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HALIFAX MILITARY HISTORY SOCIETY

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Front page
An Incident in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, an oil on canvas, painting by David Morier

Editor's Notes

The clocks have gone back, Halloween has been and gone, and we are all probably now getting our heads down for (dare I say it) Christmas. Welcome to the Autumn edition of the *Estaminet Times.*

It has often been said that no street or village in Britain was left untouched by wartime death during WW1; shorthand for the unprecedented loss of life experienced at the time. Despite a widely held belief that this was literally true, there were some villages that escaped this fate. Ian Richardson guides us through some of these 'thankful villages' as they became known.

For years we have delighted in the story of a past pupil of the Crossley and Porter School called Richard Flanagan; a charming fraudster who masqueraded as a WWI army officer. I've always felt a bit of guilt that we were inadvertently fostering some negative PR about the school, a place I've always had some affection for on account of having taught there. I can now happily go some way to redressing the negative PR by publishing an account here of Carl Stocken by Graham Bradshaw based on research done by King Cross Historical Society. As you will see, Carl was an altogether different kettle of fish.

Historians love watershed years; 410, 1066, 1485. More recently we have 1945 and Rob Hamilton's keen eye will talk us through this momentous point in history for us.

Finally, we have our patron, Peter Liddle reflecting on one of the thousands of interviews he has recorded during a lifetime of collecting oral history. Listen carefully to the words of Maria Jankowska. They are verbatim; like having her speaking directly to you in the room where you are.

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Yorkshire's Thankful Villages

Ian Richardson

I recently visited a friend in Shapwick, Somerset, and I was told that it is one of England's "Thankful Villages", a settlement from which all of their members of the armed forces returned alive from World War One. Somerset has the largest number of such villages – nine, out of the total of more than 50 in England and Wales.

The term was popularised by Arthur Mee in his 1936 book "Enchanted Land: Half-a-million Miles in the King's England", the introductory volume to his series of guides, and he identified 32 villages. Nearly every one of the estimated 16,000 villages in England had young men who answered the call to serve, and nearly all had war memorials to mark the sacrifice of lives from that community. Following later research, it was calculated that over 50 villages did not suffer any fatalities and all those who went off to fight came home to their families. That said, they may have come home alive, but many were grievously injured or traumatised by what they had witnessed.

By the laws of mathematics, such villages will tend to be small places, particularly given the recruitment patterns of local regiments and Pals' Battalions, which meant that many communities suffered heavy losses of their young men, as approximately one in nine soldiers in World War One lost their lives.

There is some dispute about the precise number of such villages (also known as "Blessed Villages"), as the home address of a casualty may be wrongly recorded or they may have originated in a certain village but had moved on, for example. Some sources suggest that there are as few as 41 Thankful Villages, but most researchers put the figure at over 50, estimates ranging from 52 – 57. It is generally agreed that there are 14 Doubly Thankful villages, that is to say no lives were lost in World War II either, including the perhaps inappropriately named Upper Slaughter in Gloucestershire.

Yorkshire's Thankful Villages

Yorkshire contains many large towns and cities as well as large rural areas, and has five or possibly six Thankful Villages, all in the former North and East Ridings, including one Doubly Thankful Village – **Catwick**, near Beverley. According to Mee's account, from this village (with a population of 213 in the 1911 census) "Thirty men went to the Great War and thirty came back, though one left an arm behind", and another 30 went off to serve in the Second World War, and all returned.

