

# Memoirs of a Veteran

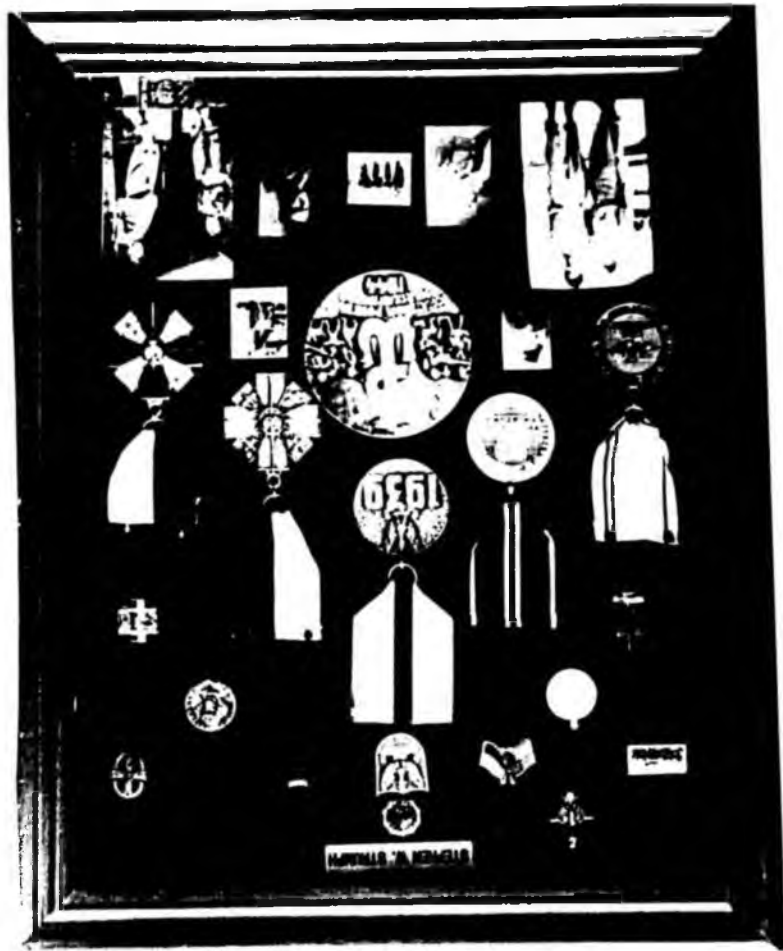


**STEPHEN W. STRUMPH**  
**Born - January 4, 1918**  
**Place of Birth - Warsaw, Poland**

## Chapter I: Childhood in Poland

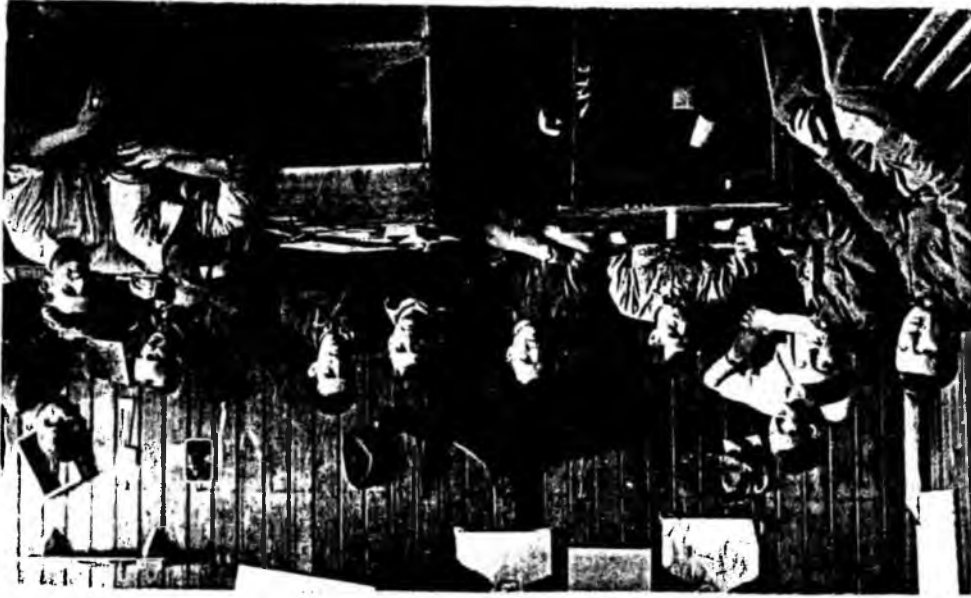
World War I came to an end in Poland and Europe in 1918. I was eleven months old when Armistice was signed in Compiègne, France in the famous railroad car of General Foch, between allies and Germany on November 11, 1918. Europe was in peace and Poland was free again as an independent state guaranteed by the Treaty of Versailles. Two years later in 1920, Communist Russia invaded Poland again. This time heroic soldiers and civilians of Poland defeated Communist hordes near Warsaw and pushed them back to Moscow. A miracle happened near Vistula River and Europe was saved. I was growing up happily in a free country with my parents, sister and brother in the beautiful city of Krakow where I finished high school. In September 1937 I was accepted to the Reserve Officers Army Academy in Przemysl. We didn't think for a moment that a second world war was eminent, yet it all started September 1, 1939 at 4:00am.





## Chapter II: Defensive Battle of Poland

Hitler's powerful armies invaded Poland from air, land, and sea (Baltic sea). After occupying Austria and taking Sudeten land from Czechoslovakia, Hitler started World War II. He knew that Poland had allies in France and England and they would declare war against Germany, but he also knew that they were not ready and had a weak military. He started the so-called "Blitz Krieg" (sudden death war). Hitler had a well prepared military