

KLUSKA / KLESZCZ

# OPERATION

## "CODFISH"



INSTYTUT  
PAMIĘCI  
NARODOWEJ

Oddział w Łodzi



A target icon consisting of concentric circles and a central bullseye, positioned to the left of the main title.

# OPERATION

"CODFISH"

ŁÓDŹ 2022

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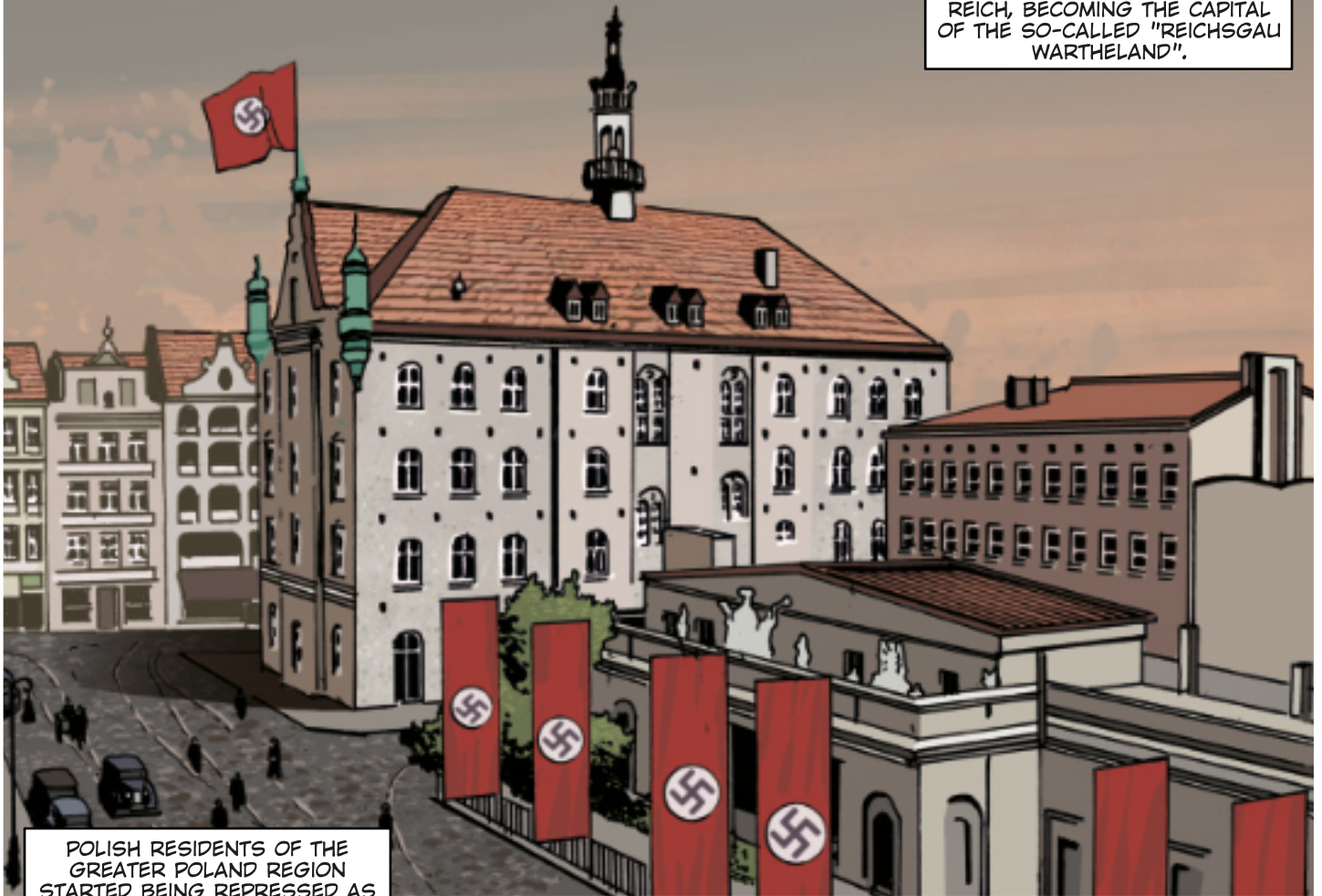
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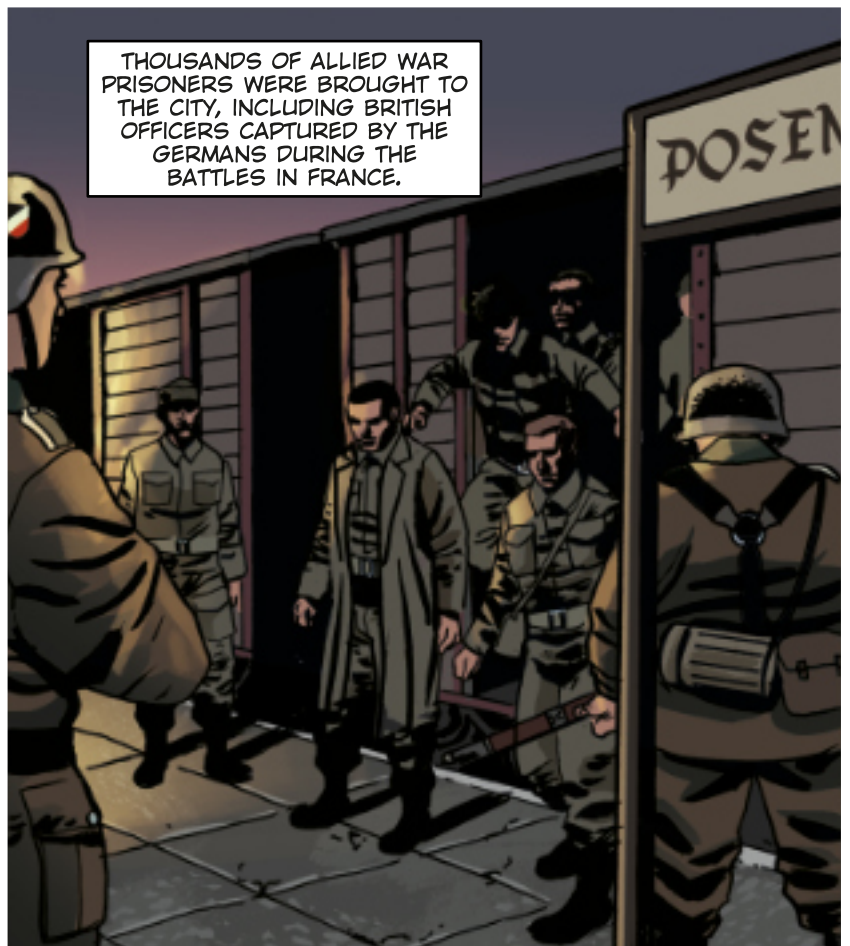
POZNAŃ, 1940

AFTER THE GERMAN CONQUEST OF POLAND, THE CITY WAS INCORPORATED INTO THE THIRD REICH, BECOMING THE CAPITAL OF THE SO-CALLED "REICHSGAU WARTHELAND".



