



By Robert Ostrycharz

THE POLISH PRESENCE IN THE FRASERBURGH AREA 1945-1947

Introduction

The information in these pages was compiled by Robert Ostrycharz to provide historical context for a photographic exhibition I created entitled 'Fragments that Remain', hosted by the Fraserburgh Heritage Centre, Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire.

Robert Ostrycharz is an independent researcher with a particular interest in the Polish Forces in Scotland during and after the end of the Second World War.

He maintains a website at www.polishforcesinbritain.info

My maternal grandparents, Stanislaw and Helena Lis, both served in the Polish Army under British Command during WW2, although, as my mother was abandoned as an infant, little was known about them until I received their military papers from the Polish section of the Ministry of Defence at R.A.F Northolt, England in 2014.

After receiving translations of these papers from Robert, I began a quest to piece together the fragments of information regarding my grandparents provided by the M.O.D and my late mother's narrative. As the journey progressed, I commenced a documentary project during which I gathered portraits and stories of those whose lives had been irrevocably shaped by the war in Poland. This led to information about Polish troops posted to Fraserburgh, where I am based. I established a connection with the descendants of these soldiers; the children and grandchildren of men who, unable to return to communist Poland after the war, had married local Scottish girls. Robert kindly assisted me by translating the military records of some of these soldiers, thus providing the families with valuable information about their relatives' experiences during the war and giving insight into how they had come to be in Fraserburgh.

The exhibition 'Fragments that Remain' is a means of reclaiming these stories from history, and honouring those Polish soldiers who, unable to return home after WW2 settled here and raised their families in a new country. May they never be forgotten.

Jennie Milne, 2019



THE POLISH PRESENCE IN THE FRASERBURGH AREA 1945-1947.

In August 1943, the Polish Armoured Fighting Vehicle and Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Training Centre (AFV & EME) moved from Scotland to Catterick Camp in North Yorkshire. The centre trained soldiers in the specialist skills needed for tank crews as well as their maintenance.

In November 1945, the AFV & EME School moved from Catterick to the Fraserburgh area. The location was the former RAF Airfield on the outskirts of Inverallochy. RAF Fraserburgh opened on 6 December 1941 and initially was part of Fighter Command. After several changes it was finally part of Coastal Command. From late December 1944, aircraft of 279 Squadron provided air-sea rescue cover for the RAF Banff and Dallachy strike wings. The airfield closed in June 1945 and in November 1945 came under War Office control.

The move of the AFV & EME Centre was part of a larger plan to move many of the Polish Army units located in Scottish Command's Lowland District north into Highland District. Other airfields in the north-east used to accommodate Polish troops included, Peterhead, Banff and Dallachy.

At the time the Polish soldiers arrived in the Fraserburgh area in November 1945, the future of Poland had already been decided at the Yalta Conference in February 1945.

The loss of eastern Poland to the Soviet Union, agreed at Yalta by Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, left thousands of Polish servicemen and their families with no homes to return to. The prevailing political situation at the end of the war was full of bitter disillusionment and tragic disappointment for the Poles. In July 1945, the British Government derecognised the London Polish Government in favour of the Soviet backed Government in Warsaw.

With the war's end, vociferous criticism mounted from certain sectors of Scottish society to the continued presence of large numbers of Polish troops in Scotland.

For men and women of its Armed Forces and with Poland now under the effective control of the Soviets an uncertain future lay ahead. Should I return to my homeland or not, or wait and see? The dilemma was made more difficult for those with wives and children still living in Poland.

The gradual demobilisation of the Polish Armed Forces in the West over 200,000 strong commenced soon after the end of the war.

