. Because these gains could not be reinforced or supplied, Anders ordered a withdrawal to their starting points.

Jan recalls, "As time passed by, our Allied troops advanced closer to **Monte Cassino** and they could not advance any further. **Monte Cassino** is about thirty-five kilometers from **Isernia**. The **Germans** had occupied the town and monastery grounds and were entrenched heavily on the top of the mountain. On top was a huge monastery and from that height, the **Germans** had visual control of all the important roads joining **Naples** and **Rome**. It was very difficult to capture that position. Many soldiers died there, **English, French, American, African** and "**Gurkhas**" from **India**."

THE BATTLE OF MONTE CASSINO

JAN recalls: *"The time came, it was our turn to go to **Monte Cassino**. The British Eighth Army commander chose to put **Poles** to do the job! This was top secret, and the **Germans** did not know who they were going to meet up against this time. We moved to the front line."*



Monte Cassino c. 1940



Monte Cassino 1944

"Because I had been trained in explosives, mines booby-traps and bridge building, my friend and I were assigned to one platoon of Infantry to clear the roads free of explosives when necessary. All night we waited in a deep ditch for our fighting orders. Somehow, the orders were delayed and about two o'clock in the afternoon we began moving up the mountain, passing alongside the dead mules used for delivering food and ammunition."



The assault on the mountain at Monte Cassino

THE DOCTOR'S HOUSE

On May 13, 1944 **Jan Drewniak** recalls his assault on the mountain at **Monte Cassino**. He mentions in his **Memoirs** a place he calls the **"Doctor's House"**.



The Doctor's House – 1944



The Doctor's House – Today a private residence



Polish Soldiers resting near The Doctor's House

Jan writes in his Memoirs:

"We passed an old house used by the field medical doctors who administered to the wounded soldiers that were brought down from the mountain. There was a narrow pathway made by the soldiers so that the medics could transport the wounded on stretchers from the mountain to that little old house down below. In that old house, the medics changed the bandages and loaded the wounded soldiers onto ambulances transporting the wounded to the main Army field hospital."

After describing what he saw at the "**Doctor's House**" as they made their way further up the mountain, would he ever have thought that he may soon be there himself?



Jan continues to describe the situation as it got worse: *"While we were ascending the mountain, following the narrow trail in single file, separated about twenty feet apart from each other, the whistle of mortar shells sounded, and the explosions peppered alongside the mountain trail! Immediately, we fell to the ground. Behind me, seven men had been hit! Three of them died where they fell. One minute later, a mortar shell burst just beyond me, about thirty feet away. I was hit! The shrapnel had pierced through my upper right leg!"*

*"While the medics were bandaging the wounded near me, I had to wait a few minutes before I was assisted. The medic carried me to a shell crater that was nearby and there I waited for an empty stretcher for almost two hours. Two medics came and took me down the narrow trail, to that **old house**."*

"I was then transported to the army field hospital where I stayed for fifty days. All of this happened on May 14th, 1944. Four days later, Monte Cassino was captured on May 18th, 1944 by the Poles and the road to Rome was opened."

This old "**Doctors House**" certainly saved hundreds if not thousands of lives and is remembered today, which stands as a testament of time at the **Polish War Museum at Monte Cassino**.





VICTORY AT LAST

On May 17, the Polish assault was renewed and this time they took their objectives and the next day a patrol of 12th Podolian Lancers, entered the monastery. A Polish flag was hoisted above the monastery. The 2nd Corps experienced their greatest victory. During the Battle of Monte Cassino, the Polish 2nd Corps lost 72 officers and 788 regular soldiers, and 204 officers and 2,618 regular soldiers were wounded.

The Allied Forces moved forward in the Liri Valley, and the Germans withdrew to the Hitler Line. The Poles continued their assault on the Piedimonte-Castrocielo line. Following the Battle of Monte Cassino several of the Polish units were placed on rest leave and the Corps was placed under direct allied command.

* * * *

BATTLE OF MONTE CASSINO SUMMARY

*Excerpts from **World War Two Facts***

The Allies had come to a halt in their advance towards Rome, 100 miles on the south of Rome at the town of Cassino the Axis blocked their advance. Despite the Allies' superior numbers the terrain and winter weather allowed the Germans to hold their ground. The Allies tried to break through three times in 1944 starting on January 17th, 1944. Each time the Allies failed until the fourth try that occurred on May 11, 1944.

Eight days into the battle the Allied forces attacked German defenses on the Italian front. As the battle grew longer their forces just increased and the Germans started withdrawing from various positions.

When the Allies marched towards Cassino the Germans just left, without even a fight even though the city was a subject of many struggles in the months before. In the next few days Gaeta was surrendered as well and this was part of a larger German withdrawal from east to west. Because of the direction in which the enemy forces retreated it was only logical that they would retreat to the north in the near future because of the layout of the valleys.



Polish Soldiers getting battle-ready

Battle after battle the Germans withdrew but for each battle won and each trench won there were more, a seemingly never-ending number of trenches and machine positions. Because of the positions that the Germans had their artillery was always laid out in such a way that they can fire very easily on the incoming enemy no matter what they're trying to attack, the hills or the valleys the Germans can attack and take them out. Italy's narrow roads also weren't much help to the Allies, because of their width the Allies had to concentrate their tanks and other vehicles which led to having hundreds of tanks in a single valley and while that can be used to the Allies advantage because of the considerable strength available it also makes them a sitting duck for the German artillery.



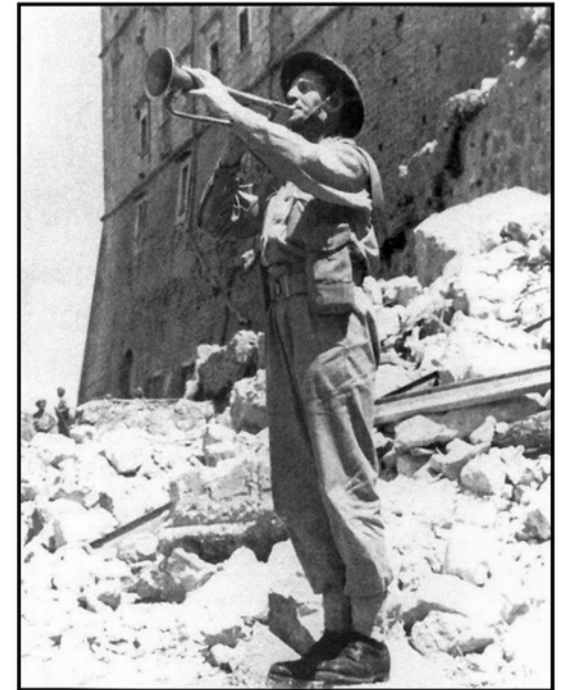
German paratroopers at Monte Cassino

But none of this stopped the Allies from advancing in the Battle of Monte Cassino. It is quite extraordinary how fierce these battles were when one considers that Germany was basically fighting at a disadvantage. The German forces were vastly outnumbered by the Allies and they still manage to put up more than a decent fight. The Germans had so little men in Italy because no one in their military leadership really considered that Italy would be the place that will require real forces or real operational decisions. The plan of the Allies was to attack with as many divisions as possible in the South, where German forces are generally weak, that way despite heavily losses of men and resources in the first weeks of the attack they will have the resolve to fight through and win the Battle of Monte Cassino.

It is in the character of war that the leadership needs to be cold-blooded and have nerves of steel to defeat a strong enemy. It is important to note that Cassino was an important place of battle for both sides of the conflict, but now that the enemy is approaching what do you do? Do you stand behind it with artillery and forces and thereby let your soldiers know that the Battle of Monte Cassino wasn't for nothing, but that would be playing in the enemies hand, who wants you to desperately try to defend and lose the town or do you just order your troops to retreat and leave it open for the Allies to take. It was by all means a no win situation for the Germans. There was no way that they could hold the town and whatever else they do, it would have led them to lose the Battle of Monte Cassino one way or another.

BATTLE OF MONTE CASSINO CONCLUSIONS

The battle was won but it came at a high price for the Allies. They lost about 55,000 people by the end of the battle. The Germans had around 20,000 killed and wounded by the end of the struggle. One interesting detail about the Battle of Monte Cassino is how everyone fighting for it perceived it. Monte Cassino had significant cultural importance because of the paintings, literature and other works of art located there. So before the war reached Monte Cassino German leadership decided to move these priceless treasures to a safer place. The town itself and its capture had a different meaning to everyone fighting in the battle. The Western Allies saw the monuments and it invoked the presence of God, country, sacrifice and freedom to them; the Poles saw it as a symbol of hope for their own country. The Germans however had a completely different view on it, for them Monte Cassino was a representation of the courage their soldiers had facing the Allies who were superior in material strength, meaning numbers and firepower.



Polish bugler Master Corporal Emil Czech plays the Hejnał mariacki, announcing the victory.

ALLIED ADVANCEMENT

Polish 2nd Corps Virtual Museum - Author: Stan Skrzyszewski

On June 4, 1944, the Allies entered Rome and shortly thereafter the Allies withdrew 7 infantry divisions, 3 tank battalions, 11 artillery divisions and many other units which were to support the Normandy invasion. This had a major impact on further operations in Italy. The 2nd Corps was assigned to the Adriatic coast. Polish HQ was located in Campobasso. General Anders took command of the Adriatic front with the Polish 2nd Corps and several British, Canadian and Italian units under General Utili (Corpo Italiano de Liberazione). The Italian units were very poorly outfitted.

The 2nd Corps was ordered to pursue the retreating enemy and take the port of Ancona, since the Allies had a need for a major supply port in northern Italy. This was no easy assignment as the enemy had dug in on various heights along the route and the roads and bridges along the way had been badly damaged while most of the sappers' units had been shifted to the Rome front.

On July 2, the Battle of Loreto began as a means to establish a front for the battle over Ancona. The order to take Ancona was given on July 15. On July 18th the Carpathian Lancers Regiment were the first unit to enter Ancona. In this battle the Corps suffered the following losses: 150 officers and 2,000 regulars wounded, and 34 officers and 150 regulars killed.