for such aggression and made sure that Russia would not become Poland's ally. On August 23, 1939 he signed a new aggression pact with Josef Stalin called the "Ribentrof- Molotov Peace Plan." Imagine thousands of Stukas and Messerschmitts dropping hundreds of bombs on our fortifications and military compounds killing hundreds of men, women, and children in cities and villages. They also bombed the farms and fields, killing cows and horses. I was one of ten million witnesses of this massacre. We were fighting against Tiger Tanks, cunning S.S. troops, and enormous infantries. I was Second Lieutenant Platoon Leader of the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 22<sup>nd</sup> Mountain division in the Polish army. For three weeks, our badly hurt company of which 35% were killed fought Germans with unbelievable heroism, retiring during the night toward new positions. We were headed east toward the Vistula River (the main river in the middle of Poland running from the Karp<sup>h</sup>athia mountains to the Baltic Sea). Our Commander in Chief Marechal Smigly was thinking of taking defensive positions along this natural source, however, when he heard blasting cannons and gunfire from the other side of the Vistula River he understood what was happening. Stalin's Communist armies were coming from the east. The fight was over for us. Cursing and crying, we had to accept the fact that the Communists crossed the Polish frontier on September 17<sup>th</sup> and gave us the final "Coup De Grace." Thousands of officers and soldiers became prisoners of war in German P.O.W. camps. I was one of them!