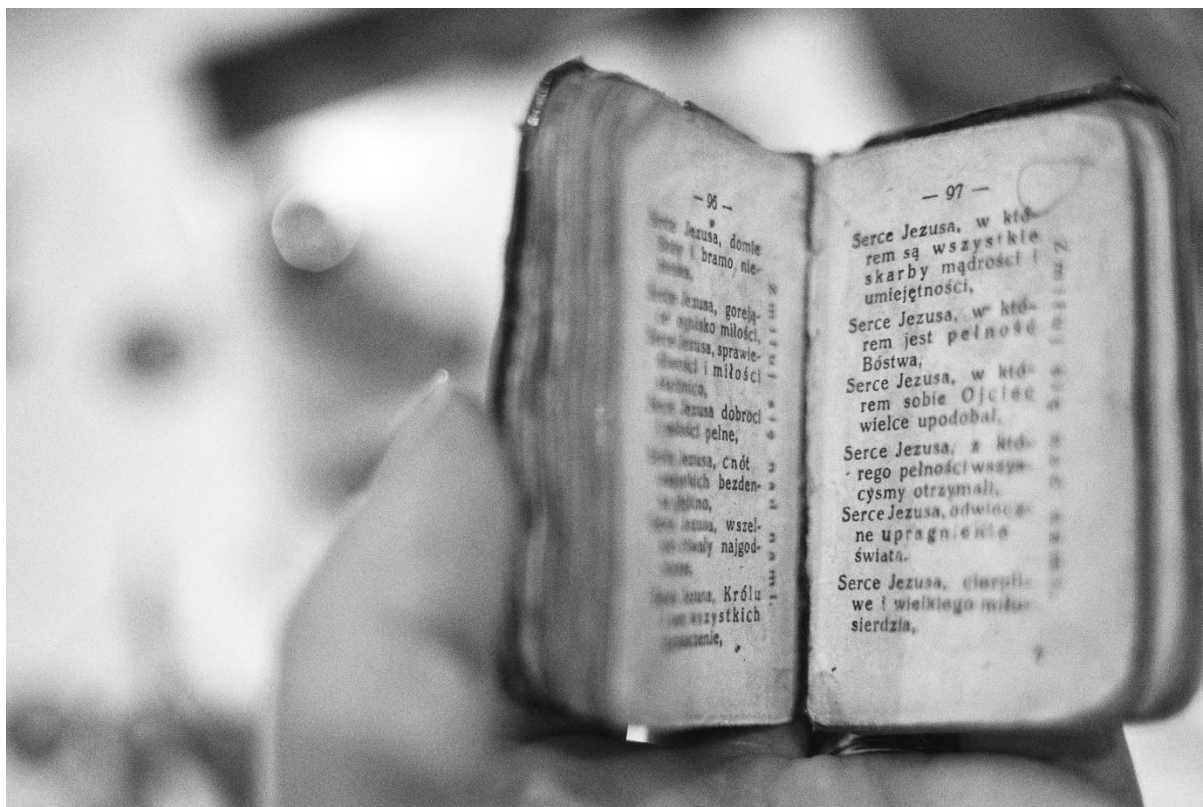


FIGURE 1 THE TINY BIBLE JAN ZAWIEJA CARRIED WITH HIM THROUGHOUT THE WAR

An insight into the events that followed with the arrival of the Polish soldiers can be garnered from the Fraserburgh Herald and Northern Counties' Advertiser. This newspaper was published between 1893 and 1958 and covers the two-year Polish presence in the area. Running through the weekly Tuesday issues of the paper are numerous references to activities and events involving both the Scots and the Poles. These include sports -particularly football, local groups and dances which led to romances and marriages.

Reading through the newspaper, unlike other areas of Scotland at this time, where soldiers of the Polish Army were present there appears no evidence of the hostility or ill-will shown to the Poles whilst they were based near Fraserburgh. For the townsfolk it was their first experience of living next to Polish soldiers. The Polish Army first arrived in Scotland in late June 1940.

The newspaper recorded the arrival on the 16th November 1945 of up to 200 officers and men, including a number of Polish ATS girls in Fraserburgh. They were to be stationed at Cairnbulg. Later, on Sunday evening 25th November, there were many interested local

spectators awaiting the arrival of a special train carrying a further contingent of Polish soldiers at the railway station.



FIGURE 2 JAN BORON. THE POLISH BOYS LOVED MOTORBIKES!

The Herald's 4th December issue reported on the progress of our Polish Allies at Cairnbulg namely that the soldiers were rapidly settling down and getting organised. Many of the soldiers came into town to go to the cinema or the local dancing. The reporter reckoned that there was a boxing team, a dance band and probably a choir.