POLISH RESIDENTS OF THE GREATER POLAND REGION STARTED BEING REPPRESSED AS EARLY AS THE AUTUMN OF 1939: EXECUTIONS, ARRESTS, DISPLACEMENTS, FORFEITURE OF PROPERTY AND RESTRICTION OF RIGHTS BECAME THE EVERYDAY REALITY OF THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

THOUSANDS OF ALLIED WAR PRISONERS WERE BROUGHT TO THE CITY, INCLUDING BRITISH OFFICERS CAPTURED BY THE GERMANS DURING THE BATTLES IN FRANCE.





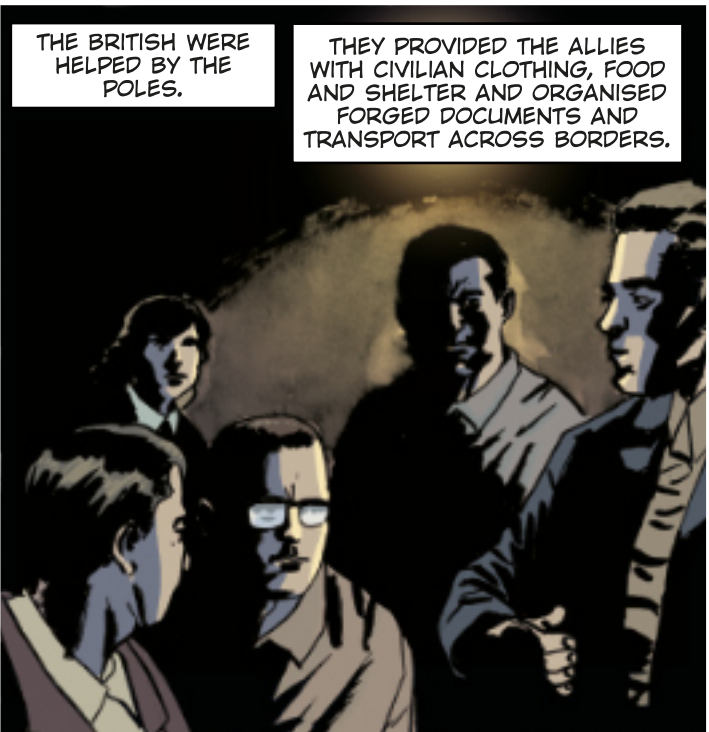
THEY WERE IMPRISONED IN A CAMP LOCATED IN FORT VIII OF THE FORMER POZNAŃ FORTRESS.

THE CAPTIVES STARTED PLANNING THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.

HOWEVER, IT WAS NOT ONLY ABOUT GETTING OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE CAMP.



NOT KNOWING THE LANGUAGE AND TOPOGRAPHY, THE RUNAWAYS WOULD SOON FALL BACK INTO THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.



THE BRITISH WERE HELPED BY THE POLES.

THEY PROVIDED THE ALLIES WITH CIVILIAN CLOTHING, FOOD AND SHELTER AND ORGANISED FORGED DOCUMENTS AND TRANSPORT ACROSS BORDERS.



THE POLES OFTEN PAID FOR THEIR HELP WITH THEIR OWN LIVES.



OPERATION "CODFISH" IS ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR ACTIONS OF THE POLISH UNDERGROUND STATE.

FORT VIII, APRIL 1941

WOZU SEID IHR  
GEKOMMEN? (\*)

WE'VE BEEN SENT TO  
REPAIR THE POWER  
GRID, SERGEANT.



HELLO, SIR?

(\*) (GERMAN) "WHY ARE YOU HERE?"







THE ROAD TO FREEDOM  
LED THROUGH THE  
CAMP RUBBISH PIT.



WITH THE HELP OF TEENAGER ZBIGNIEW KLICHOWSKI, THREE BRITISH WAR PRISONERS ESCAPED FROM THE CAMP ON 28 MAY 1941. THESE WERE 2ND LIEUTENANT GRISMOND SCOURFIELD DAVIS, 2ND LIEUTENANT MICHAEL SINCLAIR AND MAJOR RONALD LITLEDALE.



THEY ARE OUR ALLIES, "EDITOR"...

MICHALINA GORCZYCOWA, AN ACQUAINTANCE OF THE KLICHOWSKI FAMILY, CONTACTED BOLESŁAW KIERCZYŃSKI "EDITOR", A JOURNALIST AND ACTIVIST OF THE POLISH UNDERGROUND, ABOUT THE BRITISH.



THE "DOCTOR", WITOLD ŁASZCZYŃSKI, A CLERK, SOLDIER AND CONSPIRATOR IN THE UNION OF ARMED STRUGGLE, ALSO JOINED THE RESCUE OPERATION.