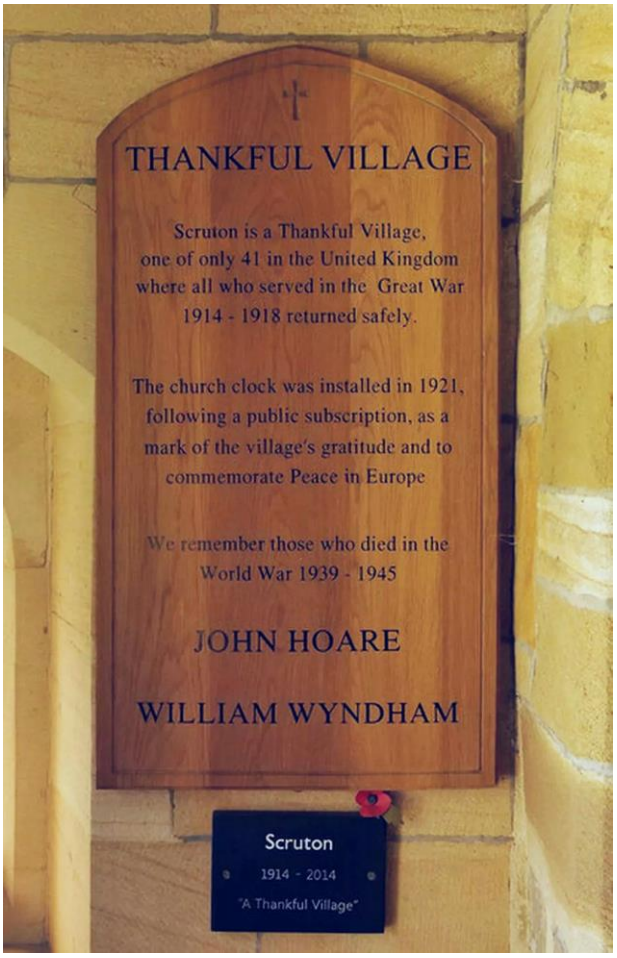
Catwick had no war memorial, but the local blacksmith nailed a lucky horseshoe to the forge's door and around it, for each man who went to the war, he nailed a coin. When WWII broke out, he did the same again, and although the forge has closed the lucky horseshoes survive.

Local blacksmith nails lucky horseshoe to wall in Catwick

Yorkshire's Thankful Villages

Clundal, a small village (current population 128) near Boroughbridge in North Yorkshire, has no memorial in its church or elsewhere, as a Thankful Village. Similarly, **Scruton** (4 miles West of Northallerton) had no war memorial, although after the Great War the villagers subscribed to erect a peace memorial, a clock installed on the church tower. In 2005 the Parish Council and the local church joined forces to install an engraved board acknowledging the village's gratitude for the safe return of all 12 of its servicemen in the First World War, and the deaths of two local men in the Second World War. For the centenary of the 1918 Armistice villagers researched the names of those who had served, to ensure that they were known.

Helperthorpe near Malton in North Yorkshire had a population of 156 in the 1911 census, and according to a memorial in the town, 18 people went to the war and they all came back. Three of them were gassed in the trenches, two were wounded and one was captured but they all eventually made their way back to Helperthorpe. The memorial reads "TO THE GLORY OF GOD and in thankful memory of the safe return of all the men of Helperthorpe who served King and Country in the Great War."



Norton-le-Clay (population 500) lies 2 miles West of Boroughbridge (and 2 miles from Cundall). The village had at least 16 men go to war, who are named in gratitude on a plaque on the side of the former house of a Belgian refugee, Maria Philomena, who left her country as the German army advanced.

There is one other village which claims to be "Blessed"- **Welbury**, 8 miles North of Northallerton, although it is not universally accepted as a Thankful Village. There is no war memorial, but inside St Leonard's Church is a framed Roll of Honour with the thirteen names plus rank and regimental details of those who left the parish to serve in the war. In 2015 some doubt emerged about one of those names, as he was killed wearing the King's colours. He died in the aftermath of an attack against Bolshevik forces by the Allied North Russian Expeditionary Force in February 1919, and he was commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves commission on the Archangel Memorial in Russia. The doubt is because the home address of the soldier (and his widow) was given as Newcastle, rather than his village of origin.

It is possible that other villages may be moved into or out of the list of Thankful Villages as research continues. Surprisingly, there are no such known settlements in Scotland or Ireland. The UK may have lost 2.2% of its population, but in other belligerent nations the toll was even higher. France, a larger and more populous country, lost 1.4 million combatants, some 4.3% of its citizens, and only has 12 such villages. However, there is one village (**Thierville**, Normandy) which had no fatal casualties in WWI, WWII or the Franco-Prussian War.

Yorkshire's Thankful Villages

Most thankful villages in the U.K. had no war memorial, but often a discreet, almost apologetic roll of honour inside the church or village hall, giving thanks to these people who went out and came back. The centenary of the Great War brought greater awareness and recognition of the impact on communities of the casualties and – perhaps ironically - the Thankful Villages brought this into sharper focus.

Editor note :

One of the gassed soldiers that Ian mentions in the 'Thankful Village' of **Helperthorpe** was my wife's grandfather, **Henry Whitehead (1888-1952).** He enlisted in the Royal Garrison Artillery in 1915 and was gassed at the battle of the Lys in 1918, part of the huge German Spring offensive. He was evacuated to the Dannes Carriers base hospital in France and later back to England, where he served out the rest of the war as a trainer. Although he was born and brought up in Helperthorpe, he had moved to South Shields sometime before 1914 and become a railway policeman. It was there that he enlisted into the RGA.