On July 23, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, Commander-in-Chief of all Polish forces, in the ruined stadium in Ancona decorated Gen. Alexander and Gen. Leese, the commanders of the British 8th Army with the Virtuti Militari Cross. General Sosnkowski had replaced General Władysław Sikorski as Commander-in-Chief after he was killed in a plane crash off Gibraltar on July 5, 1943. Generals Sosnkowski and Anders were also invited to welcome Gen. Collingwood. General Collingwood was in fact King George VI. The King appeared as the 'Duke of Richmond' for security reasons.

BATTLE FOR ANCONA/GOTHIC LINE

Jan was hospitalised at **No. 2 Polish General Hospital, Italy** recuperating from his injury at **Monte Cassino**. **Jan** recalls, "While I was in the Army Hospital, the Polish army moved to **Ortona south of Pescara**, near the **Adriatic Sea** to relieve the Canadian Army. All the time, the Poles pushed the Germans back alongside the **Adriatic Sea**, When I was released from the Army Hospital **August 06, 1944** I was returned to my unit, my company was stationed at **Senegallia (near Ancona)** where I re-joined them there. Two days later, I was placed back on the front line." "One night, we approached very close to the Germans. Our mission was to clear the road of mines to prepare for an early morning attack. The road was heavily mined. We removed the mines and piled them on the side of the road. There were a lot of dead Germans there, too."

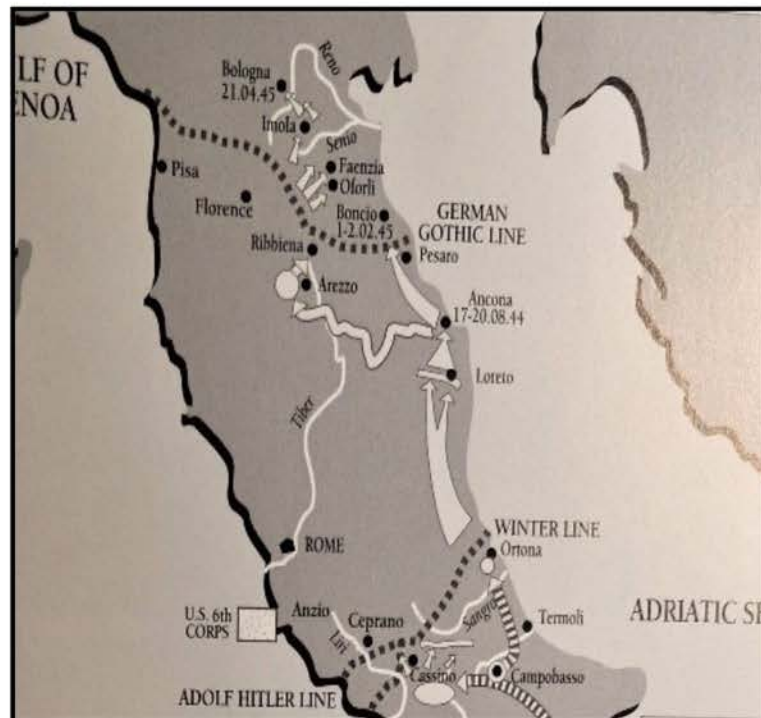
From records obtained from **PISM**, the Citation of the **Award for the Cross of Valor Jan** received stated "On **August 8 & 9, 1944**, during the action near **Scapezzano**, **Jan** dis-armed mines and cleared cave-ins on the road to **Scapezzano** under heavy artillery, mortar and enemy fire. He returned three times under fire to complete the mission. He demonstrated tremendous courage, willingness and the need to complete the task." "The patrol of which he was a member quickly opened the road to **Scapezzano** which contributed to the capture of that town." This verifies **Jan's** previous recollection of his mission he stated in his memoirs. "One night we approached very close to the Germans. Our mission was to clear the road of mines to prepare for an early morning attack. The road was heavily mined. We removed the mines and piled them on the side of the road. There were a lot of dead Germans there, too."

Later he returned to his unit where he seconded for a Training Course in Bridge Building at a Training Centre in Capra. Preparing for the **Battle for Ancona/Gothic Line** of enemy defences from **August 06 to September 04, 1944**. Their platoon became the part of the Rear Guard of the 8th British Army from **September 05 to October 10, 1944**.

After their withdrawal from Ancona, the Germans set themselves up on the Gothic Line which ran through Pesaro on the Adriatic, along the Foglia River, through Florence and along the Arno River to the Ligurian Sea. The 2nd Corps was to be active on the Adriatic front opening and protecting supply lines for the British 8th Army. Reaching the Gothic Line required crossing several rivers each of which created natural lines of defense for the German forces. British, Canadian, Italian and Polish forces were assigned to cross these rivers which they did.

The Battle for the Gothic Line, as well as the advances by the 2nd Corps along the Adriatic, ended on September 2nd. During this campaign the Corps suffered 288 officers and 3,403 regulars, wounded or dead. After these battles the 2nd Corps retired to the region of Ancona for a rest.

In the fall of 1944, the battles in the Emilian Apennines began. The 2nd Corps was assigned to the left flank of the front aiming to outflank the enemy. The Corps entered mountainous and roadless areas on their way to the Lombardy plains. There were more mountain paths than roads. The Corps advanced along a line running along the axis of Santa Sofia-Galeata-Ferri, thus clearing the roads from San Piero in Bagno to Roca San Casciano, thus improving communications between the units of the 8th Army. Numerous small towns had to be liberated and many rivers had to be crossed.



Battle for the Gothic Line



Breaching the Gothic Line

On November 26, 1944 American General Mark Clark was placed in charge of the Allied Forces in Italy replacing Field Marshall Sir Harold Alexander. The Allied Forces in Italy were then renamed the 15th Army Group and included the British 8th Army which included the 1st Canadian Corps, 5th American Corps, 2nd Polish Corps, and the 10th British Corps. By the end of December, the British 8th Army including the 2nd Corps was on the Senio River. The winter front was established along the Senio River.

Jan saw action in the Northern Apennines from October 10, 1944 to January 01, 1945 as well as along the River Senio. It was during this time during their few days of rest that Jan and some of his buddies decided to pay a visit with their girlfriends in Isernia for Christmas. So, they loaded an Army truck with food for 10 days and on they went. It was great he says to see people they had met previously. Then they were blocked in by a very bad snowstorm which delayed their return, back to their unit. Eventually the roads were cleared and they made it back to their camp.

Following the Allied landings in Normandy and the imprisonment of German POWs, a significant number of Poles from the German army volunteered to serve with the Polish forces.

It's worth mentioning that after the coerced incorporation of part of the Polish lands in 1939 into the Third Reich (Pomorze, Wielkopolska, Śląsk) many Poles had been forcibly conscripted into the German Army. Refusal to serve could result in the soldier's family being sent to concentration camp such as Auschwitz or Stutthof. These Poles just waited for the opportunity to join the 2nd Corps. General Anders when asked where he would be able to find recruits for his corps, often replied that his recruits were in front of him, not behind, for they were in the German army.

POLISH DEFECTION FROM GERMAN WEHRMACHT TO THE 2nd POLISH CORPS

During **World War II**, many ethnic Poles were forcibly conscripted into the **German Wehrmacht**, especially after 1943 when Germany began to face significant losses. Despite being forced into service, a substantial number of these conscripted Poles defected to join the Polish Armed Forces in the West.

By the end of the war, nearly **90,000 Poles** who had been conscripted into the **Wehrmacht** were fighting against **Nazi Germany**. This defection was a significant contribution to the Allied forces, with many of these soldiers joining the Polish Army in exile.

At the same time a recruitment drive began in France to get Poles living in France to join the Polish forces. In September 1944, the British authorities agreed to the transfer from southern France to Italy of 20,000 Poles to join the 2nd Corps. At the beginning of 1945, both Polish divisions were given a third brigade consisting of these volunteers.

In early 1945, the Poles became aware of the Yalta agreement which essentially betrayed Poland and left her under the control of the Soviet Union. This created huge problems both politically and militarily for the Polish Forces in the West. General Sosnkowski had resigned as Commander-in-Chief. His nominated replacement General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski was in a German prison, so General Anders was selected as acting Commander-in-Chief. Anders served in this capacity until the end of May 1945. On March 11, 1945 Anders nominated General Zygmunt Bohusz-Szyszko, to command the Polish 2nd Corps. The spring offensive began with the Battle for Bologna and the campaign for the Po River. The 2nd Corps was to break through the enemy defenses on the Senio River and cross the Santerno River.

A TRAGIC END TO A GOOD FRIEND

Jan recalls, *"Shortly after, my friend, **Lucjan Michalski** and I were assigned to instruct infantry soldiers on the handling of explosives, mines and booby-traps. I was later assigned to a group for eight months, to train for operating and guiding pontoons with sections of a bridge attached to them. I operated four motors on a pontoon. This bridge was to be constructed on the Po River. At Capua, we practiced our maneuvering of the pontoons on a river near there. That is when I heard the bad news that my friend **Lucjan** had died by stepping on an anti-personnel mine. We had been very good friends."*



*Lucjan Michalski, Sapper
3 DSK 3 Sapper Battalion*

Jan continues: *“Later, my company moved on again until we arrived at Castrocaro where previously, **“The Duce Mussolini”**, had a villa there. We checked all the villa buildings for mines and booby-traps. For two weeks we stayed there. I passed a course to drive trucks and received my first driver’s license.”*

“Shortly after the Polish Army moved again, pushing the Germans towards Bologna. We saw a good sign, the Germans were pulling their tanks and trucks, one behind the other. They were low on gasoline fuel and some of the vehicles they had abandoned in the ditches. We had advanced very near to Bologna.”

On March 11, 1945 Jan Drewniak was promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal.