Probably little known to the local populace, the paper reported at this time on the close past Scottish-Polish link, that is of Princess Klementyna Sobieska, the granddaughter of the Polish King Jan Sobieski who saved Europe from the

menace of the Ottoman Empire at the siege of Vienna in 1683. She married James III, the 'Old Pretender' and bore a son – Prince Charles Edward Stuart.

From the Polish point of view, Polish officers, and other ranks as well as women of the ATS were highly delighted with Fraserburgh and its splendid "open sea" fresh air. The paper noted that, "they are keen to be friendly with people of the town." A Polish Education and Welfare officer said that they have now got their football team functioning and were keen to play against Fraserburgh before the local crowd. In a match against Peterhead, the Fraserburgh team fielded two Polish players.

On the 15th December at Bellslea Park, Fraserburgh were up against a team from Aberdeen University. Two players, given as Dyrdia and Wodarasyh (sic) were playing for the home side. There were many Polish spectators at the match.

General Maczek, General Officer Commanding 1st Polish Corps, ordered the Armoured Training Centre, to take down the concertina wire at Fraserburgh. By May 1946, Fraserburgh Bay was cleared. By August, the clearing of coast defences of St Combs Bay was completed. Clearing defences was just one of the many tasks that involved Polish troops. They were also used in agricultural work.

In one of the "Round the Town" columns of the paper, the columnist was interested to know if anyone heard a Polish soldier singing "I belong to Glasgow" in the High Street the other night in perfectly understandable Scotch?

In the following week's "Round the Town" column, readers were informed that for the Polish soldier, Christmas Day is strictly religious. Neither meat nor fat are eaten, and the meals comprise 12 different dishes. A religious service is held. For New Year they celebrate as the Scots do, but apparently there was a shortage of "spiritual food" at Cairnbulg.



FIGURE 3 JAN BORON, BACK, CENTRE.

Now fielding three Polish players, Fraserburgh beat Buckie Thistle 5:3 at Bellslea Park.

The people of Fraserburgh seem to be taking kindly to the Polish soldiers. This was evident by the number invited out to tea by many people in the town.



FIGURE 4 JAN GAWRYLUK

On Christmas Eve, the Roman Catholic Church and St Peter's were packed out. Many of the congregation at the R.C Church were Polish soldiers whose harmonious singing was a treat for the locals attending the service.

The 'Grand End of the Year Dance' on the 28th December run by the Scottish Red Cross Society at Dalrymple Hall featured a Polish Dance Orchestra playing for the first time in Fraserburgh. The orchestra's playing was much admired.

Later in January 1946, several senior Polish officers were on a three-day inspection of Polish troops in the area. General Kazimierz

Dworak, second in command of the 1 Polish Corps, along with the present CO of the Training Centre at Cairnbulg, Lt Col Zyrkiewicz and other senior officers were guests at the Station Hotel. The Herald's correspondent recorded the General's hope that the people of Fraserburgh would find no cause to complain of misconduct on the part of Polish troops. He asked the paper to express his thanks for the kindness and hospitality shown to the soldiers. The General had been deputy commander of the 1st Polish Armoured Division during the battles of the Division in France, Belgium and Holland.

On the 20th January 1946, at their usual Sunday evening meeting in the Scout Hut in Barrack Lane, the Air Scouts entertained nine Rovers from the Polish training camp at Inverallochy.

In the Fraserburgh versus Aberdeen University football match at Bellslea Park, Polish soldiers were in the majority in the stand.

At the end of January 1946, classes in English began at Cairnbulg for the soldiers with some 120 expected to be under instruction. The teachers conducting this 10-week course were Alex McDonald MA and Edwin Duthie MA of Fraserburgh Academy.

Also, in the same month, members of the 1st Fraserburgh Group of Rover Scouts met with Polish Scouts at their hut in the camp to take part in a programme of varied events. On Saturday 2nd February at Bellslea Park, Fraserburgh team beat Huntly 3:1. It was reported that Fraserburgh played well, particularly the Polish lads, who were a great asset to the team. The following week, at Cairnbulg, a team of 4 Polish soldiers engaged Aberdeen Lads Club in a table tennis match with the Polish side winning 12 games to 1.



FIGURE 5 POLISH TROOPS.