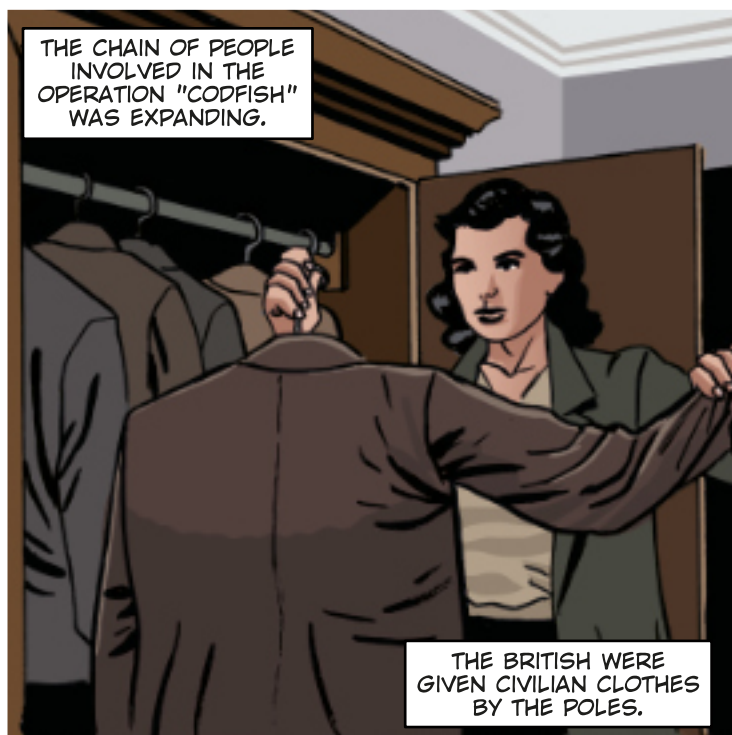
WHY "CODFISH"?

THAT IS THE CODE NAME FOR ALLIED PRISONERS OF WAR, MICHALINA.





THE BRITS CANNOT STAY  
HERE ANY LONGER. IT'S  
TOO DANGEROUS.



THE CHAIN OF PEOPLE  
INVOLVED IN THE  
OPERATION "CODFISH"  
WAS EXPANDING.

THE BRITISH WERE  
GIVEN CIVILIAN CLOTHES  
BY THE POLES.



THEY WERE ALSO GIVEN  
FORGED DOCUMENTS.

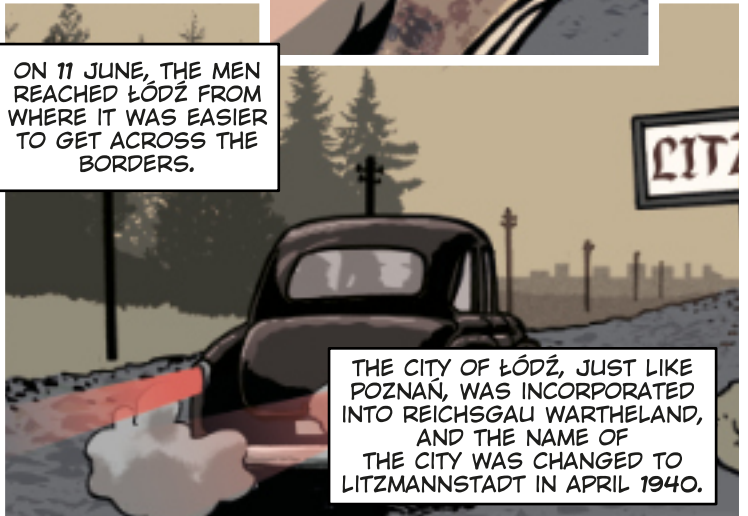


YOU WILL DRIVE THREE MEN TO ŁÓDŹ.

TRANSPORTING THE FUGITIVES TO WARSAW WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE, AS THERE WERE CHECKPOINTS AT THE BORDER WITH THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT.



ON 11 JUNE, THE MEN REACHED ŁÓDŹ FROM WHERE IT WAS EASIER TO GET ACROSS THE BORDERS.



THE CITY OF ŁÓDŹ, JUST LIKE POZNAŃ, WAS INCORPORATED INTO REICHSGAUI WARTHELAND, AND THE NAME OF THE CITY WAS CHANGED TO LITZMANNSTADT IN APRIL 1940.



THE FUGITIVES WERE GIVEN SHELTER BY CZESŁAW WOLF.

YOU'RE SAFE HERE FOR THE TIME BEING.



THE NUMBER OF POLES INVOLVED IN HELPING THE "CODFISH" KEPT GROWING...



MARIA, I HAVE A REQUEST...

ONE OF THE KEY INDIVIDUALS FOR THE OPERATION'S SUCCESS WAS MARIA JASIŃSKA - A SCOUT AND PHARMACIST INVOLVED WITH THE RESISTANCE.

INSCRIPTION ON THE DOOR: PHARMACY IN GERMAN



IT WAS JASIŃSKA WHO ORGANISED THE SMUGGLING OF THE BRITISH ACROSS THE BORDER.



ON 20 AND 21 JUNE, THREE FLUGTIVES CROSSED INTO THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT IN THE VICINITY OF GAŁKÓWEK.



IN KOLUSZKI, STANISŁAW OGÓREK, MARIA JASIŃSKA'S BROTHER-IN-LAW, TOOK OVER THE CARE OVER THE "CODFISH".

FOLLOW ME!

AFTER A STRENUOUS MARCH  
ALONG SIDE ROADS, THE  
BRITISH ARRIVED IN GERMAN-  
OCCUPIED WARSAW.



WARSAW HAD BECOME AN INTERMEDIATE POINT FOR "CODFISH" FROM ALL OVER POLAND.



MORE OF THEM ARRIVED FROM THE POZNAŃ FORT VIII, TAKING THE ROUTE THROUGH ŁÓDŹ THEN SLIPPING ACROSS THE BORDER...



... MANY REACHED WARSAW AFTER ESCAPING FROM OTHER CAMPS.

LATER, SOME OF THEM JOINED THE POLISH RESISTANCE...





... OTHERS TOOK  
A DIFFERENT PATH...



... NONE OF THEM COULD  
MAKE IT WITHOUT THE HELP  
FROM THE POLES.



THE GERMANS REGARDED HELP  
GIVEN TO "CODFISH" AS  
SUPPORTING THE ENEMY, WHICH  
WAS PUNISHABLE BY DEATH.



THE FATE - AND EVEN NAMES -  
OF MANY OF THESE PEOPLE  
REMAIN UNKNOWN TO THIS DAY.





ON 29 AUGUST, MAJOR LITLEDALE AND 2ND LIEUTENANT SINCLAIR REACHED ZAKOPANE.



AT NIGHT, THEY CROSSED THE BORDER WITH SLOVAKIA.

YOU MUST BE CAREFUL HERE!

AT EACH STAGE OF THEIR ESCAPE, THE "CODFISH" WERE ACCOMPANIED BY A POLISH SOLDIER OF THE UNION OF ARMED STRUGGLE.



