



# BIEGA INFORMATION TREASURE CHEST



## JAN BRODZKI IN MEMORIAM

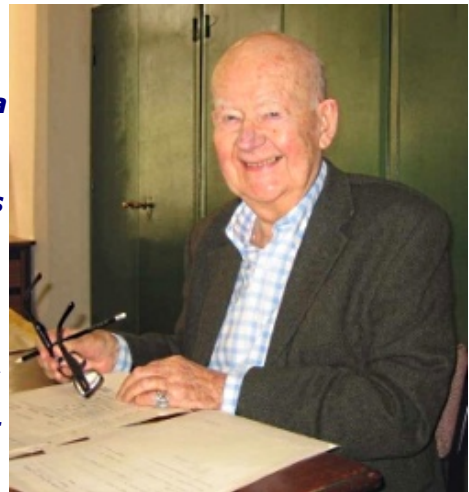
**Polish patriot - 30 years at BBC, Polish Service**

**Jan Brodzki died in his London home 21 October 2013.**

**90 years old, he served for 30 years as speaker and writer for the Polish Service of BBC . He was a veteran of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.**

**He is mourned by his two first cousins - Bill Biega (USA) and Stan Biega (Australia), by his nephews Stanisław Biega and Mark Głowinski in Warsaw, and their families. His many friends in England, France, Italy, Poland remember with sorrow happy times spent with him.**

**We all remember his cheerfulness, his generosity, his wide ranging interests in literature and the arts; and his ascerbic comments on the foibles of the politicians.**



### BIOGRAPHY

Jan Brodzki was born 5 July, 1923, at #2 Plac 3ch Krzyży (3 Crosses Square), Warsaw. His mother, Jadwiga Biega, was a teacher at the Institute for Deaf and Blind, and had married Bolesław Brodzki, an administrator at the same Institute. His sister, Marianna, was two years older. In March 1939 his father died tragically and they had to leave the apartment that belonged to the Institute. Janek attended the prestigious public high school Batory. He excelled in most subjects except mathematics. Unfortunately, two years before his matriculation, Nazi Germany invaded Poland 1 September 1939 and WWII started.

#### *Wartime in Warsaw*

German bombers appeared over Warsaw the first day and continued bombing raids daily. Within a week German tanks were approaching the city from the north, from East Prussia. The city was preparing for a siege, and all government offices had already evacuated to south-eastern Poland. Janek and a group of boy scouts from his school also marched out of the city. They were resting in a group of trees to avoid the German planes that were strafing the fleeing civilians on the highway, when his cousin, Bill Biega and another small group joined them. Together they marched 150km to Brześć, then by train almost to the Russian border. Suddenly all the trains carrying troops and supplies to an assembly point came to a halt. The order came to disembark and retreat back to the west. The Soviets invaded Poland 17 September. Janek and his cousin marched together with an army group through the forests and marshes, mostly at night to avoid the Soviet planes and tanks. Suffering from cold (they were dressed in summer boy scout uniforms) and hunger they covered some 400km in two weeks. Finally on 5 October they reached the area near the village of Kock where the final battle between the Polish army and the Germans was taking place. They were given rifles and some ammunition. The next day artillery shells started landing in their area and shrapnel wounded Jan in the head. That night the Polish general Kleeberg surrendered and German troops surrounded them. Bill managed to get Jan to a German ambulance and together they were taken to a field hospital in a school. As soon as Jan's wound was sufficiently healed, Bill procured some civilian clothing and at night they avoided the German guard and crept out of the hospital to a farmer's house. They rode all next day on a cart filled with potatoes back to Warsaw. To their delight they found their families in good health, apartments undamaged except for some shrapnel tracks and blown out windows.



The five years of German occupation were very difficult for every Polish family, for Jan and his mother particularly so, but



Jan Brodzki - Cambridge, UK - 1985  
with sister Maria Glowinska

somehow they managed. The authorities had closed all secondary and higher schools, but in the second year they realized that the Germany economy needed trained technicians and allowed trade schools to be reopened. Teachers secretly taught the forbidden curricula. Thus Jan was able to complete his Matriculation. At the same time he was employed in the laboratory of the pharmaceutical company "Motor", which the Germans allowed to continue operating.