### Chapter III: Prisoner of War (P.O.W.) Camps

After 21 years of freedom, two enemies divided Poland again and terror existed on both sides of the Vistula River. We were lucky that we were P.O.W.'s of the German army. They respected the Geneva Convention, which included specific treatment of P.O.W.'s after WWI, and were not deliberately murdering soldiers. Atrocities and terror were commonly used against the civilian population, especially Jews of Polish extraction. Sending civilians to concentration camps was common. In the Russian occupied section of Poland near the Polish frontier at Katyn camp, the Communists murdered close to ten thousand Polish officers, teachers, engineers, professors, doctors, other intellectuals and soldiers. They were deporting whole families to Siberian camps where over three million Polish people died from the cold, malnutrition, and sickness/disease. Those who tried to escape were shot dead. By simple luck our convoy went west through Poland toward Germany. Finally, on November 1, 1939, we arrived at Lukenwalde near Berlin to Stalag IIIA. Life in Stalag was terrible. We were all dirty, starving and cold. Many of our soldiers were sick and some had died. We slept on straw like animals under military tents and thought we would die. After 24 hours they started to give us one pint of hot vegetable broth and one loaf of comis bread for ten people each day. No soap or water was provided. Most soldiers ranged in age from 19-20. We were condemned in the prime of our lives and had no idea how long we would be imprisoned or how much longer we would live. The winter of 1939-1940 was severe, however, most of us survived. By the end of March 1940, three fellow soldiers and I escaped from work at the farm. After fourteen days of eluding the enemy by running at night we crossed the Pila River and entered Poland. Extremely exhausted, we found a small farmhouse and listened to the voices inside. They were speaking Polish. We knocked on the door. The farmer opened the door and we told him that we were Polish soldiers and had just escaped from P.O.W. camp in Germany. After welcoming us into his home he allowed us to bathe, gave us clean clothing, and plenty of food to eat. Two hours later the Gestapo encircled the house and arrested us. The farmer was of German descent and had secretly sent his daughter to the police. The four of us were brought back to Stalag and forced to do twelve hours of hard labor per day for one week. During P.O.W. camp I escaped and was captured by the police three times. Luckily I never lost my "tags" with my identification number on them. The third capture was in Achen near the French border in Alsace-Lorraine.

## Chapter IV: Liberation of Europe; Total Surrender of Germany to Allies

During almost five years as a P.O.W., I had been in two "Stalag's" and many working commandos in factories and farms. In the spring of 1945, I was with one hundred men in a large farm near Hanover. Our clandestine radio, "BBC" from London was informing us that allies landed in Normandy in June 1944. After breaking German resistance in France, they crossed the German border and rapidly approached Berlin and Hanover. We were elated to see the German soldiers in disorder and trying to escape. The day of our freedom had finally arrived. It was a beautiful Easter morning in 1945. We started dancing and singing as the English company of Sherman tanks approached our camp. They were great soldiers and were so happy to save us without casualties. Upon learning that we were Polish P.O.W.'s and had worked on the farm, they offered us food, cigarettes, scotch, and candy. After positive identification and debriefing, I was permitted to leave the next day. I took a motorcycle from a German farmer and headed toward the United States zone.



## Chapter V: Interpreter for the United States Army

After cruising for approximately 25 miles, I was stopped by the Military Police at the United States zone border. I met with United States Army Captain, A. Carney who was the Commanding officer of the Bickeburg Region. This tremendous and extremely genuine person, a football player from Pennsylvania, told me that the war had ended but we had new problems to deal with. All of the people of Europe who were freed from German concentration camps were taking revenge on the German population by murdering, stealing, and destroying properties and war factories. The captain informed me that he was ordered to organize "Displace Person Camps" (D.P.) in his region and he needed multi-lingual interpreters such as myself. If I accepted, the United States authorities would provide me with pay, living quarters, clothes, food, and medication rations. I felt that this offer was fair and wanted to help the U.S.A. organize the D.P. camps. Captain Carney used my knowledge of the German language to interview German soldiers, S.S. Gestapo and all other criminals before booking them into the Prisoner of War camps and Spandau prison. After six months the job was done and Captain Carney's battalion retired to Reims, France (U.S. half-way house). I traveled with them to Reims because the Polish headquarters was also located there.







Prolonged to 1. January 1941

*Mieczysław*

S. BRZESZCZYŃSKI  
COLONEL GSC.  
CHIEF PLO.

Prolonged to \_\_\_\_\_

IDENTIFICATION CARD

N<sup>o</sup> 40.

POLISH FORCES - Z.W.  
WOJSKO KOMPANI W.