Jan Drewniak, Lance Corporal

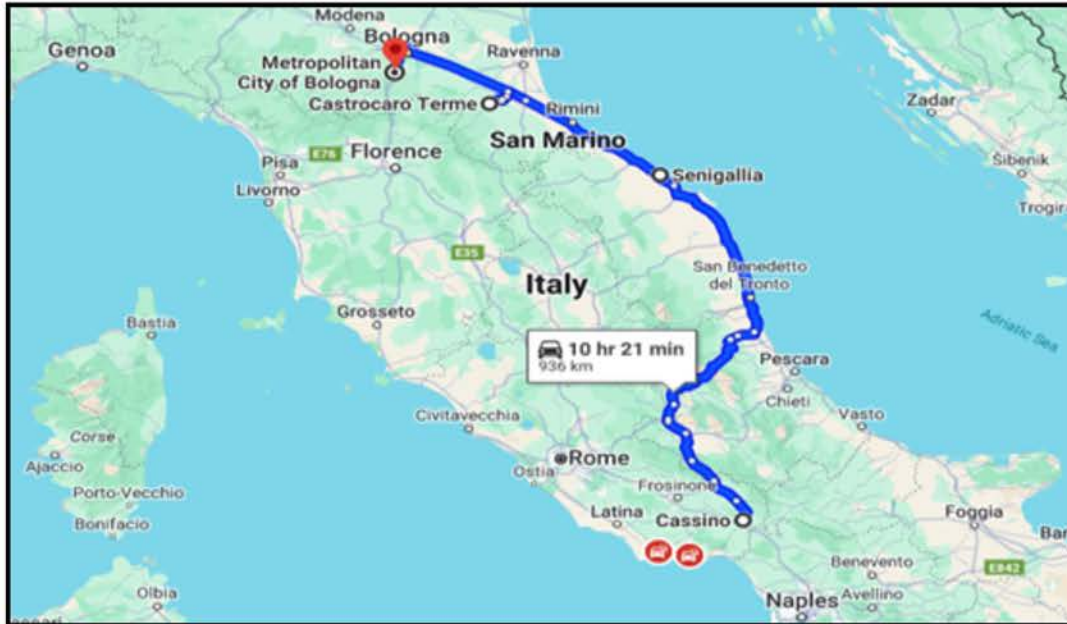


Michal Dabrus (Cousin), Jan Drewniak, Unknown soldier

The 2nd Corps had been strengthened by two infantry brigades and two newly formed heavy artillery regiments and a Commando Battalion. The 2nd Corps included also other Allied units: the 7th British Armoured Brigade, part of a Sapper brigade, 43rd Hindu Brigade, 14/20 Hussar Regiment and part of the 27th Lancer Regiment and four artillery regiments.

Again, the Germans put up a strong defense, and it was the German 1st Parachute Brigade, the same unit that held Monte Cassino that held their ground. After heavy fighting, Polish units captured a small bridgehead which enabled the 2nd Armoured Brigade to enter the fray. On April 20th the German forces were in full retreat.

THE ROAD TO BOLOGNA, ITALY



On April 21st, the 2nd Corps broke through the final defenses to the south-east of Bologna and entered the city. The 9th Carpathian Lancers' Battalion of the 3rd Carpathian Division was the first unit of the 2nd Corps to enter Bologna. From that day forth the battalion carried the name "Bolognian".

The joy of the inhabitants of the Italian city was great – it remained undamaged, because most of the heavy fighting in the area was conducted by the Allied forces outside of Bologna. In gratitude for the liberation of the city from the German forces, the authorities of the city of Bologna awarded 11 commanders and 215 soldiers of the 2nd Corps with commemorative medals. The ceremony took place in front of the Bologna City Hall. Here on April 22, Gen. Mark Clark, formally acknowledged the contribution of the American, British and Polish units.



Liberation of Bologna, Italy

Jan recalls, "The morning our soldiers entered the city of **Bologna**, the war for us in **Italy** was over, it was **May 5, 1945!**" Unfortunately, **Jan** and his platoon did not get to celebrate the liberation of **Bologna** immediately when it occurred on **April 21st**, but I am most certain that when they did enter the city a great relief fell over them for their accomplishments and their sacrifices in making it happen.

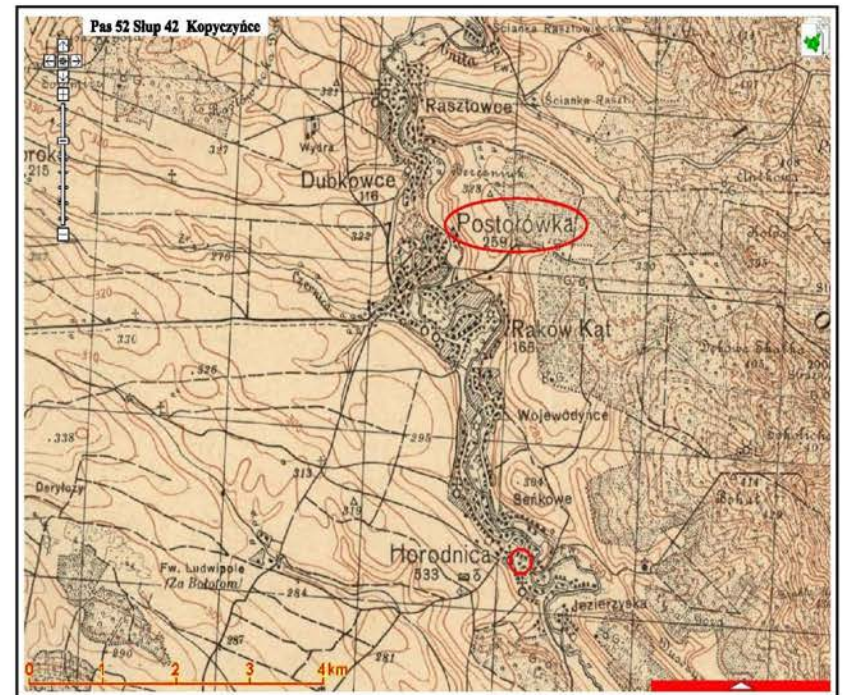
Following the surrender of Germany, the 2nd Corps headquartered at **Porto San Giorgio** and provided guard duties and patrols under the Allied Military Government in Italy. Many schools were set up to occupy the soldiers ranging from secondary schools to officer's training schools.

After leaving **Bologna**, **Jan** and his platoon returned to **Porto San Giorgio** for a much-needed rest. As they were reasonably close to **Isernia**, **Jan** and his friend **Wladyk Koschewa** went to **Isernia**, catching rides on trucks and trains, through the mountains and hitch-hiking to see their good friends there. Of course, **Jan** had a special girl to go and see, my future mother!

The war was over in **Italy** and now free from the **Fascist** and **Nazi** regimes, but **Jan** kept thinking of his home in **Poland**. The **Polish** and **Russians** were still fighting the **Nazi** back home. His brothers, **Michael**, **Stefan & Kasper** and brother-law, **Jan Rekut** were joined in the battle against the **Germans** during the **Warsaw Uprising**. Even though they defeated the **Germans**, the **Polish** people fell under **Stalin's** rule of communism. Now **Jan** had no home to return to. The **Yalta Conference** made sure of that.



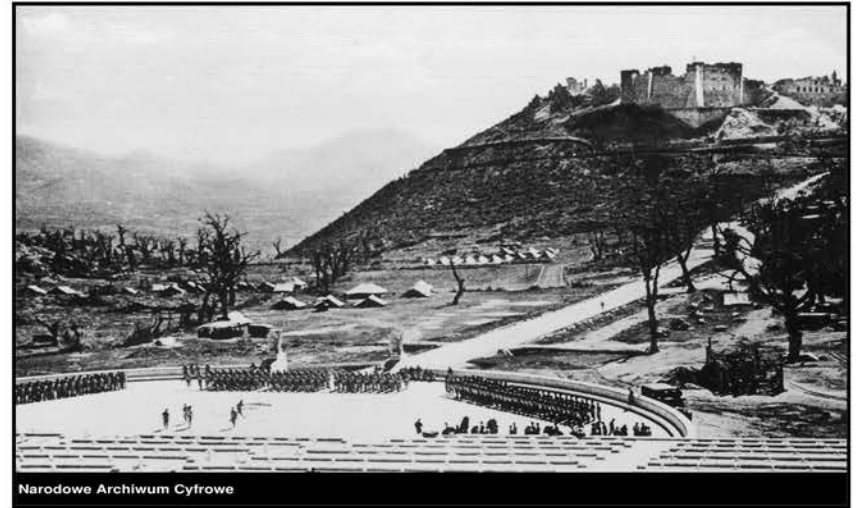
Jan recalls: "The territory where I used to live and call my homeland, where I was born, grew up and lived for twenty-one years was given away to **Russia**. Most of us Poles on Italian soil, did not have a homeland to return to. At the time, I did not know where my immediate family were, and I didn't know for five years after. I did not know whether my family were dead or alive."



Village of Postolowka, Poland (Now in the Ukraine)

On August 15, 1945 in Ancona and in Loreto, the last parade involving the 2nd Corps honouring "Święto Żołnierza / Soldier's Day" took place. The special guest was Field Marshall Harold Alexander. Alexander was leaving to become Governor General of Canada.

The Polish cemetery at Monte Cassino was officially opened on September 1, 1945. Present were Bishop Gawlina, Field-Marshal Alexander, and General Anders.



Polish Cemetery at Monte Cassino, Today



Despite the intentions of the Polish Government in Exile and the hopes and dreams of the Polish soldiers the 2nd Corps was not going to continue on to liberate Poland, which was now under the control of the Soviet Union.

In the middle of 1946, the British government, determined that the 2nd Corps was to leave Italy by ships through Naples and by trains through Germany and France and be stationed in Great Britain. In August 1946, a commission from Canada arrived to select 4,000 soldiers willing to work under contracts in this country.

GENERAL ORDER TO THE TROOPS - July 6 1945

Source: Chronicle 316 of the PSK Transport Company; Polish Institute and Gen. Sikorski Museum London

W chwili wyjątkowo ciężkiej, ale i wyjątkowo doniosłej

ROZKAZ GEN. WŁ. ANDERSA DO ŻOŁNIERZY 2. KORPUSU

W dniu 6 lipca, Dowódca 2. Korpusu, General Władysław Anders, wydał następujący rozkaz w związku z sytuacją, wytworzoną przez uznanie tak zwanego „provisorzyckiego rządu jednolitego narodu” przez Niemców zachodnie.

M. p., 8 lipca

ŻOŁNIERZE!

Zwracam się do Was w chwili wyjątkowo ciężkiej, ale i wyjątkowo doniosłej. Rady mocarstw zachodnich postanowiły uznać narzucony Polsce przez okupanta tzw. Provisorzycki Rząd Jedności Narodowej, a tym samym cofnąć uznanie prawowitego Rządu RP w Londynie.

