

Our Late, Notable Ukrainian Resident

Powlo Kostiuk.



This Tank is named after Paul Kostiuk in recognition of his Loyal Service and to mark the end of 40 years association between this depot and the many European voluntary workers who were displaced as a result of World War.

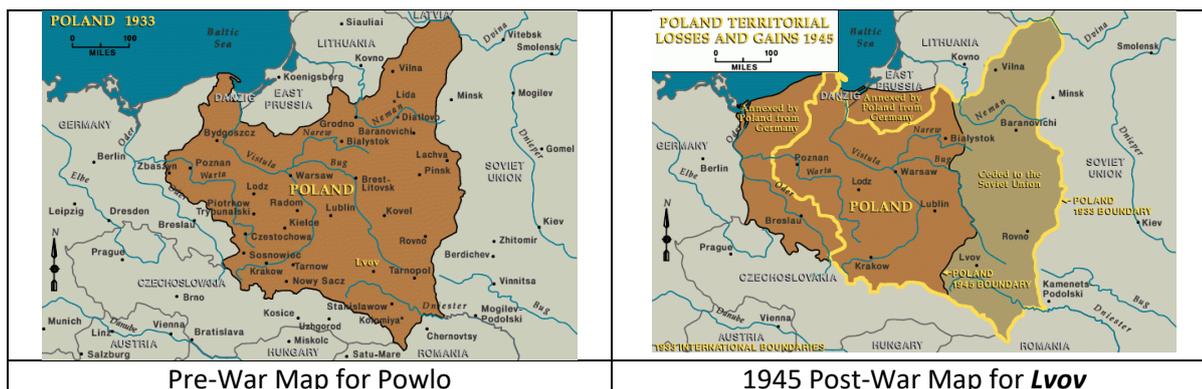
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We were very pleased when Alan Snarey, aided by Wendy, interviewed Powlo in 2012, and we published an article based on the interview in *THS Bulletin 22 [2013]*.

In February 2022 it is a suitable time to write about a **Ukrainian**, who lived and worked in our midst for 40 years. I cannot find the actual date, but Powlo died after this interview – he was then aged 86 and had endured a hard – but happy - life as you can read. **He was honoured by having this tank named after him and has work at Ashchurch Camp**

He has been forced to live in several countries:



Powlo was born in 1926 near the City of **Lvov** [now **Lviv**]. Now it is in the **Ukraine** but in 1926 it was deep in **Poland**, an independent country since 1918 after WWI].

Life changed for Powlo aged 13 after **24 August 1939** when the **Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty** was signed by Germany and Russia – that meant neither country would attack the other and **could divide Poland between them**. As a result of this Treaty, the **Nazis** attacked Poland on 1 September and the **UK declared war on Germany on 3 September - because we had earlier promised to defend Poland**. The Nazis attacked from the West and **Lvov** was their target for very heavy fighting. On **17 September the Soviets arrived** from the East – claiming “to help the Poles”. They surrendered on 22 September but he terms were traduced by the Soviets and 22,000 Polish officers and others were later found murdered in **Katyn Forest**. As Paolo explained, from 1939-1942, he had no choice to be other than a **Soviet Citizen**.

His world changed for a “second time after **22 June 1941** when Hitler did as he intended and declared war in Russia. That year they seemed very successful and **soon captured Lvov and the Ukraine** – like it or not, Powlo was now a Nazi citizen and, as he was 16 in 1942, he was conscripted by the Nazis and fought in their **Ukrainian Division**. **As he emphasised, he was involved in fighting the Russians and not the Allies**. He travelled round the **Nazi Third Reich**. In 1945 the end of the war found him in Austria - now the Soviets wished to capture him. His comrades managed to escape south over the Alps to Italy where he was captured by the British Army.

This was lucky for him because, although he was not treated particularly well by the British, they did not send him to Soviet Russia - some who survived German captivity were accused by the Soviet authorities of collaboration with the Nazis or branded as traitors – and send to Soviet Concentration Camps [**“Gulags”**].¹

As you will read, Powlo was lucky to find his way to the UK and freedom, marriage and work at Ashchurch Camp for 40 years. In 1959, he was honoured by being allowed to join the **British Legion**.

¹ Wikipedia: 15% of 4m were treated in this way

PAWLO KOSTIUK'S STORY

Oral History Transcription by *Alan Snarey*

In the 2012 *Bulletin* Alan Snarey, after a chance conversation at a rugby match, introduced us to Joachim Schulze a German POW. This year he has met and interviewed Pawlo, a Ukrainian conscripted into fighting for the Nazis, who is now a pillar of the local community – with a plaque to prove it!

I was born in the village of Wolycia Barylowa in Ukraine [1 on map] in 1926. Father had a small farm of about 30 acres. We had two horses, two cows, chickens etc. and worked the land. Everyone worked on the land in our area. Our part of Ukraine was under Polish rule until 1939 when Ukraine was split between Germany and Russia and then my village became under Russian rule.

I went to school when I was five years of age. It was the village school about 1km walk – some children started at four, but we all finished at fourteen years of age unless your family had money, then you could go to higher school; but this was not for most people. When I left school, I worked on the farm

In 1944 the Germans came – I was eighteen years of age then and was taken into the German army in the Ukrainian Division – the Artillery.

We were taken to Germany for training, after that, to Czechoslovakia [2 on map] and then to a place near the Black Sea for a Shooting and Artillery Course. After travelling to Slovakia, we stayed there and fought against the Russians on the Eastern Front in Austria [3 on map]. Our division was fighting on a front of 25km distance.