AUSWEISE, BITTE! (\*)



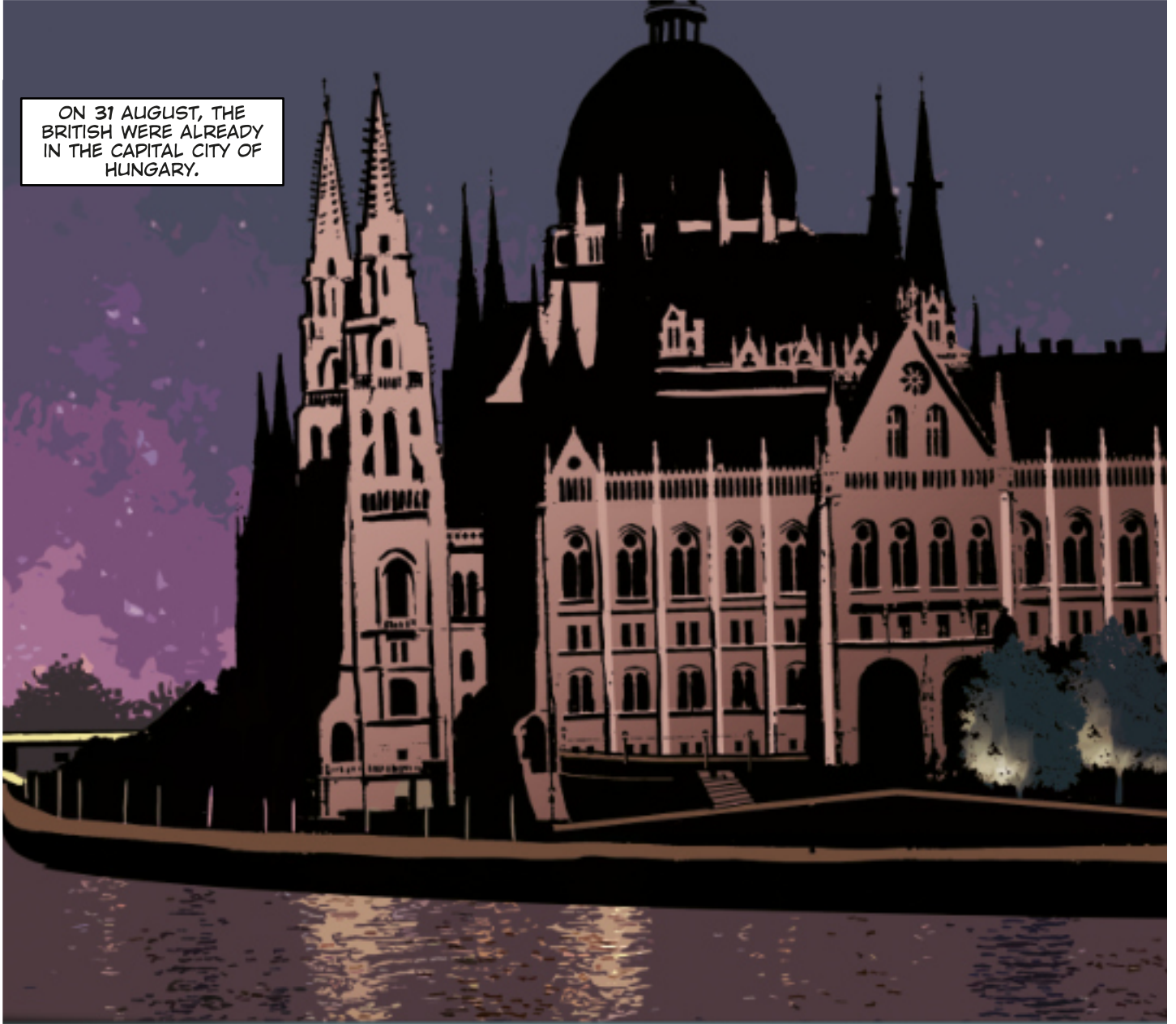
ALLES IN ORDNUNG. (\*\*)



THE UNION OF ARMED STRUGGLE PROVIDED THE BRITISH WITH A GUIDE, MONEY FOR THE TRIP, SHELTER AND FORGED DOCUMENTS.

(\*) (GERMAN) "PASSES PLEASE!"  
(\*\*) (GERMAN) "EVERYTHING LOOKS FINE"  
2ND LIEUTENANT DAVIES REMAINED IN WARSAW.

ON 31 AUGUST, THE BRITISH WERE ALREADY IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF HUNGARY.



HUNGARY, DESPITE ITS ALLIANCE WITH GERMANY, SECRETLY PROVIDED SUPPORT TO POLAND.

WE'RE IN BUDAPEST, WE SHOULD BE SAFE HERE.



TENS OF THOUSANDS OF POLISH CIVILIANS FOUND SHELTER IN HUNGARY, AND THANKS TO BUDAPEST'S TACIT CONSENT, MANY SOLDIERS WERE ABLE TO MOVE FURTHER WEST TO CONTINUE FIGHTING THERE.



THE BRITISH, ALTHOUGH EQUIPPED WITH FORGED POLISH PASSPORTS, FEARED UNMASKING.



THAT IS THE PLAN, GENTLEMEN...



THE RUNAWAYS COULD ONLY FEEL SAFE IN TURKEY, WHICH AT THAT TIME REMAINED NEUTRAL BUT FAVOURED THE ALLIES.



HOWEVER, THE ROAD TO FREEDOM LED THROUGH TERRITORIES UNDER GERMAN OCCUPATION...

ON 9 NOVEMBER MAJOR LITLEDALE AND 2ND LIEUTENANT SINCLAIR REACHED YUGOSLAVIA, THEN OCCUPIED BY GERMANS AND THEIR ALLIES.



FEARING A SLIP-UP, THEY SPENT JUST ONE DAY IN BELGRADE.





IN JAGODINA, THE BRITISH MET OLGA KAMIŃSKA-PROKOP, WHO PROMISED TO LEAD THEM ALL THE WAY TO TURKEY.

PLEASE HELP THEM, OLGA.



THE ROAD TO THE BORDER LED THROUGH SERBIAN LANDS OCCUPIED BY BULGARS, WHO WERE ALLIED WITH GERMANY.