Dotknął nas ciężki cios, tym cięższy, że nie mamy nie zapaść, Polska przez 6 lat trwała niezłomnie w walce ze wspólnym nieprzyjacielem Narodów Zjednoczonych. Poniesliśmy olbrzymie straty i złożyliśmy na ołtarzu wolności straszliwe ofiary. Nie daliśmy się nigdy skłonić do obywateli i nie zeszliśmy z raz obranej drogi. Dotrzyliśmy w stosunku do naszych Aliantów wszystkich umów i wszystkich zobowiązań. Nie pozwoliliśmy sobie, żeby Polska wzniosła się w tej wojnie na najwyższe szczyty poświęceń i męstwa.

Mimo to przekrośla się dziś podstawowe prawa naszego Narodu zorganizowanego w Państwo. Możliwość tego świata przechodzi do porządku nad naszą Konstytucją, nad naszymi prawnymi władzami i dla doroznych koniunktur godzą się na fakty dokonane, stworzone w stosunku do Polski i Polaków przez obcą przemoc.

Żołnierze! Zostaliśmy w tej chwili jedną częścią Narodu Polskiego, która ma możliwość i obowiązek głośnego wyrażenia swych woli i właśnie dlatego, że jesteśmy w tym dniu świadkami, że jesteśmy wierni naszej przysiężce żołnierskiej, wierni naszym obywatelskim obowiązkom względem Ojczyzny, wierni testamentowi naszych poległych towarzyszy broni, którzy bili się i umierali w imię Polski niepodległej, całej i naprawdę wolnej.

Ta historyczna rola, jaka przypadła Wam Polakom na obczyźnie, jest oczywiście solą w oku naszych nieprzyjacieli. Będą się oni starali zniszczyć nasze Siły Zbrojne. Wszyscy będziemy pod ostrzałem ich podstępnej agencji. Będą szukali wśród żołnierzy polskich ludzi o słabszej woli i nerwach. Ta rola będzie uświadomiona o tym, że po cofnięciu uznania legalnemu Rządowi RP, władze polskie i pozabawione zostały instrumentów uświadomienia, chociaż w postaci audycji radiowych z Londynu, które teraz przestają służyć Sprawie Polskiej.

Nie wątpię ani na chwilę, że żołnierze 2. Korpusu, którzy wiedzą dlaczego i o co Polska od tak dawna walczy, potrafią przeciwstawić się wrogim zakusom. Jesteśmy jedną wielką rodziną, która nie powstała drogą przysięgi, ale wzajemnego związania się w służbie dla wspólnej sprawy i takiej rodzinie, związanej dobrowolnie zadziernymi wierzni chcemy pozostać. Ale niechże do stosowania przysięgi, to jeszcze nie zgoda na rozbiór nas przez wrogów. Wręcz przeciwnie: w odparciu takich ataków wroga będziemy solidarni i mocni.

Żołnierze! Znaćcie mnie nie od dzisiaj. Dziesiątki tysięcy spośród Was pamiętają chwile, jakie wspólnie przeżyliśmy w Rosji sowieckiej, Opatry o Wasze zaufanie, świadom odpowiedzialności, jaka na mnie ciążyła, szukałem wówczas wyjścia z sytuacji potocznie bezradnej. Bog pobłogosławił moim wysiłkom. Znaleźliśmy się na ziemi chłop obcej, ale przysiężnej, na której dane nam było przysporzyć się do przyszłych, zwycięskich bojów. W tych bojach na historycznym szlaku M. Cassino-Ancona-Bologna ukazał nam się ostatecznie nasz wspaniały, od triumfu do triumfu, 2. Korpus.

Przyjeżdża 2. Korpus w ciężkich chwilach, jakie nadchodzi jest zapewniona. Mam na myśli zarówno środki potrzebne nam do życia, jak i do dalszego szkolenia. Mam na myśli nie tylko sprawy materialne, związane bezpośrednio z nami, ale także sprawy rodzinne na obczyźnie żołnierzy 2. Korpusu. Cokolwiek będzie, jakkolwiek rozwinięte się wypadki — ja osobiście oraz wszyscy Wasi przełożeni; pomagając razem z Wami w dobrej i tej doli, dadzą z siebie najwyżej wszystko, aby naszego wspólnego dorobku stracił, abyż nie nie uronił, aby go ponownie ku chwale i pożytkowi Ojczyzny.

Zmuszony dziś do milczenia Kral patrzy w naszą stronę. Chcę nas widzieć na Ziemi Ojczyźnej, do której idę i my dajemy i tęsknimy z całego serca, ale chcę nas widzieć nie jako niewolników obcej przemocą, ale jako wolnych i równych w standardach, jako chorążych i zwolenników prawdziwej wolności. Gdy taki powrót dziś jeszcze nie jest możliwy, trzeba nam w zwartych, karnych szeregach czekać na powrót zmian warunków. Zmiana ta nadaje mi. Gdyby bowiem miało być inaczej, to wówczas straszliwe i krwawe ofiary całego świata, poświęcone w ciągu 6 lat, byłyby daremne. Nie można zaś wyobrazić sobie, by ludzkość nagłe oślepiła i naprawdę zatraciła świadomość śmiertelnego niebezpieczeństwa.

Żołnierze! Kto ma nieugiętą wolę walki o życie i prawo mi w końcu zwyciężyć. Przetrzymaliśmy w ostatnich dniach ciężkie i niełatwe warunki tak wiarę przapętno, tak wola ożdzia Prezydenta RP, Rządu Polskiego i Rozkaz Naczelnego Wodza. Wypełniliśmy nasz obowiązek względem Ojczyzny i jej prawowitych władz. Najjaśniejsza Rzeczpospolita Polska niech żyje!

Dziś 2. Korpusu
WŁADYSŁAW ANDERS

W polu, 6. VII. 1945



In an exceptionally difficult, but also exceptionally momentous moment

GENERAL ORDER WL. ANDERS TO THE SOLDIERS OF THE 2nd CORPS

On 6 this month, the Commander of the 2nd Corps, General Władysław Anders, issued the following order in connection with the situation created by the recognition of the so-called "provisional government of national unity" by the Western powers.

M. p., July 8

SOLDIERS!

I am turning to you at an exceptionally difficult, but also exceptionally momentous moment. The governments of Western powers decided to recognize the so-called Provisional Government of National Unity, and thus withdraw recognition of the legitimate Government of the Republic of Poland.

We suffered a heavy blow, all the more severe because it was undeserved. For 6 years, Poland remained steadfast in the fight against the common enemy of the United Nations. We have suffered enormous losses and made terrible sacrifices on the altar of freedom. We have never been tempted by promises and have never strayed from our chosen path. We have fulfilled all agreements and all obligations towards our Allies. There is no one who can accuse us of anything in this regard. The Polish Nation, the Polish Soldier, looks boldly into the eyes of allies and nations outsiders aware that Poland rose to the highest peaks of sacrifice and bravery in this war.

Despite this, the basic rights of our Nation organized into a State are being erased today. The powerful of this world are overriding our Constitution, over our legitimate authorities and, for the sake of immediate economic conditions, they are agreeing to fait accomplis created in relation to Poland and Poles by foreign violence.

Soldiers! We are now the only part of the Polish Nation that has the ability and obligation to loudly express its will, and that is why we need to state today by word and deed that we are faithful to our soldier's oath, faithful to our civic duties towards the Homeland, faithful to the testament of our fallen comrades in arms, who fought and died in the name of an independent, whole and truly free Poland.

This historic role played by the Polish Army abroad is, of course, a thorn in the side of our enemies. They will try to destroy our Armed Forces. We will all be under fire from their insidious agitation. They will call on us to supposedly return to the country, which we know will end with. They will look for people with weaker will and nerves among Polish soldiers. This job will be made easier because after withdrawing recognition from the illegal Government of the Republic of Poland the Polish authorities were deprived of awareness-raising instruments, for example in the form of radio broadcasts from London, which now no longer serve the Polish Cause.

I do not doubt for a moment that the soldiers of the 2nd Corps, who know why and what Poland has been fighting for for so long, are able to resist hostile attempts. We are one big family that was not created by force, but by mutual bonding in the service of a common cause, and we want to remain such a family, bound by voluntarily made bonds. But reluctance to use coercion does not mean consent to be destroyed by our enemies. On the contrary, we will be united and strong in repelling such enemy attacks.

Soldiers! You have known me for a long time. Tens of thousands of you remember the moments we experienced together in Soviet Russia. Based on your trust, aware of the responsibility that burdened me, I was looking for a way out of a seemingly hopeless situation. God blessed my efforts. We found ourselves in a foreign but friendly land, where we could prepare for future victorious battles in these battles on the historic M. Cassino-Ancona-Bologna route, our wonderful 2nd Corps, marching from triumph to triumph, was finally formed.

The future of the 2nd Corps is assured in the difficult times ahead. I mean both the resources we need for living and for further training. I mean not only material matters directly related to us, but also the families of the 2nd Corps soldiers abroad. We will do everything to ensure that you remain with you in good and hard times, will make the greatest effort to protect our common achievements, not to lose anything from them, to contribute to the glory and benefit of our Nation.

Forced to remain silent today, the country looks towards us. He wants to see us in our homeland, for which we strive and long with all our hearts, but he wants to see us not as slaves of foreign violence, but as free citizens of our own country, who have won their freedom. While such a return is not yet possible today, we must wait in light, disciplined ranks for this change to come. If it were otherwise, then the terrible and bloody sacrifices made throughout the world would be in vain. It is impossible to imagine that humanity would suddenly go blind and truly lose consciousness due to the change in conditions. mortal danger. Soldier, whoever has the unwilling will to fight for life and the law must win the end. In recent days, we have read the messages of the President of the Republic, the Polish Government and the Order of the Commander-in-Chief, strewn in such faith and filled with such will. We will fulfil our duties to the authorities. Long live the Most Sacred Republic of Poland!

Day of the 2nd Corps
WŁADYSŁAW ANDERS

In the field, July 6, 1945

Translated version - English

General Anders and the command of the 2nd Corps left Italy on October 31, 1946.