## Chapter VI: Arrival in France-November 1945

Upon showing my military identification and credentials, Colonel Brzeszczynski, commanding officer of the Polish units in Reims sent me as commanding officer of the Polish guard forces with a company of one hundred twenty five soldiers to the city of Soissons. We were in charge of the United States Army depot full of ammunition, vehicles and parts. A few months later in Soissons I met my future wife Sophie. We were married on May 4, 1946 in a thirteen-century church. A Polish military authority demobilized me in August 1947 in exile in France. My first job as a civilian was a beer salesman to bars in Paris. After working for the United States authorities (like Marshall plan for Europe), I went to the United States Embassy in Paris. We immigrated to the United States in 1955, during the time when Douglas C. Dillon was Ambassador. We arrived in New York by boat (Le Flandre) on July 28, 1955.



1947 REFUGEE - SOISSON





## Chapter VII: Life in the U.S.A.

While working for the U.S. Army in Germany, Marshall plan and the U.S. Embassy in Paris, I met many Americans. Men and women, soldiers and civilians were all gentle, friendly, and polite. They told me about life in the U.S.A. and spoke about how the American customs were well preserved from many ethnic groups. Naturally, they were most cherished by all citizens dating back to the U.S. Constitution in 1787. It was a freedom loving and democratic society. It was also a land of great opportunities for everyone who was able to work, respect the law, and defend the Constitution. I quickly became fond of America. I dreamed that one day I would become a good U.S. citizen. France, devastated by war, was not an easy place to live. Although I spoke French fluently, I was still an immigrant and political refugee. I could not return to Communist Poland due to my anti-Communist beliefs and fear for my life. My wife and I decide to move. At that time our son was only seven years old. We looked forward to giving him the best life and education we could. Our daughters Patricia-Claire, and Linda-Anne were born in Glen Cove, NY.

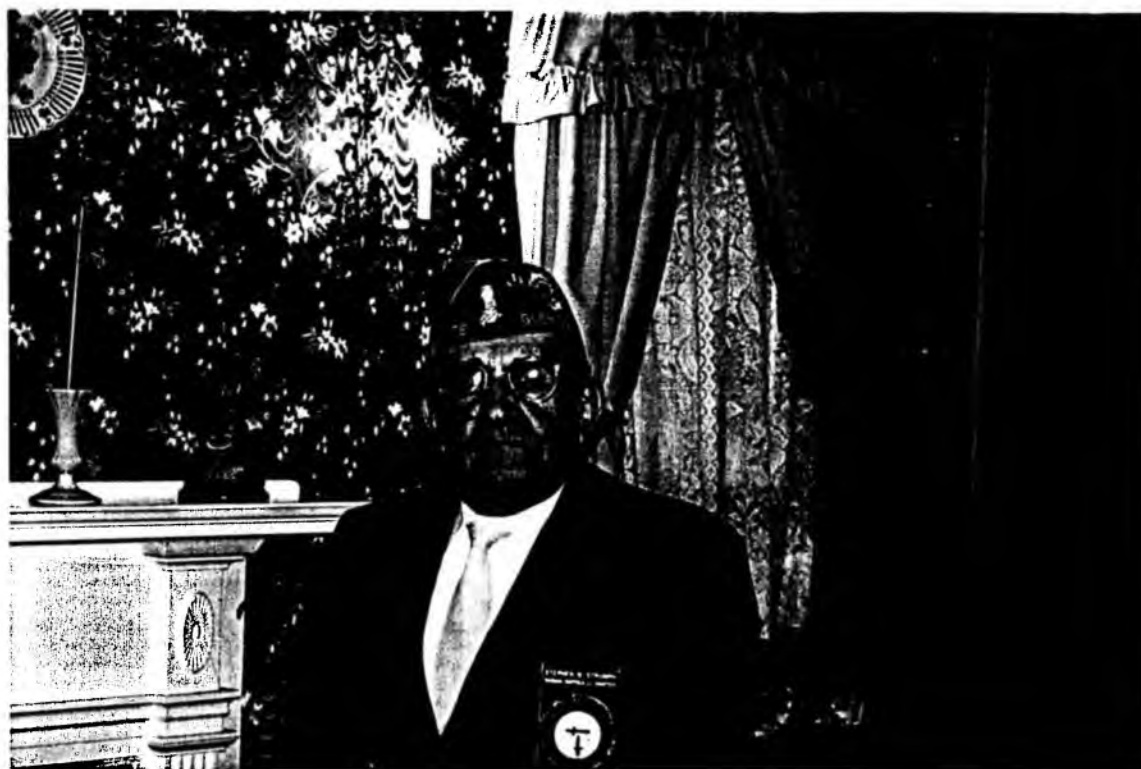
All three of our children are married. Since, 1955 my wife and I were working on Long Island, our new homeland that we still love very much. We have met many friends. Our very first friend was Waclaw (Walter) Pieta, who came from England after WWII. He was a fascinating man and a military hero of WWII. Mr. Pieta served as a Master Sergeant of the Military Police Company in Warsaw, the Capital of Poland. He was in charge of the safety of the last president of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic of Poland, Honorable President Ignacy Moscicki. Walter had always been very helpful to my wife and I as we established our lives on Long Island. In December 1960, we became citizens of the U.S.A.. I worked as a production line manager in a private industry of electronics, and volunteered in many Veteran and Fraternal/Senior Organizations. On May 24, 1991 at the Glen Cove Senior Center, I was honored as "Outstanding Senior Volunteer of the Year" by Mayor Donald DeRiggi and Nassau County Executive Honorable Thomas Gulotta. I was elected by the members of the senior center to serve on the Senior Advisory Council for three years. During this time, I photographed and videotaped events, produced an exercise video, and completed over one hundred photograph portraits of the senior members.