GRENZPUNKT, BEREITEN SIE DIE DOKUMENTE VOR. (\*)



SIE HABEN FALSCHES PAPIERE! (\*\*)



DU SCHWEIN! (\*\*\*)



Бѣда! всички сте арестувани! (\*\*\*)

ON 17 NOVEMBER, IN THE VILLAGE OF PIROT, THE DOCUMENTS OF THE FUGITIVES LOOKED SUSPICIOUS TO THE MILITARY POLICEMEN DURING A ROUTINE CHECK.

(\*) (GERMAN) "BORDER POST. PREPARE YOUR DOCUMENTS"  
(\*\*) (GERMAN) "THEY HAVE FORGED DOCUMENTS!"  
(\*\*\*) (BULGARIAN) "STOP! YOU'RE ALL ARRESTED!"  
(\*\*\*\*) (GERMAN) "YOU PIG!"



SOON THE BULGARIANS LEARNED THE TRUE IDENTITY OF THE BRITISH.



MAJOR LITTLEDALE AND 2ND LIEUTENANT SINCLAIR WERE TAKEN TO SOFIA, FROM WHERE THEY WERE TRANSFERRED TO GERMAN PRISONS IN BELGRADE AND VIENNA.



RALIS MIT DER SPRACHE! (\*)

SOON THE GESTAPO STARTED AN INVESTIGATION.

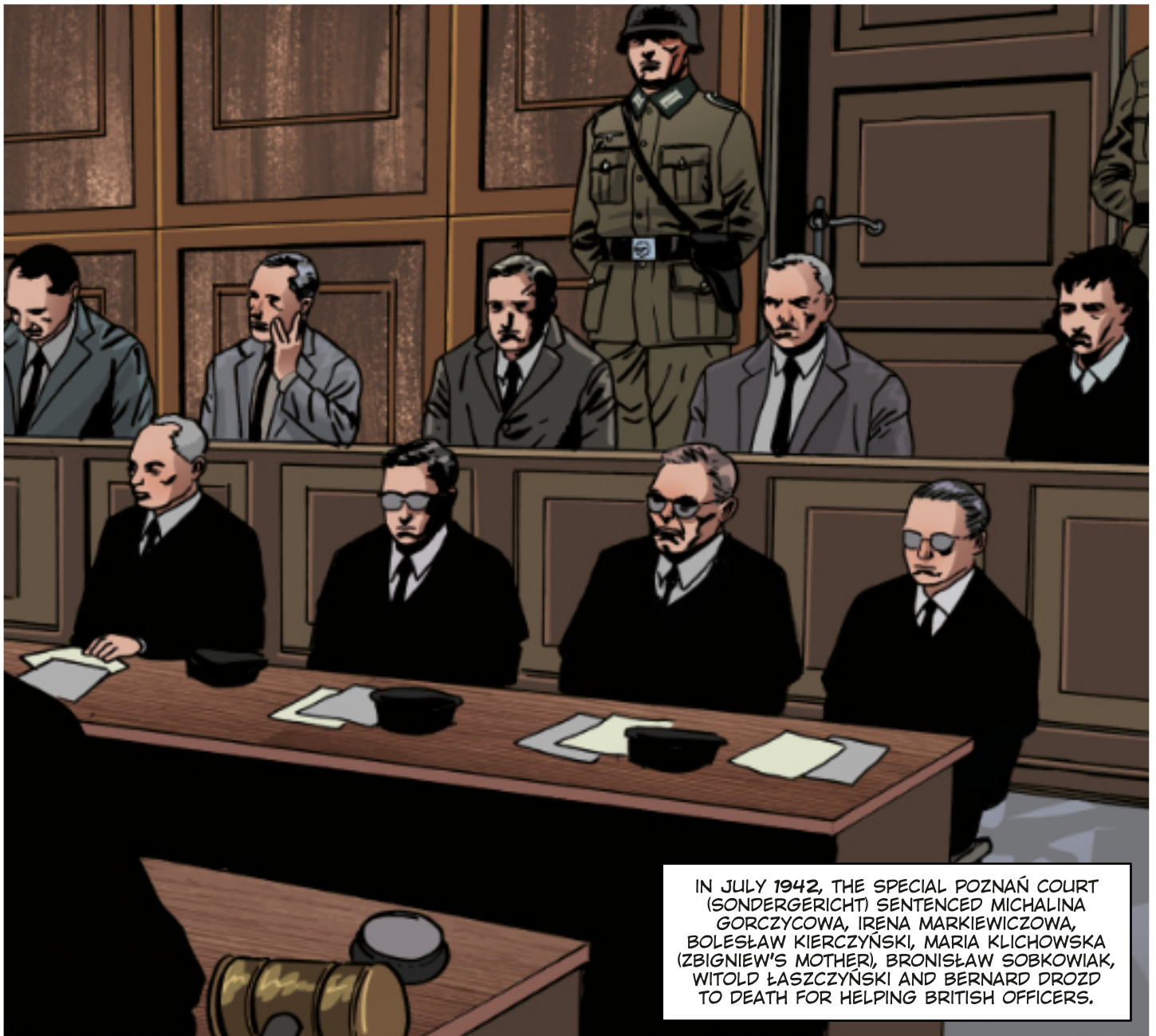
(\*) (GERMAN) "SPEAK NOW!"

THE TESTIMONY OF THE BRITISH ALLOWED THE GERMANS TO REACH PEOPLE WHOSE NAMES THEY KNEW.



THE POZNAŃ GESTAPO ALSO ARRESTED: KLICHOWSKI FAMILY, GORCZYCOWA, THE "EDITOR" AND THE "DOCTOR".





IN JULY 1942, THE SPECIAL POZNAŃ COURT (SONDERGERICHT) SENTENCED MICHALINA GORCZYCOWA, IRENA MARKIEWICZOWA, BOLESŁAW KIERCZYŃSKI, MARIA KLICHOWSKA (ZBIGNIEW'S MOTHER), BRONISŁAW SOBKOWIAK, WITOLD ŁASZCZYŃSKI AND BERNARD DROZD TO DEATH FOR HELPING BRITISH OFFICERS.



THEY WERE EXECUTED ON A GUILLOTINE.

ONE OF THOSE  
ARRESTED IN ŁÓDŹ  
WAS MARIA JASIŃSKA.



IN MARCH 1943, THE  
SONDERGERICHT IN ŁÓDŹ  
SENTENCED HER TO DEATH.