The memorial is in St Peter's Church, Helperthorpe (reproduced right). Apologies for reflected light right in the middle!

Memorial in St. Peter's Church Helperthorpe

Carl Augustus Stocken

Graham Bradshaw

The King Cross Local History Group discovered the story of Carl Stocken when researching an account found in the West Yorkshire Archives of a girl named as **Bonnie Stockings who in 1893 tragically drowned in the school swimming pool at Crossley and Porter Orphanage and School.** By searching through the former pupil's list it was established that Bonnie was in fact Margarete Stocken who had been sent to the home with her sister Dorothy **and brother Carl**, when their father Hans Paul Stocken, who was born in Berlin, died in Hull in 1887, at the age of 37.

Carl was seven years old when he started his education at the school and went on to be one of their most distinguished pupils, leaving at the age of fifteen to go to Bradford Grammar School. He continued to excel at Bradford and subsequently at **Cambridge University,** where he attained a Double First Degree in Mathematics and Geography. After leaving university, Carl was appointed to a teaching post at **Wellington College, Berkshire** in 1904.

Carl Stocken (Crossley and Porter School, boy no.683) 20th Dec 1895

Carl Augustus Stocken

Wellington College was set up as a charitable educational institution as a monument to the Duke of Wellington and as an institution to educate the orphan sons of army officers. Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone in 1856, and the first pupils started there in 1859, just five years before the Crossley Orphan Home and School was opened.

Wellington College, Berkshire

Up to the start of the First World War Carl immersed himself in College life teaching Mathematics, Geography and German. He especially devoted lots of his time playing football, cricket and hockey, which he played at county level. For many years Carl was in charge of the swimming baths, where he gave up an immense amount of spare time, particularly for safety in the pool, which for obvious reasons was very important to him.
His enthusiasm for sport and particular that of skiing, which he had taken up whilst on holiday in Switzerland, would prove to be a great asset for his service in the army during the war.

Carl Augustus Stocken

When Carl was 33 years old he joined **the Wellington Officer Training Corps,** less than one month after the declaration of war with Germany. He signed up for the army in December of the following year but was not **called up for service until April 1917**. He was still teaching in the Midsummer Term of 1916, playing football until July 1916 and refereeing games into 1917. In October 1917 he became a cadet with the Officer Training Battalion in Gailes, Scotland which was a pre-requisite for his application for promotion to 2nd Lieutenant, which he gained in February 1918. Carl's loyalty to the king and country seems to have come under scrutiny because his father was German. It would appear that questions were asked, and W W Vaughan, the Principal of Wellington College, and A A David, the head of Rugby School, who knew Carl at Oxford, both gave their support.
A. A. David wrote:
"I believe him to be entirely British in sentiment and allegiance"
W. W. Vaughan wrote:
"I am prepared to pledge myself to his purely English sentiment and to his intense loyalty to his purely English sentiments"

Carl Stocken at Wellington College

Carl Augustus Stocken

Carl's war was to take quite a considerable change of direction on 7th August 1918 when he was transferred to the 11th Royal Sussex Regiment. At first things went much as previously with him spending the first month in training. Then on the 6th September orders were received that overseas kit was to be issued to the battalion in preparation for **active service in North Russia.** Carl's battalion was to take part in the Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War along with other forces from 16 mainly western countries. The intervention had been instigated when on 3rd March 1918 a peace treaty was signed between Russia and Germany. The Western powers were initially fearful that Russian munitions and supply depots would fall into the hands of the Germans, and, after the Armistice, the West wanted to try to prevent the Bolshevik communists taking control. For many reasons the intervention was a disastrous attempt to reverse the Russian Revolution, and it has been argued that the West has not learnt from this, consequentially subsequent attempts to intervene in other counties have been failures.

British troops in Russia 1919.
© IWM (Q 16630)

On 17th September 1918, Carl with 33 other officers and 943 other ranks boarded two trains at Aldershot sidings and departed for Leith in Scotland. There was a 15 minute stop in York, when breakfast was issued to the troops, and then they proceeded, to arrive in Leith in time to embark on the troopship HMT Leicestershire. As the train travelled through Yorkshire, perhaps Carl would have been contemplating what he would be facing in Russia, and might have been remembering happier times in Halifax, mixed with the sorrow of loosing his sister, all might have felt to him like a lifetime ago.