A very warm but most certain a disheartening speech Anders had to make to his comrades, his faithful soldiers who were with him to the very end. The photo of General Władysław Anders giving his final speech to the troops was one that Jan had in his possession after the war. I am most certain he cherished his words in his heart till the day he died.

POST WAR - LIBERTY

While in **Italy**, **Jan** and his fellow soldiers took in the free life with gusto, visiting places, meeting the local people, relaxing and enjoying themselves.



Jan Drewniak (rear right)



Jan Drewniak (Squatting)



Jan Drewniak (first left)



Jan Drewniak (first left)

To keep from going to **England**, **Jan** requested his superior officer that he remain in **Italy**. He remained with the trucks and equipment which was being transferred to the **Italian Army**. His intention was to ask his girlfriend to marry him. **Jan** began to get the proper documents ready while they were stationed in **Italy**. He requested the **Italian** government for a "Soggiorno", to stay in **Italy**. He received his permission and stayed in **Isernia** with the **Materiale** family that he had known for three years.

Jan Drewniak married my mother, **Lucia Materiale** on **August 8, 1946** in **Isernia, Italy**



After the wedding they left to be with his company stationed in **Porto San Giorgio**, hitch-hiking and carrying their luggage by Army trucks, changing trucks on occasion. What a way to begin a new life. At least they were free from harsh treatment, oppression, destruction and people dying.

A new life begins, getting married, raising a family, which happened within a year when my older brother **Joseph** was born on **September 16, 1947**. The next Chapter of their lives was to begin when they immigrated to **Canada** on **December 1, 1948** and they continued to enjoy their freedoms and raise a family.

My father **Jan Drewniak** and mother **Lucia**, brothers **Joseph** and **Francis** and sister **Annamaria** and me, **Michael**.

No longer “one among many” now “one among a few”



3rd Carpathian Rifle Division



Memorial Cross
3rd Carpathian Rifle Division
50th Anniversary 1942-1992



Jan Drewniak, Lcpl



Wound Badge



Krzyż Zesłańców Sybiru
Cross of the Exiles of Siberia
1939-1942



Cap Badge



2nd Polish Army Corps
Badge



Shoulder Flash



2nd Polish Army Corps
Patch



Cross for
Valour

Polish Army
Medal 1939-45

Cross of Monte
Cassino #3908

Italy Star
1939-45

British Star
1939-45

British Defence
Medal

British War Medal
1939-45

WW2
1942-1945

MILITARY MEDAL DOCUMENTS



Cross for Valour



Cross of Monte Cassino



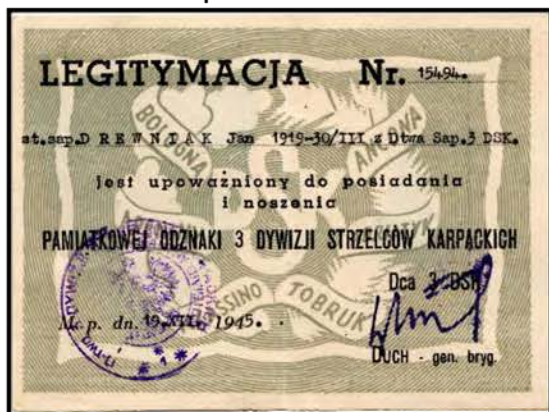
Commemorative Badge - 3DSK
3rd Carpathian Rifle Division



Italy Star 1939-1949



Memorial Cross of 3DSK - 50th Anniversary



ORIGINAL CITATION DOCUMENT from Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM)

887

3 DYWIZJA STRZELCOW KARPACKICH
3 KARPACKI BACON SAPERÓW
W N I O S E K

o odznaczenie **KRZYŻEM WALECZNYCH** po raz pierwszy
(nazwa odznaczenia)

.....
(klasa odznaczenia)

1	Stopień	Saper
2	Nazwisko i imiona oraz rocznik i numer ewid.	D R E W N I A K Jan 1919 - 30/III
3	Przydział i funkcja	1 Kompania Karp. Saperów 3 DSK - saper linjowy
4	Stopień, przydział i funkcja w czasie dokonania czynu przedmiotowego do odznaczenia	1 Kompania Karp. Saperów 3 DSK saper patrolu
5	Posiadane odznaczenia	Nie posiada
6	Dokładny opis czynu kwalifikowanego do odznaczenia z podaniem czasu, miejsca, okoliczności i rodzaju akcji bojowej	Dnia 8 i 9.8.1944 w czasie akcji pod Scapezzano rozbijał miny i usuwał zawały na drodze do Scapezzano pod silnym ogniem art., moźdz., i spandau apla. Trzykrotnie ogniem spędzony wracał aby wykonać zadanie. Wykazał olbrzymią odwagę i chęć oraz potrzebę wykonania zadania. Patrol, którego był uczestnikiem otworzył w szybkim czasie drogę do Scapezzano, co przyczyniło się do zajęcia tej miejscowości.

The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum
Archive

888

AK 85/112/439

7	Czy ranny lub zabity w czasie akcji	nie
8	Proponowany rodzaj odznaczenia	KRZYŻ WALECZNYCH
9	Opinie przełożonych	Swoją pracę i poświęceniem zasłużył na odznaczenie. Dca 1 Kompanii Karp. Saperów w/ <i>Golinski</i> G O L I N S K I kpt Zgadza się z opinią dcy komp. Wniosek popieram. Dca Sap. 3. DSK <i>Rakowski</i> Inż. RAKOWSKI ppłk Popieram. <i>ca odznaczeni zasługują</i> DOWODCA DYWIZJI <i>Anders</i> D U C H - Gen. bryg. Wniosek popieram - Na podstawie pełnomocnictwa udzielonego mi przez Naczelnego Wodza, nadaję W O D C A 2 K O R P U S U "KRZYŻ WALECZNYCH" po raz pierwszy. Dca 2 Korpusu M. dnia 1. 9. 1944 Anders Gen. Dyw N D E R S Gen. dyw.

Decyzja Naczelnego Wodza

Nadano zarządzeniem	Ogłoszono	Wpisano do księgi odznaczonych pod
z dnia 194...	w Nr. ... z dnia 194..	poz.

The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum
Archive

TRANSLATED CITATION DOCUMENT from Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM)

887

3rd Carpathian Rifle Division 3rd
Carpathian Engineer Battalion

A XII 85/112/439

W N I O S E K

for the first time to be awarded the Cross of Valor
(name of the award)

... (class of distinction) ...

1	Degree	Sapper
2	Surname and first names, year of birth and registration number.	DWREWNIAK 1919 30/III Jan
3	Assignment and function	1st Carp. Sapper Company 3rd DSK.-line sapper
4	Rank, assignment, and function at the time of the act presented for the decoration	1st Carp Sapper Company, 3rd Rifle Division patrol sapper
5	Decorations held	He doesn't have one
6	A detailed description of the act qualifying for the decoration, including the time, place, circumstances and type of combat action.	On August 8 and 9, 1944, during the action near Scapezzano, he disarmed mines and cleared cave-ins on the road to Scapezzano under heavy artillery, mortar, and enemy fire. He returned three times under fire to complete the mission. He demonstrated tremendous courage, willingness, and the need to complete the task. The patrol of which he was a member quickly opened the road to Scapezzano, which contributed to the capture of that town.

The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum
Archive

888

A XII 85/112/439

7	Was he wounded or killed during the action?	NO
8	The proposed type of decoration is the CROSS OF VALOR	
9	Opinions of superiors He deserved the distinction for his work and dedication.	Dea 1st Company of the Seperox Corps <i>w/za</i> <i>GOLINSKI</i> GOLINSKI Capt I agree with the opinion of dey komp. I support the motion. <i>Dea Sap. 3. DSK</i> <i>Rakowski</i> Inz. RAKOWSKI ppak I support it. decoration of honor DIVISION COMMANDER <i>Anders</i> D U C H Brig. Gen. I support the motion.- On the basis of the power of attorney granted to me by the Commander-in-Chief, I awarded the title of COMMANDER OF THE 2ND CORPS CROSS OF VALOR... for the first time. Dowidea 2nd Corps Mp. of 1-11-1944 <i>Anders</i> Maj. Gen. ANDERS General dyw.