A function in the town at the Drill Hall with the lads of the Air Sea Rescue and other young people dancing to the music of the Polish Dance Band was a great success.

There were a number of marriages involving Polish soldiers and local girls. But probably the first was on the 28th February when a Polish Officer Cadet married a soldier of the Polish Women's ATS at the Roman Catholic Church. Father Macrae spoke in Latin and English and to the bride in French and she made her responses in that language. The bride was given away by a senior Polish officer. During the ceremony the Polish Choir sang anthems. There were many Polish soldiers present at the ceremony. A number of local girl workers gave the couple a hearty send off to Cairnbulg.

On Wednesday 20th March and on Tuesday 26th March a 'Grand Dance' with a Polish Dance Band was held at the Dalrymple Hall and Drill Hall in Grattan Place, respectively. Admission then was 2 shillings and six pence (7½p)

The "Herald" was open to help the Polish soldiers. Lt J Kruczek with a party of Polish soldiers visited the newspaper office to improve their printing knowledge. The camp at Cairnbulg had a printing press.



FIGURE 6 POLISH SOLDIERS IN FRASERBURGH. RICHARD DYGA IS WEARING THE WHITE SHIRT.

On the evening of the 27th March, the St Valery Ball was held in the Dalrymple Hall. Two Polish musicians from Cairnbulg augmented David Pressley's Band.

On Friday 26th April and the following Friday from 8pm to 1am dances to the music of the *Full Polish Dance Band* were held at Dalrymple Hall.

Preparations were being made for the Victory Day celebrations on 8th June. A variety of events, many family orientated, were organised. Based on the programme, Fraserburgh's celebrations did not feature the military. Several local bands including a Polish band provided music throughout the day.

In the very large national celebration in London there was a large contingent of Britain's Allied Forces, troops from the Dominions, India and forces of the Colonial Empire. A significant omission at the ceremonies was the absence of any Polish Armed Forces representation.

Despite being one of Britain's staunchest allies, for political reasons the Government of the day decided to give in to the Soviets.

Weddings

LASKOWSKI-GARFORTH

In the Roman Catholic Church, Fraserburgh, on Tuesday, with Rev Father A. V. Macrae officiating, the marriage was solemnised between L/Cpl. Stanislaw Laskowski, Polish Forces, eldest son of the late Mr Teodor Laskowski and of Mrs Laskowski, Poland, and Gladys Albrow Garforth, only daughter of Mr and Mrs John McLean, 49 Watermill Road, Fraserburgh.

The duties of best man were carried out by a friend of the groom. Pte. Teodor Hebel; and Miss Catherine Noble, friend of the bride, was bridesmaid.

The bride's gown was of white satin with lace sleeves, she wore a short veil headdress and carried a bouquet of red roses and jasmine. Miss Noble wore a gown of saxe blue and carried a bouquet of mixed sweet peas.

As the bride and bridegroom left the church the voices of a large Polish Choir poured forth rendering a beautiful wedding anthem. The church was well filled.

The reception was held in the Broadsea Hall and 80 guests attended.

The bride was formerly employed by Messrs Crose & Blackhall, Peterhead.

On 15th June, Polish Rover Scouts from Cairnbulg entertained around 60 Girl Guides and Boy Scouts of Fraserburgh. Prizes in the raffle were all gifts made by the Polish troops. The Commandant at Cairnbulg, Colonel Michalski was present for a short time.

The first Scottish-Polish marriage in 1946 was probably that of Maksymilian Jarczynski who married Marion May. The next Scottish-Polish wedding was on the 15th July when L/Cpl Stanislaw Laskowski of the Polish Training Centre Inverallochy, married Gladys Garforth in the Catholic Church, Fraserburgh. A large Polish choir sang a beautiful wedding anthem. A reception was

FIGURE 7 . WEDDING NOTIFICATION FOR STANISLAW LASKOWSKI. FRASERBURGH HERALD AND NORTHERN COUNTIES' ADVERTISER 23 JULY 1946

held in the Broadsea Hall. Later in the year, Teofil Zielinski married Agnes Addison. During 1946, in Scotland in total, there were 733 marriages to Scotswomen where the groom was Polish.