1. Pawlo's Europe today - but the Europe of his youth was very different (Jan Natrass)

When the war finished, the Russian Army came after the Ukrainian division and tried to stop us reaching the British. We had to march all night and tried to go to Yugoslavia because we thought there was transport there. We walked every night and only had army portion rations. It was a hard time and we had to go over the Alps to try to get to safety. We finally fell into the hands of the British who took us to Rimini, Italy [4 on map].

There were 12,000 of us taken Prisoners of War; I was there for three years until 1947.

At first we were like sheep – they put us in the field and every night we were given a spoon of dried milk, a spoon of sugar and six biscuits to last us for 24 hours. We were hungry but the British said the calories were enough to keep us. Afterwards they graded us – the young ones got more rations – so it was ok. The Russians asked if we would like to go back home saying you have left your mothers, fathers and children, but only about 150 went back. My friend went but his family never saw him – they took him to Siberia [to prison camps of the Gulag].

The British said to me, “you are young, you can go to Britain and do something there – there are jobs in Britain – if you go to England you can be free”. I came to England with some others – 12 days by boat – the crossing was terrible! We docked at Liverpool, Camp no. 56, and then were taken to Diss in Norfolk [5 on map] to work in agriculture.

We were still prisoners of war and worked for £1 a week on the land, mainly sugar beet and potatoes. It was very hard work and I was always very hungry. After a year we were told we could now work for normal pay and were now civilian. Two hundred of us were brought to Ashchurch Camp and we lived in 20 huts within the former American Camp.

We were told what job to do; I was told I had steady hands and could become a sign writer. We were all happy at the Camp: there was as much heating and water as we liked. We were given £15 to start our new life: I bought a suit for 50 shillings [£2.50p] and shoes for 30 shillings [£1.50p].

Life in England was hard at first because we could not speak the language. When I came to Ashchurch, I used a dictionary for everything I wanted – like sweets or a shirt – and, when the boys wanted to send letters to home, they had to flap their arms pretending to be a plane to say they wanted it sent airmail. After duty hours we went to work with the farmers – Ukraine reared strong men so we did haymaking and apple picking to earn extra money.

The best thing was to learn to dance. In the camp every Thursday, there was music and I learned the 'quickstep'. With my friend we cycled to Malvern every Saturday to go to the 'Winter Garden Dance' which is where I met my wife; we married in 1955. We used to leave our bicycles in Barnards Green against the hedge – I do not think you could do that today!

At first we could not go back to Ukraine because it was under Russian Communist rule; we could not get a Visa until 1991 when Ukraine became free. Then we went to visit as a family. When we arrived we were put into a camp and my family had to come to see us there. I asked if I could go to see my village where I was born but was told "be satisfied and stay where you are! ... you have on the paper where you can come to and that is it!"

Since then I have made several visits and am able now to go to my village – of the children I went to school with there are only two girls left and one boy in Australia. Life is still very hard in Ukraine – especially for the women. It seems the women do the work – and the men drink the liquor they make from the sugar beet!

I came to Twyning in 1956 – it was very different then: a small village with many greenhouses and orchards. I like it here and I am very fond of Twyning. I even joined the British Legion and everyone was very kind – at the time I

was the only foreigner ever to have been admitted to the Twyning Branch of the British Legion.

I keep in touch with comrades through the 'Old Comrades Association'. I was Chairman but there are not many of us left now – of the 200 there are only ten left – we still meet up together – I am the youngest at 86!

A lot of Ukrainians went to Canada – there are a lot of Ukrainians there. I had the chance to go but I have no regrets about coming to England – I have been very happy here.



2. Pawlo's Presentation

After three years at the Camp, we were told we could change jobs and work anywhere but I stayed at the Camp until I retired – I worked there 40 years and the tank positioned at the entrance to the Camp is known as *Paul K*. The inscription on the plaque in front of the tank reads:

This Tank is named after Paul Kostiuk in recognition of his Loyal Service and to mark the end of 40 years association between this depot and the many European voluntary workers who were displaced as a result of World War.

Topic: Powlo Kostiuk

Photo:

<p>Ex-P.O.W. In Legion</p>  <p>MR. POWLO KOSTIUK, of Fleet Close, Twyning, who</p>	<p>MR. POWLO KOSTIUK, of Fleet Close, Twyning, who became naturalised recently, is the only foreigner ever to have been admitted to the Twyning branch of the British Legion. It is certain that there are very few foreigners in the Legion anywhere in the country.</p> <p>Born in Lvov, in the Ukraine, 32 years ago, Mr. Kostiuk has been in this country for twelve years, having come here first as prisoner of war. He left the Ukraine when he was 18. At the time he had just completed his early training as a signwriter, a trade in which he is employed at Ashchurch Depot.</p> <p>During the war he was a member of the Ukrainian Division and was captured in Austria. He spent two years in a prisoner of war camp in Italy and when he came to England was sent first to a camp in Norfolk.</p> <p>Four years ago he married. The couple have a 7-month-old son, Peter.</p> <p>In excellent English which, he said, he learned from his wife, he told me that he joined the British Legion in November last year.</p> <p>"They have welcomed me," he said. "and everyone has been very kind. I like the social life there."</p> <p>He said he enjoyed life in this country and had no desire to go back to the Ukraine except to visit his mother, who was still living in his home town.</p> <p>"I like it here. I like the people and I am very fond of Twyning." His tone spoke volumes.</p>
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Details: Fleet Close, Twyning; aged 32, born Lvov Ukraine; came as POW from Austria 12 years ago; married with 7 month old son; excellent English thanks to wife; member of British Legion

Date: 1959 Page/Column:

Notes: see THS Bulletin 22 (2013) for his Story written by Alan Snarey

Transcriber: W. Snarey March 2016