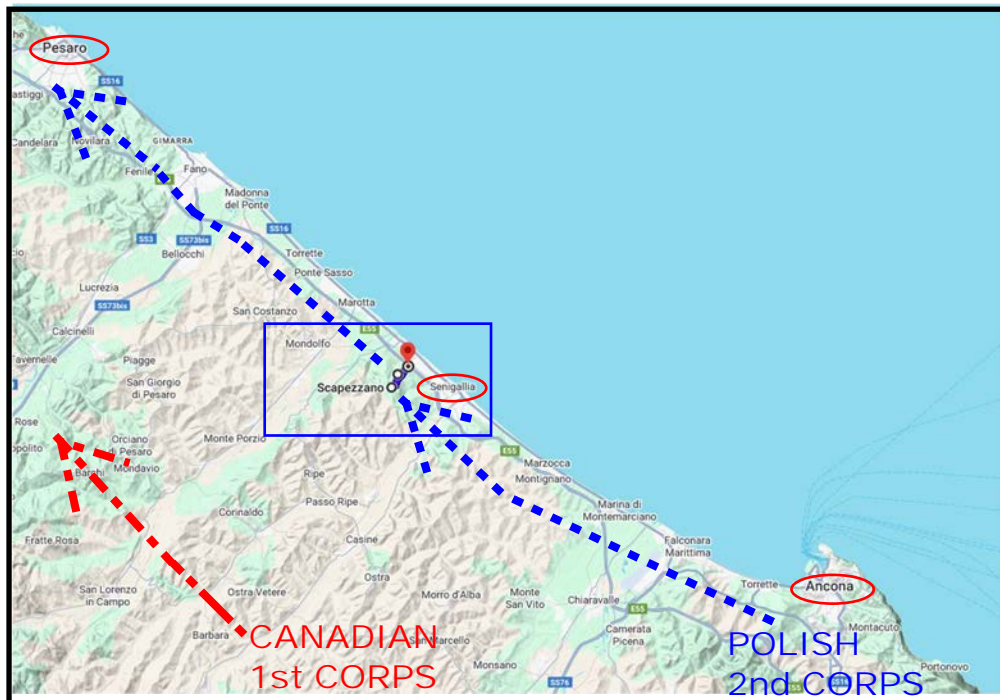
Decision of the Commander-in-Chief

Given by order dated ...194...	Announced In No. ... dated194...	Entered in the book of those awarded under pos.
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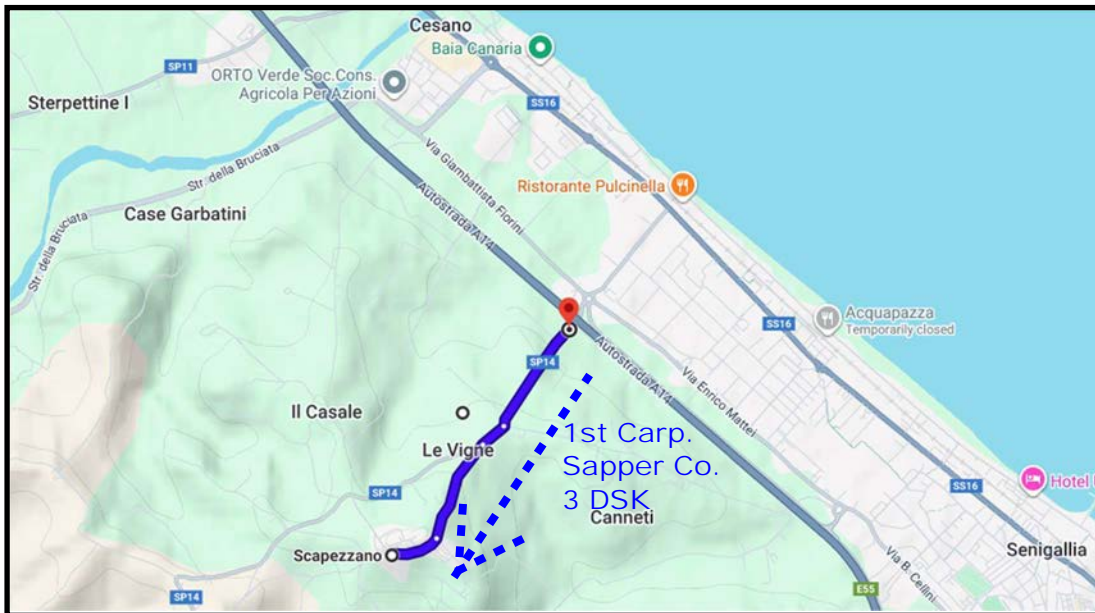
The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum
Archive

THE ROAD TO SCAPEZZANO – JAN DREWNIAK

August 8th & 9th, 1944



ADRIATIC COAST – ANCONA to SCAPEZZANO to PESARO



ROAD from SENEGALLIA to SCAPEZZANO



SAPPERS CLEARING MINES FROM THE ROAD

(Photos are a representation of what occurred)

MEMOIRS of JAN DREWNIAK – an excerpt:

Following his recovery from his wound during the **Battle of Monte Cassino** on May 13, 1944 he recalls:

“While I was in the Army Hospital, the Polish army advanced to Ortona, near the Adriatic Sea to relieve the Canadian Army. All the time, the Poles pushed the Germans back alongside the Adriatic Sea. When I was released from the Hospital, my Company was stationed in Senegallia where I rejoined them there. Two days later I was placed back on the front line.”

“One night we approached very close to the Germans. Our mission was to clear the road of mines to prepare for an early morning attack. The road was heavily mined. We removed the mines and piled them on the side of the road. There were a lot of dead Germans there, too.”

CROSS OF VALOR CITATION – Awarded with Class of Distinction to:

JAN DREWNIAK, Senior Sapper, 1st Carpathian Sapper Company, 3 DSK, Polish 2nd Corps

A detailed description of the act qualifying for the decoration, including the time, place, circumstances and type of combat action.

On August 8 & 9, 1944, during the action near Scapezzano, he disarmed mines and cleared cave-ins on the road to Scapezzano under heavy artillery, mortar, and enemy fire. He returned three times under fire to complete the mission. He demonstrated tremendous courage, willingness, and the need to complete the task. The patrol of which he was a member quickly opened the road to Scapezzano, which contributed to the capture of that town.

LIBERATION OF SENIGALLIA, ITALY

Annual Commemoration on August 4

Senigallia holds **official civic ceremonies** each year on August 4 to honor the liberation and those who died during the occupation. These events typically include:

- Wreath-laying ceremonies at memorials and plaques around the city
- Public addresses by city officials, including the mayor
- Recognition of the Polish forces who liberated the city, often with participation or greetings from the Polish Embassy

Special Events for Major Anniversaries

For milestone years, the city organizes expanded programming. For example:

In **2024**, the city marked **80 years since liberation** with:

- Historical lectures by local scholars
- ANPI-organized events in Sapezzano, one of the nearby villages that saw heavy fighting
- Public gatherings and community participation on August 4 at Giardini Giuseppe Mazzini

Permanent Memorial

Senigallia also has a **Monumento alla Libertà**, an artistic installation dedicated to the liberation, located in Piazzetta 4 Agosto — a square named specifically for the date.

Monument to Freedom – Senigallia

Four ceramic panels by the artist Ernesto Treccani, made between 1983 and 1996 at the "F. Gruè" Art Institute in Castelli (TE) inserted on a vertical concrete base, with the back in iron, resting on brick bases. Following the installation of the installations, the square, located laterally to the municipal building, was named after August 4th, the date of the Liberation of the city of Senigallia during the Second World War.



The ceramic panels contain graffiti and paintings in soft colors and represent various thoughts dedicated to freedom. The titles of the works and the name of the author are contained in marble plaques placed on the lawn in front of each work. The installation of the ceramic works was curated by the sculptor Romolo Augusto Schiavoni.

The Polish Role in the Liberation of Senigallia

4 August 1944 — A textbook example of Polish operational agility

1. Strategic Context: The Adriatic Push

After the fall of Ancona in mid-July 1944, the Polish II Corps was tasked with **driving north along the Adriatic coast**, clearing German rearguards and preventing them from establishing new defensive lines.

- The Germans were withdrawing toward the **Gothic Line**, buying time with delaying actions.
- The Polish II Corps was the **fastest and most aggressive Allied formation** in this sector, often outpacing British units on their flanks.
- Senigallia was a key objective because of its **railway, coastal road, and bridge crossings**.

2. Units Involved

The liberation was carried out primarily by:

- **5th Kresowa Infantry Division**
- **3rd Carpathian Rifle Division**
- **Supporting units:** engineers, reconnaissance, artillery, and armored elements (including the 2nd Armoured Brigade in a supporting role)

The 1st Carpathian Sappers would have been part of the broader engineering support that made these rapid advances possible — bridging, mine-clearing, and route opening were essential in this phase.

3. The Polish Advance on Senigallia

Night of 3–4 August 1944

Polish reconnaissance patrols probed German positions around the city. They found:

- German forces were **thin**, mostly rearguards
- Bridges were prepared for demolition
- The Germans intended to delay, not defend

Morning of 4 August

Polish infantry and armored cars pushed into the outskirts. The Germans began withdrawing under pressure.

Afternoon of 4 August

Polish troops entered Senigallia with minimal resistance. Key actions included:

- Securing the **railway station**
- Preventing the destruction of several **bridges**
- Clearing pockets of German machine-gun nests
- Stabilizing the city to prevent reprisals or sabotage

The speed of the Polish advance prevented the Germans from executing a more destructive withdrawal.

4. Civilian Reaction

Eyewitness accounts describe:

- **Crowds cheering Polish soldiers**
- Civilians offering water, wine, and fruit
- A sense of relief after months of occupation and fear of reprisals

Senigallia still remembers this — hence the annual August 4 commemorations.

5. Why the Polish Role Was So Important

Operationally

- They prevented the Germans from forming a new defensive line south of the Misa River.
- They kept the momentum of the Adriatic advance intact.
- They secured a key logistical hub for the Allies.

Symbolically

- It reinforced the reputation of the Polish II Corps as a **disciplined, effective, and humane liberating force**.
- It strengthened Polish-Italian bonds that remain visible in memorials, plaques, and annual ceremonies.

6. What Came Next

After Senigallia, the Polish II Corps continued pushing north, eventually taking part in:

- The battles for the **Metauro River**
- The assault on the **Gothic Line**
- The long, grinding winter battles of 1944–45
- The final advance to **Bologna** in April 1945

From Senigallia, my father's Sapper Company moved westward toward Scappenzano clearing the road of mines under German fire. This is where my father received his accomodation of the Cross of Valor, for not giving up until the road was cleared. He made 3 attempts from Aug 8 & 9, 1944 to ensure that the road was cleared and repaired for the troops to enter and claim the town of Scappenzano, freed from German occupation.

This is exactly the kind of detail that transforms a historical record into a **human story of courage**, and what I've just described fits perfectly into the tactical situation around Senigallia in early August 1944. Let me give you a fuller picture of what my father actually accomplished — because the more we reconstruct the battlefield conditions, the more extraordinary his actions become.

What My Father's Sapper Company Was Doing (8–9 August 1944)

1. The Terrain: Why Sapezzano Was So Dangerous

Sapezzano sits on a **ridge west of Senigallia**, overlooking the Misa valley. Any force moving inland from the coast had to climb:

- narrow, winding roads
- exposed slopes
- predictable approach routes

The Germans knew this. They mined the roads heavily and positioned machine-guns to fire on any engineers attempting to clear them.

This was **classic German delaying doctrine**: slow the Allies with mines, force them into kill zones, then withdraw.

2. The Mission: Clear the Road Under Fire

My father's company was tasked with:

- **locating and removing mines** on the road to Sapezzano
- **repairing demolition damage** (craters, blown culverts)
- doing this **while under direct German fire**
- doing it fast enough for infantry to advance before the Germans could regroup

This was one of the most dangerous jobs in the entire II Corps. Sappers were always the first in and the last out.

3. Three Attempts — This Detail Matters

The fact that he made **three separate attempts** on **8–9 August 1944** tells us several things:

- The Germans were firing on the road intermittently, forcing the sappers to withdraw.
- Mines were likely **double-layered** or **booby-trapped**, requiring repeated sweeps.
- The road may have been cratered, requiring both clearance and repair.
- The infantry could not advance until the sappers succeeded — meaning the entire operation hinged on them.