SHE WAS  
HANGED A MONTH  
LATER.



BOLESŁAW SOBOLEWSKI (DIED  
DURING THE INVESTIGATION) AND  
BRONISŁAW WIECZOREK (HE WAS  
ILL AND DID NOT SURVIVE HIS  
STAY IN A GERMAN PRISON)  
SHOULD ALSO BE INCLUDED AS  
VICTIMS OF THE "CODFISH"  
OPERATION IN ŁÓDŹ.



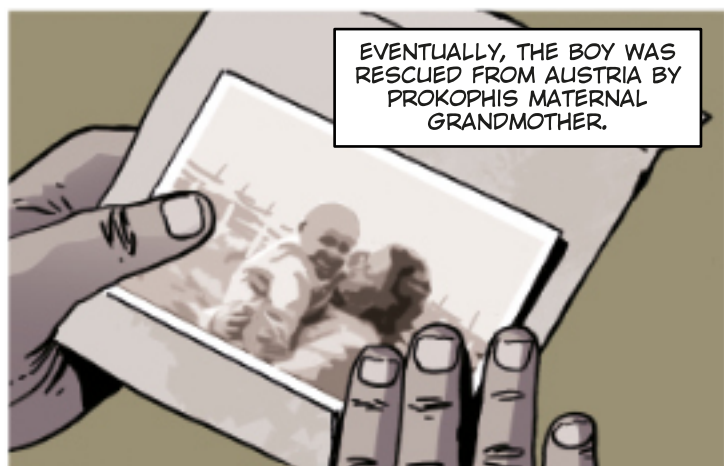
WHEN IMPRISONED IN BELGRADE  
OLGA KAMIŃSKA-PROKOPOWA  
GAVE BIRTH TO A SON.



AFTER SHE WAS  
TRANSPORTED TO VIENNA,  
HER SON WAS PLACED IN  
AN ORPHANAGE.



EVENTUALLY, THE BOY WAS  
RESCUED FROM AUSTRIA BY  
PROKOP'S MATERNAL  
GRANDMOTHER.



MAREK PROKOP NEVER  
SAW HIS MOTHER AGAIN.

OLGA KAMIŃSKA-PROKOP,  
ALONG WITH WIESŁAWA  
JEZIERSKA, WHO HELPED HER  
TRANSPORT THE BRITISH, WERE  
EXECUTED IN MARCH 1943.



IN JANUARY 1942, WHILE TRANSPORTED TO A PRISONER-OF-WAR CAMP, MAJOR LITLEDALE AND 2ND LIEUTENANT SINCLAIR ATTEMPTED TO ESCAPE.



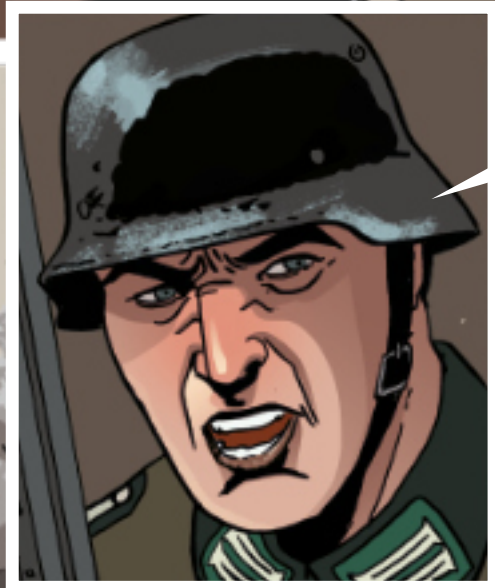
SCHNELLER! (\*)



ICH BIN FERTIG! (\*\*)



(\*) (GERMAN) "FASTER!"  
(\*\*) (GERMAN) "I'VE ALREADY FINISHED!"



VERDAMMT! (\*)

MAJOR LITTLEDALE MANAGED TO ESCAPE AND HIDE IN THE OCCUPIED CZECHIA.



(\*) (GERMAN) "OH HELL!"

## Oflag IV C Colditz



Within the walls of the castle in Colditz, near Dresden, the Germans set up a POW camp for high-profile prisoners. Here the paths of the "Codfish" who had escaped from the Poznań Fort crossed again. They all kept trying to get out of German captivity.

Little Dale:  
w 1302  
Lestart-  
colditz  
+ 1944



Ronald Littledale was captured in May in Czechia. Imprisoned in Colditz, he managed to escape and return to the UK. He continued to fight against the Germans and was killed in September 1944 in France.

M. Sinclair:  
Lestart-  
1938 - 1944



Michael Sinclair made multiple attempts to escape Colditz. He was shot dead by guards in September 1944 during one of these attempts.



Grismond Scourfield Davis, who did not leave Warsaw with his colleagues, was recaptured by the Germans in the Polish capital. After an unsuccessful attempt to escape from Colditz, he survived in the camp until its liberation by the Americans in April 1945. He continued his military career. He died in 2006.





AS THE POLISH CONSPIRATORS CONCEALED THEIR ACTIVITIES WELL, THE MAIN SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE "CODFISH" RESCUE OPERATION REMAINS THE FILES OF THE GERMAN INVESTIGATORS.

THESE MATERIALS ARE INCOMPLETE, SO TO THIS DAY, WE DO NOT KNOW THE NAMES OF ALL THOSE WHO SUPPORTED THE BRITISH IN THEIR ESCAPE.



WE ARE STILL TRYING TO FIND OUT THE DETAILS OF THIS SPECTACULAR OPERATION OF THE POLISH UNDERGROUND.



WE ALSO REMEMBER THOSE WHO PAID THE ULTIMATE PRICE FOR HELPING THE BRITISH.

MARIA JASIŃSKA, A HEROIC PHARMACIST AND SCOUT, MURDERED BY THE NAZI CRIMINALS ON 20 APRIL 1943 FOR HELPING PRISONERS OF WAR, WORKED IN THIS PHARMACY. PHARMACISTS SCOUTS.