In a Highland Cup football match against Peterhead, the Fraserburgh team fielded a Polish goalkeeper.

In September 1946, enrolment in the Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC) commenced. This Corps was established by the British solely to assist men and women of the Polish Forces to settle down in civilian life in Britain. Service in the PRC was for up to two years, but as soon as civilian employment was found for members of the PRC, they for all practical purposes were treated as civilians.

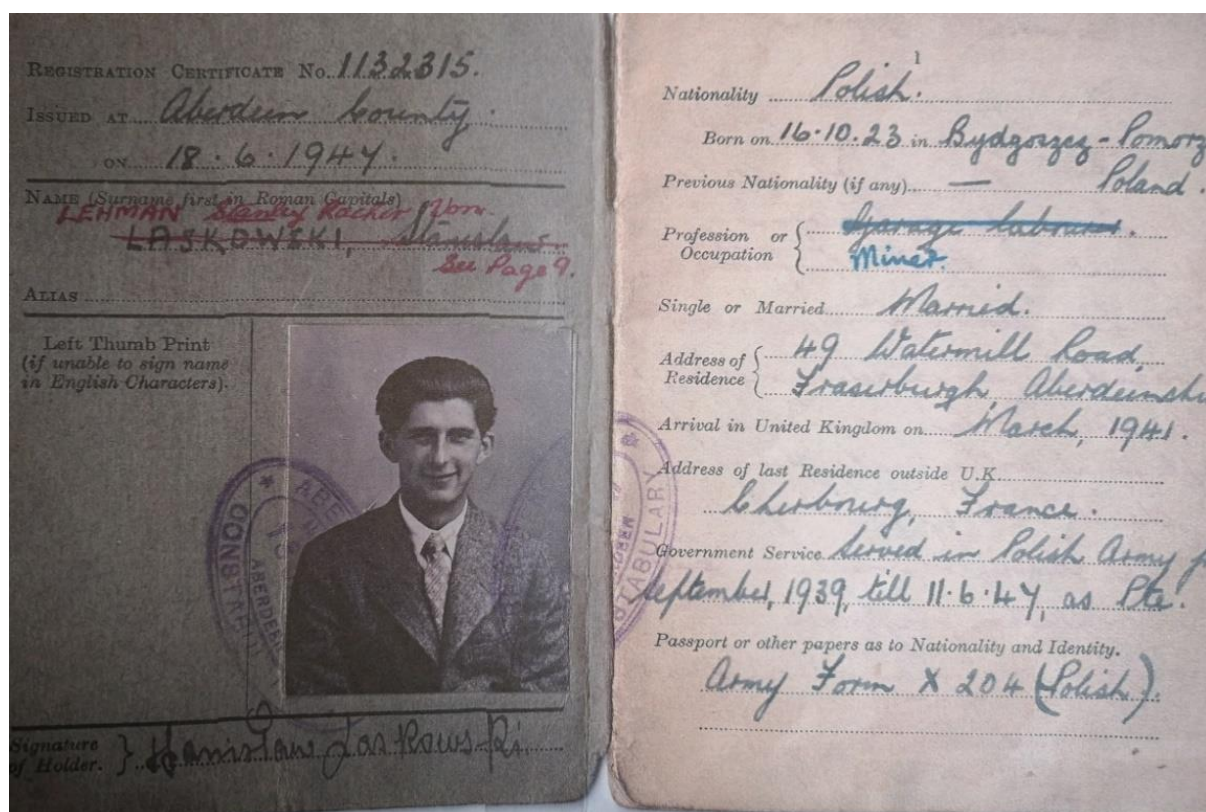


FIGURE 8 STANISLAW LASKOWSKI

In October, a company named as the Polish AFV and EME Combatants' Association Ltd was set up with its registered office at 15 Frithside St, Fraserburgh. Its objects were to assist its

members while serving with the Polish Forces in Britain, and in preparation for demobilisation, by means of tutorial classes in all branches of manual, clerical and technical employment. Negotiations were already proceeding to find places for Poles in North and South America and with the Dominions.