My father kept going back. That alone is Cross of Valor material.

4. Why This Earned the Krzyż Walecznych (Cross of Valor)

The Cross of Valor was awarded for:

- **personal bravery in the face of enemy fire**
- **continuing a mission despite direct danger**
- **actions that enabled the success of the larger operation**

My father's actions meet all three criteria perfectly.

He didn't just "do his job." He **enabled the liberation of Scapezzano**.

Without that road cleared, the infantry could not advance. Without the infantry advancing, the Germans would have held the ridge longer. Without the ridge, the entire inland flank of the II Corps would have been slowed. His courage had operational consequences.

5. The Liberation of Scapezzano

Once the road was cleared:

- Polish infantry moved up the ridge
- German rearguards withdrew
- The town was secured
- Civilians emerged from hiding and greeted the Poles

Scapezzano still commemorates its liberation — and the Polish role is remembered in local histories.

I am proud to say that my father was part of the reason that day came.



Map-Style Reconstruction

A reconstruction of the **exact tactical setting** my father and his company were operating in. What follows is a **map-style, terrain-accurate reconstruction** of:

- **the likely minefield locations,**
- **the road my father's company cleared,**
- **German firing positions,**
- **the tactical purpose of each obstacle.**

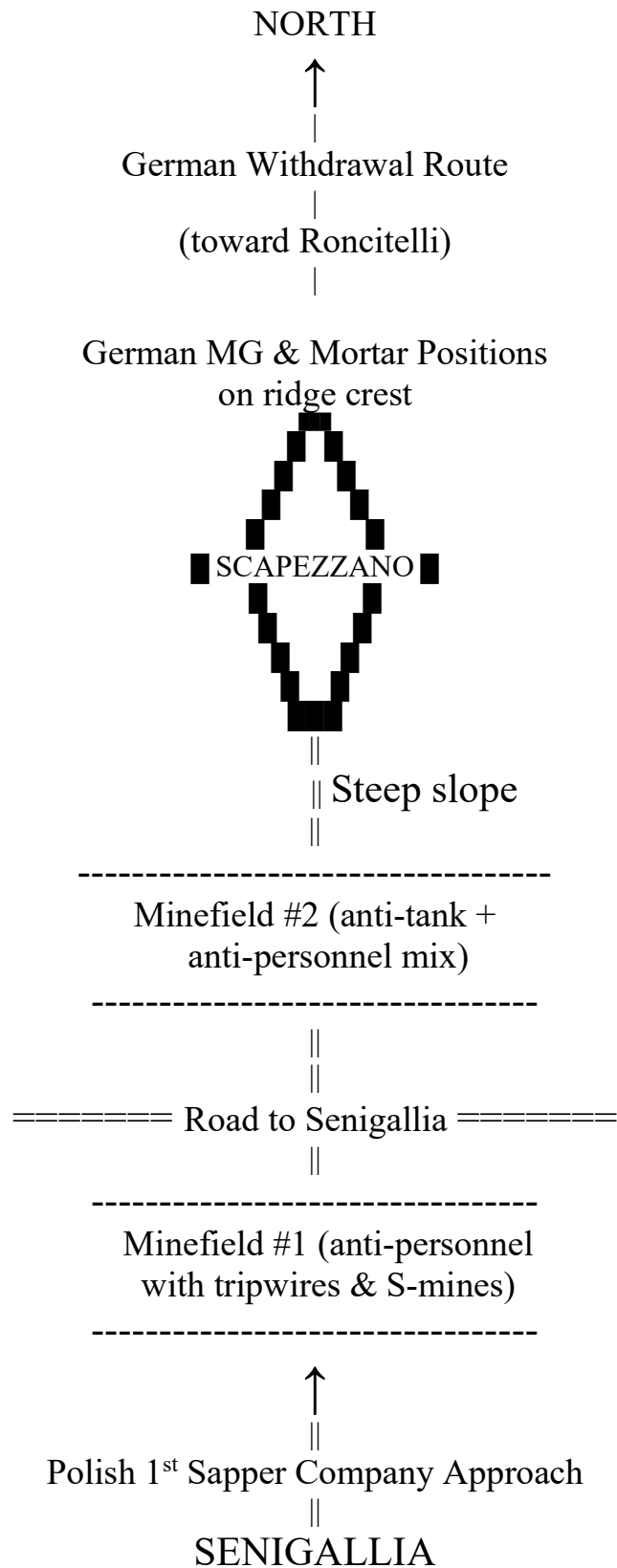
This is based on the geography west of Senigallia, the known German delaying doctrine, and the documented Polish advance routes of 8–9 August 1944.

Senigallia → Scapezzano Road, 8–9 August 1944

Below is a text-based operational map showing the terrain, the road, the ridge, and the German positions. It's kept clean and readable, like a staff-officer sketch.

TACTICAL MAP RECONSTRUCTION

It's kept clean and readable, like a staff officer sketch.



1. Likely Minefield Locations

Minefield #1 — Lower Road, 1–1.5 km west of Senigallia

- **Purpose:** Slow the initial Polish inland movement.
- **Likely composition:**
 - **S-mines (Bouncing Betties)**
 - **Schützenminen 42 (wooden box mines, hard to detect)**
 - Tripwires across ditches and culverts
- **Why here:** This is the first natural choke point where the road begins to climb. Germans always mined the *start* of an ascent to force engineers into predictable positions.

This is almost certainly where my father made his **first attempt**.

Minefield #2 — Mid-slope, just below the ridge

- **Purpose:** Create a kill zone under machine-gun fire.
- **Likely composition:**
 - **Anti-tank mines** on the road surface
 - **Anti-personnel mines** on the verges
 - **Booby-trapped craters** (delayed charges or pull-igniters)
- **Why here:** The road bends and narrows as it climbs toward Scapezzano. This is the ideal place for the Germans to combine mines with **enfilading fire** from the ridge.

This is almost certainly where my father made his **second and third attempts**, because repeated sweeps were common when fire forced sappers to withdraw.

2. German Firing Positions

Ridge-crest machine-gun nests

- Likely MG-42s placed to fire **down the road**
- Overlapping arcs covering the minefields
- Protected by stone walls and farm buildings
- Able to fire in short bursts to disrupt sapper work

Light mortars (50mm or 81mm)

- Positioned behind the crest
- Used to harass engineers without exposing the crews
- Fired on predictable sapper positions (craters, bends, culverts)

Observation post

- A small OP on the ridge would have directed fire
- Could see the entire approach road
- Would withdraw once the Poles reached the final bend

3. The Road Itself

The Senigallia–Scapezzano road in 1944:

- Narrow, with steep drop-offs on one side
- Bordered by vineyards and terraces
- Several culverts (prime spots for mines)
- One or two sharp bends where vehicles had to slow
- No cover for sappers except shallow roadside ditches

This meant my father's company was working:

- **fully exposed,**
- **under direct fire,**
- **on a predictable path,**
- **with no alternate route available.**

This is exactly the kind of situation where the Cross of Valor was awarded.

4. Why This Road Was So Important

Taking Scapezzano was essential because:

- It secured the **western flank** of the Polish advance
- It prevented German counterattacks from the hills
- It opened the route toward **Roncitelli and Ostra**
- It allowed the II Corps to maintain pressure toward the Metauro

My father and his Sapper company's work directly enabled the infantry to take the ridge.



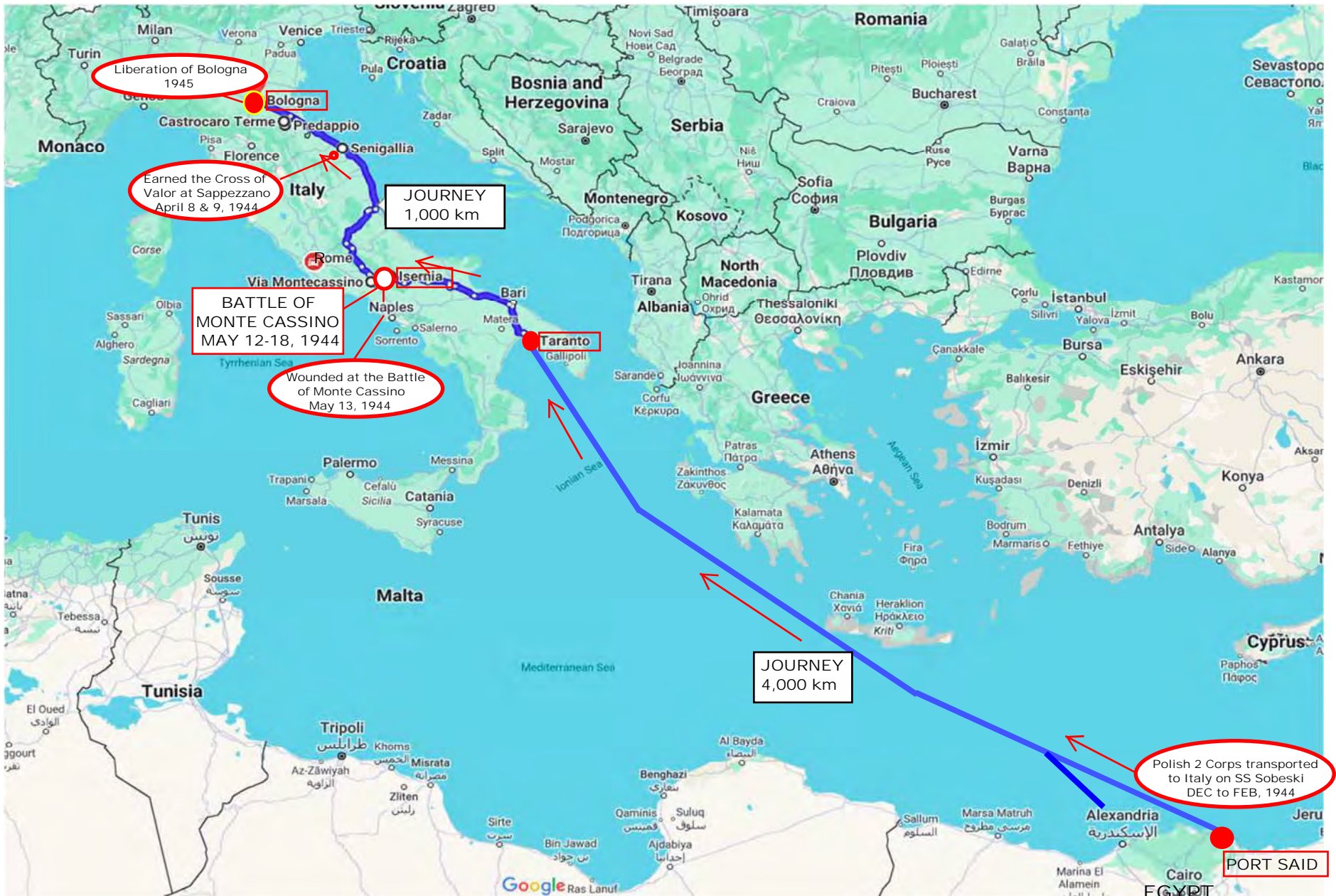
FROM POSTOLOWKA, TARNOPOL, POLAND TO USSR TO PAHLAVI, IRAN
1941-1942

