

Soldier Bear from 1

Sometimes Piotr would lock the bear in the warmth of his greatcoat so that it became part of him. In the evenings, as he sat with the other men around the fire telling tales late into the night, the bear cub would be rocked to sleep in the sound of his immense laughter. In time, the orphan lost himself in the lives of these strangers and entangled himself completely in the rhythms and cadences of their speech. From that time onwards he became wholly theirs: body, will, and soul.

Voytek, The Iranian Soldier-Bear with a soldier of 22nd Transport Division (Artillery Supply) of the Polish 2nd Army Corps

In this way, Voytek the Iranian brown bear from Hamadan entered the lives of the soldiers of the Second Polish Army Corps, transforming all their destinies.

In the months that followed, Voytek won over the hearts of all who met him. The soldiers, who had all endured the horrors and hardships of Siberia, needed something in their lives to love, and the presence of Voytek was a wonderful tonic for their morale. Despite his brute strength, which grew day by day, he was always an amiable and a gentle giant. The soldiers treated him from the start as one of their own company and never as a pet. They shared their food with him, allowed him to sleep in their tents at night and included him in all their activities. If the unit was ordered to march out, he would march with them on two legs like a soldier. When they were being transported to some distant location, he would ride in the front seat of the jeeps (or transport wagons) to the great amazement of passers-by. More than anything, however, he loved to wrestle with the soldiers, taking on three or four of them at a time. Sometimes he was even gracious enough to allow them the courtesy of winning. Over the next few years, he shared all their fortunes, and went with them wherever they were posted throughout the Middle East. He grew to be almost six feet tall and weighed 500 pounds.

Despite his great size, the soldiers who were stationed with him say that he was easy to get a long with. Polish veteran Augustyn Karolewski said: "He was just like a dog – nobody was scared of him." He liked a cigarette a bottle of beer – he drank a bottle of beer like any man."

In early 1944, the men of Voytek's unit were ordered to embark for Italy to join the Allied advance on Rome. The British authorities gave strict instructions that no animals were to accompany them. The Poles therefore enrolled Voytek into the army as a rank-and-file member of their company and duly waved the relevant papers in front of the British officers on the dockside at Alexandria. Faced with such impeccable credentials, the British shrugged their shoulders and waved the bear aboard. In this way, Voytek the Iranian bear became an enlisted soldier in the 22nd Transport Division (Artillery Supply) of the Polish 2nd Army Corps.

Monte Cassino was the strategic key to the allied advance on Rome. Three bloody attempts by the British, Americans, Indians, French and New Zealanders to dislodge the enemy from the famous hill-top monastery had failed. In April 1944, the Polish forces were sent in. It was one of the bloodiest battles of the war. Much of the fighting was at close quarters. The shelling, which continued night and day without interval, scarred and cratered the landscape until it resembled the pock-marked surface of the moon.

The symbol of the 22nd Transport Division (Artillery Supply) of the Polish 2nd Army Corps

During the most crucial phase of the battle, when pockets of men were cut off on the mountainside desperately in need of supplies, Voytek, who all this time had been watching his comrades frantically loading heavy boxes of ammunition, came over to the trucks, stood on his hind legs in front of the supervising officer and stretched out his paws toward him. It was as if he was saying: I can do this. Let me help you. The officer handed the animal the heavy box and watched in wonder as Voytek loaded it effortlessly onto the truck. Backwards and

forwards he continued, time and time again, carrying heavy shells, artillery boxes and food sacks from truck to truck, from one waiting man to another, effortlessly. The deafening noise of the explosions and gunfire did not seem to worry him. Each artillery box held four 23 lbs live shells; some even weighed more than a hundred. He never dropped a single one. And still he went on repeatedly, all day and every day until the monastery was finally taken. One of the soldiers happened to sketch a picture of Voytek carrying a large artillery shell in his arms, and this image became the symbol of the 22nd artillery transport, worn proudly on the sleeves of their uniforms ever afterwards and emblazoned on all the unit's vehicles.