# Forgotten heroes of World War Two

We do not know why Zbigniew Klichowski, a teenage assistant to an electrician who repaired the electrical network at Poznań Fort VIII, decided to help the British prisoners of war. Had he been aware that his participation in Operation "Codfish" would end in the death sentence for his mother, Maria Klichowska, would he have made a different decision? The motives of the other participants in this endeavour are also unknown. They left no memoirs, and no Polish documents relating to the escape of the British have survived. It is a paradox, therefore, that the course of the operation can be reconstructed by historians mainly based on German investigative and court records. Moreover, neither the Gestapo officers nor the judges asked the Poles about their motives. Little - or nothing at all - is also known about the characters in the story:

- **Michalina Gorczyca** - from Poznań, wife of a Polish Army captain who was in German captivity (hence her conspiratorial pseudonym, "Kapitanowa"), active in the Union of Armed Struggle from 1940.
- **Maria Jasińska** - from Łódź, a pharmacist who was active in the scouts before the war. During the German occupation, while working in a pharmacy, she supported the soldiers of the Polish Underground State by preparing parcels of medicines for those in hiding and the wounded and organising their forged documents. She was involved in smuggling people across the border.
- **Olga Kamińska-Prokop** - from Katowice, a scout. During the war, she followed her soldier husband to Hungary and then to Yugoslavia, where - despite her advanced pregnancy - she became active in the underground, supporting the smuggling of refugees to Turkey.
- **Bolesław Kierczyński** - editor of the Poznań press in the interwar period, publishing mainly sports columns. He fought against the Germans in September 1939 and was wounded. Imprisoned for journalistic activism. After his release, he took a job as a chauffeur and became active in the underground.
- **Witold Łaszczyński** - Varsovian by birth, a citizen of Poznań by choice, civil servant, social activist connected with the socialist movement, Hungarian honorary consul in Poznań. In September 1939, in the ranks of the "Poznań" Army, he fought against the Germans, was wounded and lost an eye. He undertook underground activity in the Union of Armed Struggle under the pseudonym "Doctor".

Others are known only by name, while many - those not unmasked by the German investigators - will remain anonymous forever. The course of the operation itself also raises numerous questions (for example, there is still no concrete information about the Warsaw episode).

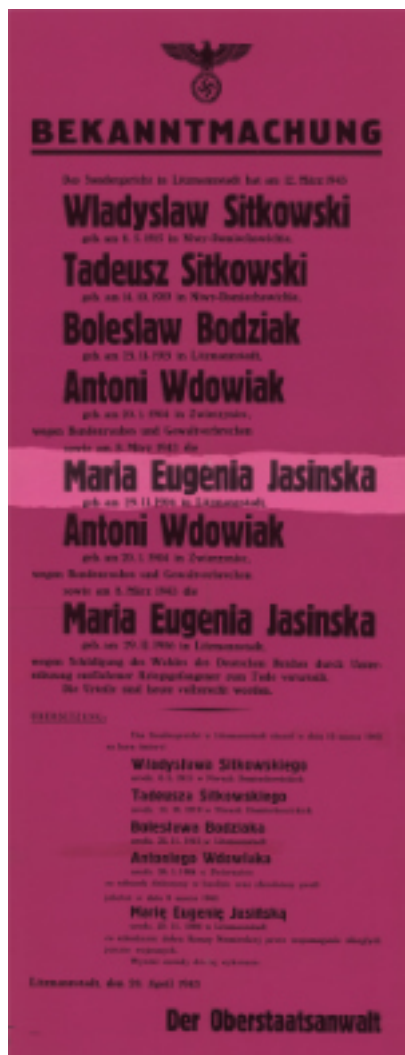
.....



It must be stressed at this point that the events depicted in the comic strip were not a stand-alone example of heroism. The initial military successes of the Third Reich led to many Allied soldiers being taken prisoner by the Germans. They were often sent to camps located on the territory of occupied Poland. When they managed to escape, they had to rely on the help of Poles. And the Poles did help, even though they were threatened with the death penalty for such activities.

Operation "Codfish" was carried out within the military structures of the Union of Armed Struggle (later the Home Army) and with the approval of the London Government of the Republic of Poland in exile almost until the end of the war. It mainly involved hiding fugitives in German - occupied territory, including providing shelter and forged documents, as well as financial means of subsistence and daily care (needed especially for those fugitives who did not know the Polish language and the realities of the occupation). The second - even more risky - stage involved attempts to smuggle prisoners of war across borders to countries that were outside the control of the Third Reich. The routes varied, leading, for example, to Sweden, Switzerland, Hungary, France (from where attempts were made to transport fugitives to Spain or directly to the British Isles) and even - via Romania - to North Africa. Some of the British were also sent east to the territory of the Soviet Union.

In the absence of documents, it is difficult to estimate the true extent of the support given to Allied escapees from German camps, but it can be assumed that Poles helped - either by hiding in the occupied country until the end of the war or by organising smuggling abroad - at least several hundred "Codfish". This care was understood as an expression of natural cooperation with Britain, Poland's ally, and as a form of resistance against the German occupier. For the Polish authorities in London, Operation "Codfish" was also important for political reasons, demonstrating to the Allies the efficiency and usefulness of the Polish Underground State in the fight against the Third Reich.



German poster announcing the execution of Maria Jasińska and others.

It is difficult to say whether these were the arguments that guided Zbigniew Klichowski when he answered the call of the British prisoners of war and initiated the network of people of goodwill - the organisers of the operation, whose stories we have told in this comic. It should be noted here that although the rescue of the "Codfish" was carried out as part of the activities of the Union of Armed Struggle (later the Home Army), it would have had no chance of success if not for the participation of civilians. It was they who often paid the highest price for their commitment. While The Geneva Convention protected allied prisoners of war and, if captured while attempting to escape, were usually sent back to the camp (this was, after all, also the fate of Major Littledale and Lieutenant Sinclair), the fate of the Poles who helped them was much worse. This makes us all the more obliged to remember the heroes of Operation "Codfish".

Bartłomiej Kluska, PhD

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# From captive to partisan

The first British prisoners of war arrived in German- and Soviet- occupied Poland as early as August 1940, with most of them captured by the Germans in Norway, Belgium and France. Later, captives from Crete and North Africa were brought. Out of the nearly 170,000 troops of the British Commonwealth of Nations, that is, English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Indians and military personnel from the Union of South Africa (now South Africa), they were primarily sent to camps in eastern Germany. The largest of these was Stalag VIII-B (344) Lamsdorf (from 1945 Łambinowice); altogether, about 50,000 British prisoners of war were sent here. And in Reichsgau Wartheland, Stalag in Poznań (German: Posen), designated facility XXI-D, was a major centre for British servicemen. Only a few were sent to Łódź (German: Litzmannstadt), and they were forced to work at the expansion of the knitting mills in Widzew and the construction of the Łódź-Olechów railway junction. They were also kept in Reichsgau Danzig-West Prussia (German: Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreussen), in the buildings of the old fort in Toruń (German: Thorn, Stalag XX-A).