During the two-year period only one case was discovered referring to criminality by a Polish soldier based in the Fraserburgh area. At Aberdeen in November 46, Marian Wilczynski of the Polish Training Centre, appeared on charges of housebreaking. The offences were committed in Fraserburgh, Rathen and from a van at Mains of Inverugie between July and November. He pled guilty and was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment.

There were a couple of deaths of Polish soldiers based on the airfield. The first was Sergeant Tadeusz Skaczyło based at the Polish Training Centre, Inverallochy who died on 29 December 1946, age 51 from a cerebral haemorrhage. His unit is given on the memorial as the Polish Resettlement Corps. At Fraserburgh (Kirkton) Cemetery where he is buried there are a number of WWII graves here are of men whose parents lived in Fraserburgh.



FIGURE 9 POLISH TROOPS POSSIBLY AT THE CAIRNBULG AIRFIELD. JAN ZAWIEJA IS KNEELING, LOOKING AWAY FROM THE CAMERA

In February 1947, the funeral took place of the Provost of Fraserburgh. Prominent among many Scottish mourners was Lt Col Szystowski OBE, with fellow officers, NCOs and Other Ranks from the Training Camp.

By early 1947, the Training Centre had been absorbed into the Polish Resettlement Corps and was known as the Iron Trades & Mechanical Engineers Training Centre from its previous title of 1st Corps AFV & EME Training Centre. Some of the soldiers were stationed in the Banff area.

A Scottish Command document listed the courses as at 1st March 1947 running at the Centre, namely for Craftsmen, Electricians, Mechanical Trade, Welders, Drivers/Tractors & Agricultural Machines and Fitters. In total 24 officers and 78 ORs provided the teaching/instruction for 3 officers and 196 ORs on all the courses.

On the 20th April, in the Picture House, Mid Street, under the auspices of the Scottish Veterans Garden City Association, members of the 1st Polish Corps Entertainment Group provided the talent. Their show was entitled "The Melody Lingers On," and not for a long time as the newspaper's review of the show stated. 'has such a brilliant performance been seen in Fraserburgh. The items, were many and varied and for 135 minutes, the audience (of about 1,000) was enthralled by the artistry of the performers.' 'Following each item, the applause lasted many minutes, as the audience showed their appreciation of artistry in its highest form.'

At the end of the show, Bailie Harold Milne came on the stage with Lt. Col. F. Szystowski OBE and thanked the artistes for a wonderful performance and the audience for giving such a wholehearted reception.

In his speech Bailie Milne said:

"I impress the need for understanding with a country which stood up to Hitler's hordes and saved the world, when the war forced them to get out, they continued the war on our side. They fought in the Battle of Britain, in North Africa, at Cassino and with our own boys at Arnhem. Now, the war drums throb no longer, and the battle flags are furled". He continued - "In the meantime, we are offering the hospitality of our soil to our allies during the period of resettlement and absorption into civil life, till the day comes when

they can be reunited with those who are near and dear to them in their beloved homes. If for any reason, that should impossible, might we remind them that Mr Winston Churchill's pledge is still the policy of the present Government. 'Look the portals of the British Empire are open.'"—there followed a loud applause.

Lt Col Szystowski was very much affected by the reception and thanked the audience for the way in which they had responded to the first Polish Show in Fraserburgh.

When the senior and junior members of the 1st Company (High Church) Boys' Brigade Shield winning teams gave their display in Dalrymple Hall, Lt Col Szystowski, who was present, was so impressed that he invited the boys to the camp to repeat the performance. Accordingly, complete with Pipe Band, the boys, under the leadership Captain James Sinclair, M.B.E., paid their visit, as guests of the Polish Officers and men. A large audience watched the boys as they went through their manoeuvres and they were enthusiastically applauded. The Pipe Band, under the direction of Pipe Major Hector Taylor, played Scottish airs to the delight of the Polish audience. Following the display, the boys were entertained to tea in the N.A.A.F.I. Lt Col. Szystowski spoke and thanked Capt. Sinclair for bringing his company along and providing such first-class entertainment and said they were very grateful indeed.