Now famous, he completed his tour of duty in Italy and when the war was over, he sailed with the Polish Army in exile to Scotland. Here, once again, he found himself a celebrity. In Glasgow, people lined the streets in their thousands to catch sight of the famous soldier-bear marching upright in step with his comrades.

Voytek's last days, however, were steeped in sadness. In 1947, the Polish army in Scotland was demobilized and a home had to be found for him to live out his retirement.

Although he was world-famous, the bear of Monte Cassino was forced to spend his last years behind bars in Edinburgh's Zoological gardens. Artists came to sketch him and sculptors to make statues of him. Sometimes his old army friends arrived to visit him, leaping over the barriers to wrestle and play with him in the bear enclosure (to the utter horror of all the visitors and zoo officials). But he did not take well to captivity, and as the years passed, he increasingly preferred to stay indoors, refusing to meet anyone.

Mr. Karolewski went to the zoo once or twice when Voytek was there. As soon as he mentioned his name, Voytek would sit on his backside and shake his head wanting a cigarette.

He was lucky enough to see him just before his death. Voytek was sitting at the back of his large enclosure, silent and immobile. It was said that he was sulking, angry at being abandoned by those he had loved. Others said he was merely showing the symptoms of old age. None of the shouts from his assembled visitors seemed to catch his attention. But when Karolewski called out to him in Polish, something seemed to stir in him at last, and he turned his head towards him as if in recognition.

Voytek died in Edinburgh at the age of 22 on 15th November 1963. A plaque was erected in his memory by the zoo authorities. Statues of him were placed in the Imperial War Museum in London and in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. But although he had entered the pages of military history, the Iranian soldier-bear of Monte Cassino would have preferred to remain in the company of the soldiers with whom he had shared five years of war and countless memories of devoted companionship.

Eyemouth High School teacher Garry Paulin is now writing a new book telling the bear's remarkable story.

Local campaigner Aileen Orr would like to see a memorial created at Holyrude to the bear who was part of the community and the area's history.

She first heard about Voytek as a child from her grandfather, who served with the King's Own Scottish Borders. She thought he had made it up, but only when she came to the zoological gardens did she know that he was there. When she heard that so few people knew about him, she began to research the facts. She thinks the story is totally amazing! □

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Janek's Corner from 4

concerns about youth, and their knowledge and sensitivity regarding the history of Poland and its complexity in many interviews. Wajda wanted to create a movie that could be understood and thought over not only by those who are interested in history, but also younger generations who seem to be fed up with it at times. Directing such an influential movie with such a good cast, he tried to attract as many youngsters as possible, who definitely look up to him.

I am hoping you will watch the movie once it's played in the US. I highly recommend it to everyone whether you like Wajda's productions or not. There is something magical about them, and there is definitely something surreal about "Katyń" also, despite the controversy aroused around it. It is a well-directed and brilliantly-played film with a strong end that makes an ineradicable impression on people. □

Polish Profiles from 2

The war that broke out in 1939 found Tadeusz in the United States. His wife Barbara was also in the United States and so was their son Michael, who would soon be 15 and would enroll at the Military Academy in upstate New York. Eventually, Barbara and Tadeusz divorced.

Bob Solborg introduced Sendzimir to his secretary Berthe Bernoda. It took 12 years before Sendzimir and Berthe married in 1945. From Kostuchna in Poland which was the beginning of Sendzimir's fame and fortune, there was a lot of traveling between France and the United States, but it all started in Kostuchna, a little town in Silesia.

Poland has never forgotten Tadeusz Sendzimir. The largest Steel Mill in Poland in Nowa Huta near Krakow was named after him in 1990. But his fortune of millions he made in the United States with his inventions.

Sendzimir was honored by many countries. He received the Presidential Award in this country. England bestowed upon him the "Iron and Steel Institute Award," and New York gave him the Liberty Award.

Mostly Tadeusz Sendzimir is remembered in Connecticut where he lived with his second wife Berthe and three children.

When a writer approached Sendzimir and asked to write a biography of him, Sendzimir refused replying, "My inventions are my heritage."

Tadeusz Sendzimir died in 1989. □

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