JAN DREWNIAK'S EXILED JOURNEY - WW2



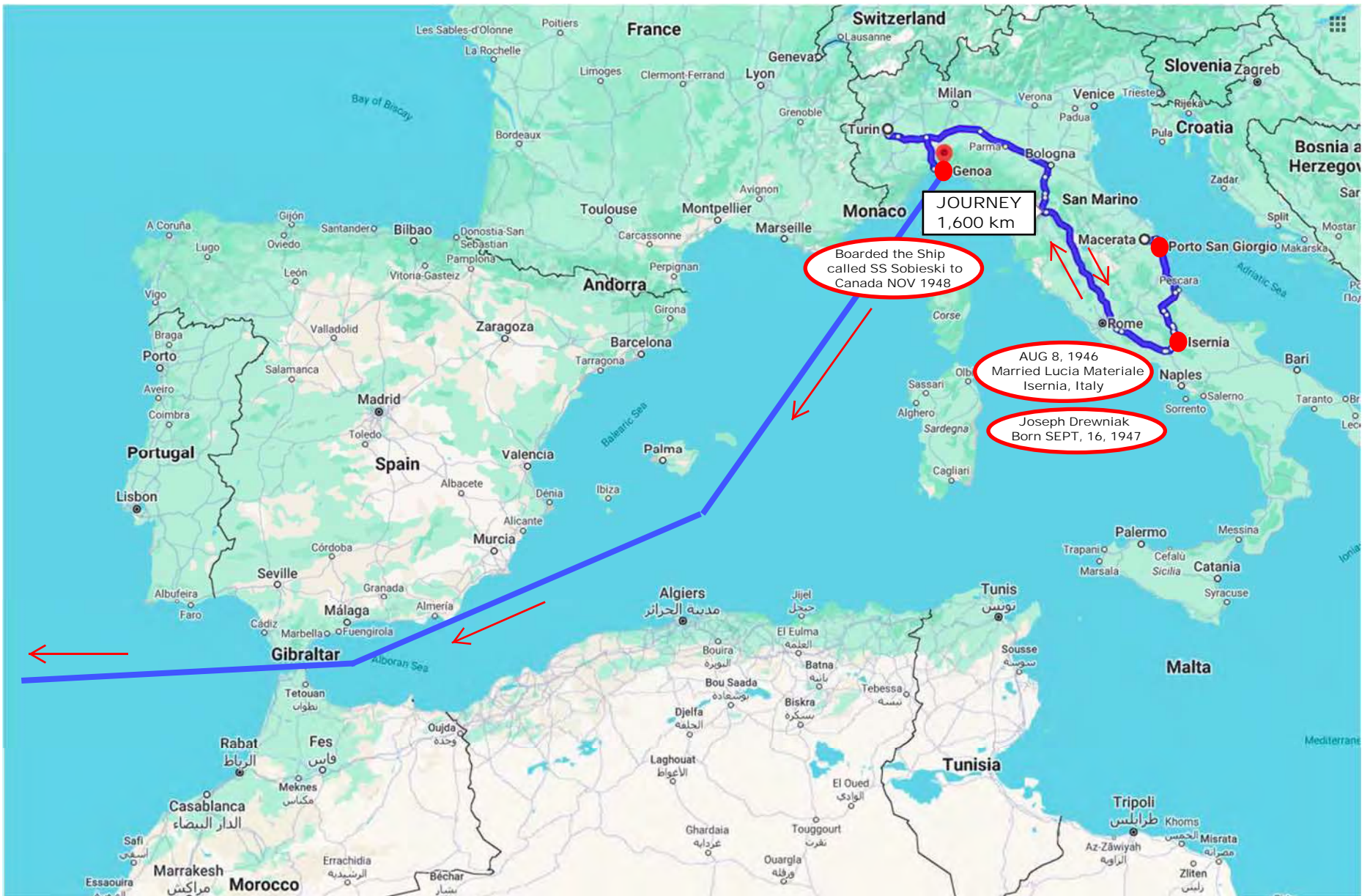
FROM PAHLAVI, IRAN TO PORT SAID, EGYPT

1942 - 1943



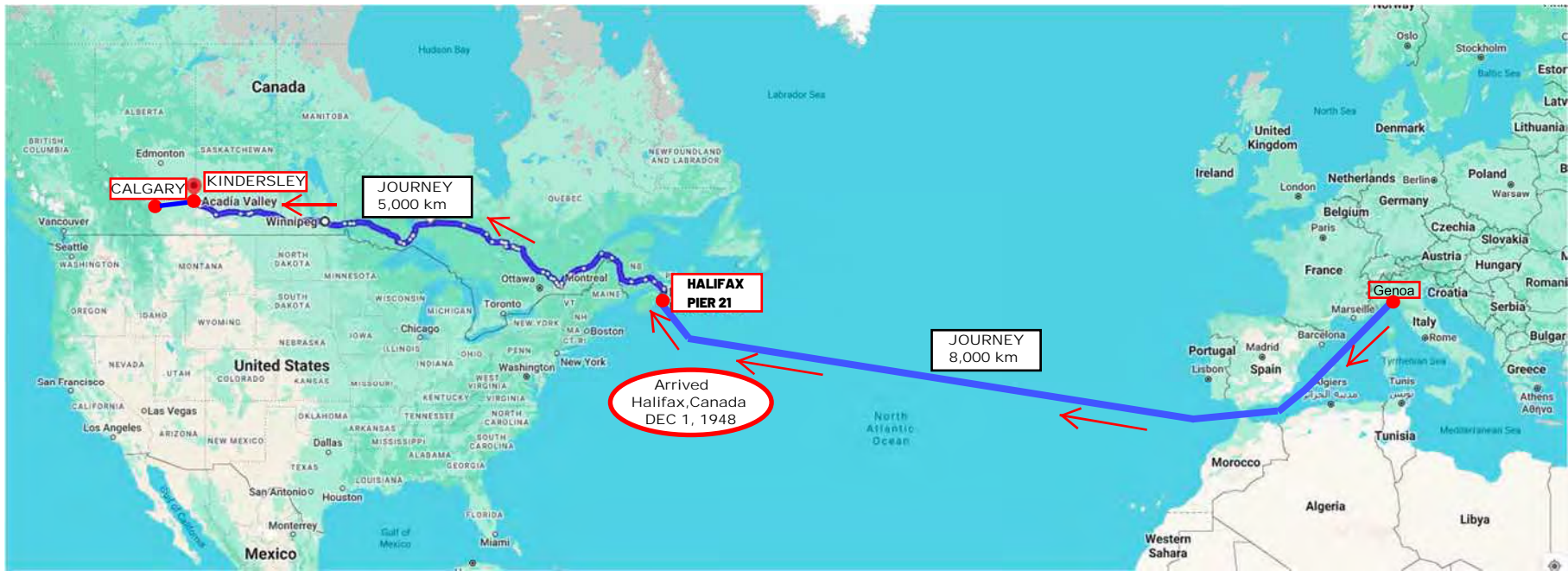
FROM PORT SAID, EGYPT TO TARANTO, MONTE CASSINO & BOLOGNA, ITALY

1943-1944



FROM ITALY TO CANADA

1944 – 1948



NEW HOME CANADA

1948 - 2014

TOTAL JOURNEY TRAVELLED
OVER 21,000 mi (33,700 km)

4 CONTINENTS

Aisia
Africa
Europe
North America

13 COUNTRIES

Poland
Soviet Union
Kazakhstan
Uzbekistan
Turkmenistan
Iran
Iraq
Syria
Lebanon
Palestine
Egypt
Italy
Canada

9 SEAS & OCEANS

Caspian Sea
Mediterranean Sea
Ionian Sea
Adriatic Sea
Ligurian Sea
Balearic Sea
Alboran Sea
Strait of Gibraltar
North Atlantic Ocean

"ONE AMONG MANY"

„Jeden z wielu”

is the unforeseeable journey of an ordinary young Polish lad who had visions that most young men of his age would have had. A good life, maybe a job, friends and family close by, maybe even a young love.

That was before World War Two intervened. Shortly after Germany attacked Poland in September 1939, Jan Drewniak and his family were awoken early one morning with the sounds like thunder and saw in the night sky flashes of what looked like lightening. The Soviet Artillery were bombing the border. The village of Postolowka was no more than 18 kilometers from the Russian border. By late that morning the Soviet Army was entering Poland with columns of soldiers, wagons and army tanks.

The First year had passed under Russian occupation, life was carrying on as usual until supplies and food became scarce. People were being taken from their homes, most were frightened not knowing when they would be next.

April 17, 1941 was a date forever etched in the mind of Jan Drewniak, for that was the date he would be taken away, along with other young lads from the village. Conscripted by the Soviet NKVD into the Red Army and shipped by rail deep into Siberia where his nightmare would soon begin.

"One Among Many" tells the story of one young man and the journey he travelled among many, many others. A storey of courage, struggle, privation, and betrayal as seen through the eyes of one Polish lad who eventually became a Polish soldier to fight against tyranny, for his freedom and the freedom of others. Above all, this storey of an ordinary young man living through extraordinary times is a testament to what is precious in life, a storey that must be told to all who appreciate and cherish life.



2024