FIGURE 10 JAN ZAWIEJA'S BRITISH ARMY BOOK (BRITISH A.B.64)

Following the local gala, a 'Grand Dance', by kind permission of the Commandant of the Camp, Lt Col Szystowski, took place in the cinema at Cairnbulg Camp with music supplied by a Polish Band on the 21st June. Buses were organised to run from Fraserburgh and Inverallochy to the Camp. In those days an admission ticket for Forces and ladies was 1 shilling and sixpence (about 8p) and for civilians 10p.

On the 25th July, Private Franciszek Jurczykowski of the Polish Resettlement Corps from the Training Centre was killed on the spot when his motorcycle was in a collision with a private car at a crossroads near the airfield. He was 27. He was buried in Cairnbulg and Inverallochy Burial Ground, his grave marked by a Commonwealth War Graves Commission memorial.

On the 28th July, Wiktor Paszkiewicz of the Polish Army and Rosalind Eddie of Gallowhill Road in Fraserburgh married in the Roman Catholic Church. The bride was an employee of the National Fish Co. Ltd.

At the Registry Office, Fraserburgh on Saturday 30th August, Captain Bronislaw Karwan married Mary Hodge. A reception was held in the Saltoun Hotel and 50 guests were present including Lt. Col. Szystowski. Captain Karwan previously served in the 2nd Armoured Regiment of the 1st Polish Armoured Division. He started a watchmaker business in the High Street, Fraserburgh.

A War Office order of 27th August 1947 instructed that the PRC Training Centre should be disbanded with effect from the 13th September. The actual strength of the Centre on 1st August 1947 was 32 officers and 132 ORs with 31 officers and 111 ORs on courses. Disbandment of the Training Centre was finally complete by 30th September 1947.

Soldiers remaining in Britain organised a circle of soldiers of the Centre, the President of which was Major Tadeusz Poliszewski, one of the senior officers at the Training Centre.

On the 6th October Lt Col Szystowski left the town to take over command of Johnstone Castle Camp in Renfrewshire.

Before leaving he paid a courtesy call to bid Provost Williams farewell and handed over a monetary gift from the officers and men of the PRC towards the Princess Elizabeth Wedding Gift Fund.

About a year later the last PRC unit closed in Scotland, the work of the Polish Resettlement Corps, at least in Scotland, having been completed.



FIGURE 11 JAN BORON, SEATED IN TANK



FIGURE 12 JAN AND BETTY GAWRYLUK AND FAMILY



FIGURE 13 JAN ZAWIEJA'S WAR TIME MEMENTO'S



FIGURE 14 SOME OF THE POLISH SOLDIERS WHO REMAINED IN FRASERBURGH ORGANISED AID TRIPS TO POLAND. IMAGE TAKEN CIRCA EARLY 80'S LEFT TO RIGHT VICTOR PASZKIEWICZ, RICHARD DYGA, BETTY GAWRYLUK, JESSIE LEE, ROSIE PASZKIEWICZ, RUDI KUBERIK, JAN GAWRYLUK.



FIGURE 15 THE NEXT GENERATION; THE CHILDREN OF RICHARD DYGA, WITH THEIR FATHER'S AND GRANDMOTHER'S PORTRAITS



FIGURE 16 JAN GAWRYLUK, SECOND FROM THE RIGHT.



FIGURE 17 PIOTR HANDKAMMER WITH HIS WIFE AND INFANT SON, PETER.

In memory of:

Jan Boron, Ryszard Dyga, Jan Andrzej Gawryluk, Piotr Handkammer, Stanislaw Laskowski, and Jan Stanislaw Zawieja.

All these men had to leave Poland little more than boys. They fought in the Polish Army under British command, and were each posted to Cairnbulg. None of them were able to return home after the war, and married Scottish girls from Fraserburgh. They represent many others.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank:

Robert Ostrycharz, on behalf of myself and the Fraserburgh families involved, for his invaluable assistance in providing translation of the Polish military records, compiling this document, and giving us an insight into our ancestors' military experiences during WW2 and their lives beyond.

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With gratitude to the descendants and their families for the time they gave me, the memories they shared and the photographs included in this document:-

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Much of Robert's narrative was drawn from newspaper reports found in the *The Fraserburgh Herald and Northern Counties' Advertiser* published by Johnston Press plc in Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Jennie Milne

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FIGURE 18 FROM THE COLLECTION OF RICHARD DYGA