

## Władysław Grabowski (1922-1991)



At Chambois, France on the 19.08.1944 when the Falaise gap was closed.

Corporal Władysław Grabowski of the Polish 10th Dragoons (right) shakes hands with G.I. John Wellington of the 359<sup>th</sup> US Regiment.

Władysław Grabowski; Władek for short, or just Walter as he was known to local people in his Rotherham days was born in Kraków on the 29.05.1922 into a working class family. His father worked on the Polish Railways and Władek hoped to follow in his father's footsteps. In 1939, he was seventeen when Germany attacked Poland and, as the first bombs were dropped on the Kraków railway lines, his father was seriously injured losing his right arm. As a result Władek had to be the bread-winner for his family. One day whilst working, he made insulting remarks about Hitler. A Ukrainian railway worker reported him to the German Railway Authorities - having overheard these remarks. Władek soon realised that he was being watched by the Gestapo and became aware that he was in danger. He confided his predicament to a local parish priest who advised him to leave Poland. The priest also knew several other young people who were in danger from the Gestapo and so organised a group and told them the escape route to take.

Just before Christmas 1939, they set off from Kraków and travelled through Slovakia and into Hungary. On leaving his home in Kraków, Władek took with him a holy picture and told his family that when he reached a safe place he would post that picture home, as proof that he had reached a safe destination. When the group reached Hungary, they were helped by the British Consulate and a sympathetic Hungarian Official who provided them with visas to travel through Yugoslavia and Italy to France. At around this time, General Sikorski and the Polish Government in exile in France were organising the Polish Army from the soldiers who had managed to escape from the Germans and

Russians into Hungary and Romania, and had joined the Polish Forces in France. Władek and his escapee friends also joined the Polish Army, where he served with the Tank division. In 1940, the Germans attacked Belgium and France. When these countries surrendered to the Germans, the Polish Government in exile moved across the Channel to England. Most of the Polish Army in France was evacuated (in a similar fashion to Dunkirk) by the British Navy from the French port of Bordeaux to the UK. At the time of the French capitulation, one Polish brigade, finding itself near the Swiss border and wishing to avoid capture, crossed into neutral Switzerland where they were interned for the duration of the war. Władek was in this brigade. From here he sent home the holy picture, as he had promised. In 1940, he escaped to Spain and was interned in Miranda de Ebro. This city in Northern Spain was the site of a camp for escapees mainly from France. With the help of the British and Polish Consulates he was able to obtain a visa and travel to the UK, arriving in Scotland where he joined the Polish forces preparing for the Normandy D-Day action. His immediate role was the defence of Scotland. Władek was later involved in the Normandy D-day action in June 1944; more precisely he was involved in the Falaise gap action. Falaise is a town that went down in WWII history, having seen the destruction of an entire German unit.

The remaining paragraphs are available in the book.

This account has been put together with the assistance of Marian Macko, Władek's family in Poland and information provided by Danuta Mackie, Władek's daughter.



At the Falaise Pocket: 12-21<sup>st</sup> Aug 1944, Władek is second from the right.



With his unit at the Falaise Pocket: 12-21<sup>st</sup> Aug 1944, Władek is first from the right.



Grabowski family photo, 1953.



At the Polish Club in Rotheham, Władek Grabowski receiving an SPK medal, looking on is Witold Grzesik. To Władek's right is Józef Wasilewski. In the foreground is Mr Rybak, 1966.