My hobbies include photography, gardening and reading.

One of my fondest memories is meeting Karol Cardinal Wojtyla of Krakow, Poland in 1976 who is Pope John Paul II. We reminisced about the years before WWII that we had spent in Krakow. My pictures and account of meeting him were in Newsday the day after the Pope's election on Tuesday, October 17, 1978. Presently, my lovely wife and I are retired and enjoying the senior citizen life in our new homeland. We are happy to be near our eight wonderful and healthy grandchildren, their families and our friends.

**WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED OUR DREAM OF BEING AMERICANS !!!**







MEMOIRS OF A VETERAN

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- PHOTO # : FRONT PAGE. 1997 - STEPHEN AT HOME, GLEN COVE, N.Y.  
# 2 1930 - Muszyna ZDRÓJ, POLAND  
# 3 1939 - 1989. MEDALES  
# 4 1939-1945 POW CAMPS : STALAG III A LUCKENWALDE, , AND  
STALAG XI B , GERMANY  
# 5 1946 - FRANKFURT AM MAIN, GERMANY  
# 6 1946 - BUCKEBURG MP BATAILLION US ARMY, GERMANY  
# 7 1946 - NEUVILLE SUR MARGIVAL, FRANCE, MAY 4th OUR WEDDING  
# 8 1947 - PARIS, FRANCE  
# 9 1947 - REIMS, FRANCE, ID CARD POLISH FORCES NR.40  
# 11 1947 - NEUVILLE SUR MARGIVAL, GERMAN'S POW CAMP  
POLISH GUARD FORCES.COM.OFFICER 2nd Lt, SZTRUMPF  
# 12 1965- pfc JOHN D.STRUMPH. our son  
# 13 1997- CHRISTMAS, (STRUMPH FAMILY ON L.I.  
# 14 1976 - POLISH SOLDIERS' HOME IN N.Y. BANQUET FOR  
KAROL CARDINAL WOJTYLA, BISHOP OF KRAKOW, POLAND.

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- CHAPTER # CHILDHOOD IN POLAND  
# DEFENSIVE BATTLE OF POLAND  
# P.O.W. CAMPS IN GERMANY  
# LIBERATION OF EUROPE  
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# ARRIVAL IN FRANCE. NOV.1945  
# LIFE IN THE U.S.A.



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