Even before the outbreak of WWII, a plan to help prisoners of war had been drawn up in Britain, and a Prisoner of War Escape and Evasion service (MI9) was established within Military Intelligence (MI6). Also, all units received training in case of being taken prisoner. In the various branches - among officers and non-commissioned officers - even so-called persons of trust were selected, who were taught a code to encrypt messages transmitted in letters. After falling into enemy hands, they were expected to maintain correspondence with their families and the officers from MI9 assigned to monitor them.

The first materials to facilitate the escape were already delivered in the autumn of 1940 to Stalag XX-A in Toruń. These included such items as miniature radio receivers (hidden in cigarette lighters), maps of the area where the prisoners were held (disguised in clothing brushes) and compasses (fitted into commemorative medallions). Similar items found their way to Stalag XXI-D in Poznań, where instructions and maps of Greater Poland were glued into chess boards, playing cards or the popular "Monopoly" board game. The system worked quite efficiently, while encrypted reports informed of the number of prisoners in a given place of confinement, the camp commandants, arms production and bombing results. In total, MI9 received around 22,000 relevant intelligence reports via this channel.

The first successful escapes of British POWs from German captivity took place as early as November 1940. Others were recorded in 1941, but the most daring escape was from Colditz Castle (Oflag IV-C), which held so-called difficult prisoners who had already tried to escape from other places of confinement. Second Lieutenant Airey Neave, accompanied by Lieutenant Antony Luteyn, a Dutch prisoner of war, escaped from this camp on 5 January 1942 and travelled from Saxony to Switzerland, where he was transferred to the British Isles. Second Lieutenant Neave's experience was found to be relevant to such operations; therefore, he was directed to work for MI9. The other three escaped Allied soldiers were also lucky: on 29 October 1943, they made their way by train from Żagań (Stalag Luft III-Sagan) to Gdańsk (German: Danzig), from where they travelled to Sweden. Unfortunately, many attempts were unsuccessful, and captured prisoners were often handed over to the Gestapo and murdered. The most tragic escape was from the mentioned camp in Żagań, which took place on the night of 24 to 25 March 1944. The prisoners gathered in a barrack under which the entrance to one of the three tunnels that had been dug was located. A total of 80 of them attempted to escape at the time, but only 76 prisoners managed to get out. To catch the fugitives, the Germans engaged several thousand soldiers and police officers. The case was personally overseen by Adolf Hitler, who ordered the execution of the fugitives. In the end, only three prisoners (a Dutchman and two Norwegians) escaped pursuit, while 50 captured Allied soldiers were murdered. Among them were six Poles, including Lieutenant Navigator Włodzimierz Kolanowski, who was involved in digging one of the tunnels.

In total, nearly 1,200 British prisoners of war dared to escape from German captivity. Some of them made several attempts to get out of the hands of the enemy, hoping for help from the Poles. Most of the aid operations were carried out within the structures of the Polish Underground State, which provided the ally with intelligence networks in Budapest and Athens. On 13 November 1940, agent Krystyna Skarbek escaped from Warsaw by this route, along with thirteen other British escapees. In the following years of the war, Skarbek assisted Allied airmen in German-occupied France and participated in intelligence operations in North Africa.

However, it should be kept in mind that the situation of the British prisoners of war, compared to the living conditions of, among others, the Poles, the French, the Serbs and especially the Soviet prisoners of war, who were starved and murdered on a massive scale, was not the worst. The Germans generally respected the Hague and Geneva Conventions concerning them and allowed them to correspond with relatives and receive parcels through the International Red Cross. Nor did they separate British Jewish prisoners of war, as they did with Polish and Red Army soldiers, sentencing these people to death.



Capt Peter Heiden

Not all British decided to take the risky route across occupied Europe; some of them joined the Polish partisans, becoming soldiers of the Home Army. This decision was made by three British soldiers who were active in the Łódź District of the Home Army. Two of them - pilots Capt Peter Heiden "Peter" and Lt James Flaming "Jim" served in two partisan units under the command of Capt Witold Kucharski "Wicher" and Senior sergeant Stanislaw Karlinski "Burza" and took part in the attack on the Piotrków prison branch in Brzoza.

The operation was carried out on 19 December 1943, and one hundred Polish prisoners who were to be executed were freed. Capt Heiden was killed in a clash with the German crew by a fatal shot to the abdomen. However, his comrade continued fighting in the ranks of the reconstituted - in the summer of 1944 - 25th Infantry Regiment of the Home Army, where his compatriot Ralph Ketland "Ralf" also served.



Lt James Flaming

In this way, each side honoured allied commitments, believing that fighting together would bring them closer to victory. Today we recall the stories of British soldiers whose prisoner-of-war experiences were intertwined with those of Polish conspirators. Some 2,000 British servicemen found their final resting place on Polish soil, and their remains were moved to appropriate and dignified locations, as specified, among others, in two agreements of 1925 and 1955. The British Commonwealth War Cemetery took the most monumental form in Poznań, where the Cross of Sacrifice was prominently displayed. In total, individual and mass graves were located in the Citadel Park, on the southern slope of Fort Winiary, in which 476 soldiers were laid to rest - those who died and fell between 1914 and 1918, as well as victims of the last global conflict. The largest group, as many as 48 people, are the murdered prisoners of war, those who took part in the so-called Great Escape from the Żagań camp, whose urns were placed in the local cemetery. Other commemorated service members are Royal Air Force (RAF) airmen, among them more than a dozen Poles who fought side by side with the British ally. Similar necropolises where the remains of British Commonwealth servicemen are deposited are the war cemeteries in Malbork and Krakow. It is worth visiting these sites and paying tribute to the British heroes, as in this way, we can also commemorate the Polish citizens who gave their lives participating in Operation "Codfish" and whose remains have not been found to this day.

Artur Ossowski



Cemetery of British Soldiers in Poznań

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