In 1944 the Soviet army pushed the Germans back and entered the territory of pre-war Poland. During July columns of retreating Germans marched through the streets of Warsaw. On August 1 the Uprising started at 17:00 while Soviet tanks were already on the outskirts of the eastern suburbs.

Jan had not belonged to any of the *Underground* units training for this long awaited moment. When the shooting started he was on his way from work to his home in the southern district Mokotów. He was unable to reach his home but stopped at a friend's apartment at the edge of the open fields *Pole Mokotowskie*, around which there was much fighting. After three days this area was firmly in the hands of the Polish Home Army. Jan then joined the army with the name "Dyzio". He was assigned to BIP (Office of Information and Propaganda) at the division's headquarters.

Meanwhile, the Soviet offensive had ceased. Stalin ignored all pleas from Churchill and Roosevelt to provide assistance to the Insurgents, did not even allow Allied planes, that were flying from southern Italy to drop supplies, to land on Soviet airfields for refueling. Meanwhile under continous German pressure and continous bombing and artillery fire, the area under control of the Home Army kept shrinking. In the case of Mokotów, 23 September the order was given to evacuate as many as possible through the sewers to the center of the city. Jan was one of those who passed through the sewer from Szustra Street in the center of Mokotów to Ujazdowski Avenue at the corner of Wilcza Street. The passage in total darkness, a distance of just over 3km took 15 hours! Then he joined the Kilinski Battalion.

Churchill and Roosevelt to provide assistance to the Insurgents, did not even



Jan Brodzki - West Point, USA - 1997  
at Kosciuszko monument with Lili Biega

Negotiations started during the last week of September, and October 2 the document ending the Uprising was signed by the Polish and German Commanders, generals Bór and von dem Bach. Previously the Germans had guaranteed that all Insurgents would be treated as combatants in accordance the Geneva Conventions.

During the next few days the surviving insurgents were transported to prisoner of war camps, and civilians dispersed to the country. But Jan spent several more days in the ruins of Warsaw in joint German-Polish patrols searching buildings. Then he was transported to Stalag IVB, Muehlberg.

### England

Jan quickly became involved in theater groups, there were several - Polish, French, British. When the Russians approached in April, 1945, the German guards left the camp, many Poles and French also left the camp. Jan stayed with the British who had been told that they would soon be transported home by plane. Arriving in England, Jan was sent to Scotland to join the Polish forces there.

After he was demobilized he came to London, where he had friends including the Murray-Lawes, and the family of Gen. Kopanski, who helped him. For a couple of years he worked in the crystal department of Harrod's department store. Then he worked for five years in Munich at Radio Free Europe, in the Polish section under Jan Nowak.

In 1960 he returned to London and obtained a position with the Polish Section of BBC. He worked for BBC for 30 years, until his retirement in 1990. He worked as writer, newscaster, commentator. In particular he talked about cultural life in England. After retiring, he continued to work when requested for another 10 years, to fill in for vacancies, holidays.

Jan was a brilliant linguist. His English lost its Polish accent very quickly. He was also fluent in French, German, Italian and Spanish.

He managed his finances very carefully. He bought his first flat, 2 bedrooms on the ground floor, in Drayton Gardens, in the 1960s. Upon retiring he sold it and bought the flat on Milman's Street, in which he died. He was given, and acquired some very nice pieces of furniture and art work.

After retiring, he gave freely of his time for various organizations in London, including the Red Cross and the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust



Jan Brodzki - in his flat - 2004 - with cousin Bill Biega

While frugal, he enjoyed the occasional theatre, and good dinners in Chelsea's excellent French and Italian restaurants. He

enjoyed traveling particularly to France, Italy and Spain. He visited north America 7 times.

In particular, he visited his mother and sister in Poland after the end of the Stalinist era. Although with difficulty, he did obtain visas for family visits several times. After 1990 he traveled to Poland annually.

He was very generous, during the difficult communist era sending frequent packages with clothing and hard to get items. He also assisted them in purchasing apartments.

His mother died at Easter 1983.

His sister, Marianna Brodzka-Głowinska was always involved in scouting, even in the *underground* during the German occupation. In the 1990s she was awarded the prestigious medal *Polonia Restitua* for her work in Polish scouting after the war. She died 25 June 2011.

*All photos are by the author, except top picture which is adapted from a photo at <http://spp-pumst.org> (Polish Underground Movement Study Trust).*

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