The ship sailed on the 19th September and dropped anchor outside **Murmansk** in Russia on the 26th, just off "a very barren & rocky coast". The vessel was towed into Murmansk where two of the four companies of the battalion disembarked, including Carl's, and proceeded to **Kola** by train. The remainder of the battalion boarded another ship and sailed onto another port. The records indicate that Carl spent all the winter of 1918/19 based in Kola, South of Murmansk, where there was virtually no hostile action in the area, so the battalion spent many hours in military training and exercises. This including **skiing lessons** four or five times every week throughout December, January and February.

Ski training near Murmansk

Carl as the Sports Officer to several battalions would have been closely involved in organising and leading the ski training of hundreds of servicemen. It would seem he also had a mischievous sense of humour; whilst teaching skiing he would derive much amusement from watching his commanding officer and men learning to do jumps on skis from the roof of their huts.

Carl Augustus Stocken

When compared with the mud, conflict and casualty rate of the western front, it would appear that Carl had a reasonably easy and safe war. In fact. the only deaths of Carl's battalion was from illness and accidents, including a train crash when 6 men were killed. That being said, the cold, ice and snow would be their worst enemies. They were situated just inside the Arctic circle where for 40 days in winter the sun stays below the horizon, and the temperature can be down to **minus 30 degrees** centigrade. They had to face the possibility of losing fingers or toes or even worse to frostbite. Even routine tasks like loading their weapons or preparing rations became battles against the cold, dark and icy conditions**.**

Murmansk Harbour, 1919

Carl Augustus Stocken

On 5th July 1919 a message was received that all troops who had spent the winter in Russia would be going home. By the end of August, Carl had returned to England and was demobilised on 6th September 1919 from the Dispersal Unit in Ripon. By December 1919 he had **returned to teaching at Wellington College** and was also now Head of Dormitory.

It is not known if Carl knew **Eileen Mary Tribe** before he served in Russia or if they met when he returned to Wellington College. However, within less than 18 months of his return, on the 7th April 1921, they were married in St Mary Magdelane Church in Stoke Bishop, with the guest list including an Admiral, a Rear Commander, two Members of Parliament who had played key roles during the war and the military after the war; and W W Vaughan and A A David (see above).

Eileen had been awarded the MBE in 1920 for her service during the war at the Admiralty in the Naval Intelligence Division. Carl and Eileen had three children whilst Carl was teaching at the college. Eileen entertained at their home, held meetings of the college Music Society and she appears in the photograph alongside Carl in the Wellesley House photographs when Carl was the House Master. Shortly after Carl's retirement in 1941 there was a comment in the Waterloo College Year Book that the swimming pool had an odd sense of something missing without him presiding with his whistle. Many of the boys would find it hard to picture College Baths without that familiar figure in shorts and straw hat. There is still an echo… "Junior Relay, get ready."

Much of the information about Carl's life came from the excellent archives at Crossley Heath School and Wellington College which was provided by Marie-Rose Fielding and Caroline Jones, respectively.
Carl's daughter and grandson kindly shared information on Carl and the Stocken family. The King Cross History Group are grateful for all their help.

The World at a Turning Point: September 1945

Rob Hamilton

September 1945 was a month of monumental change. The dust of war was beginning to settle, but the reverberations of conflict continued to shape the future. While the world celebrated the official end of World War II, countries across the globe—many still under colonial rule—saw this moment as an opportunity to forge their own paths toward independence.

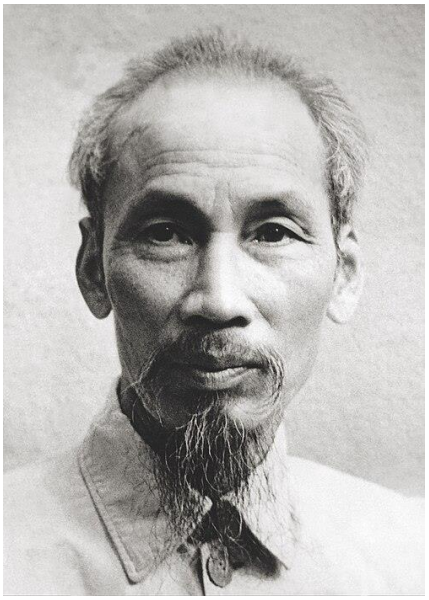
On September 2, aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, the world watched as **Japan formally surrendered** to the Allies. Representatives from Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, the Soviet Union, and other Allied nations gathered for this historic event. General Douglas MacArthur, who presided over the ceremony, declared, "*We are gathered here, representatives of the major warring powers, to conclude a solemn agreement whereby peace may be restored.*" As Japanese officials signed the Instrument of Surrender, World War II was officially over.

Though the guns fell silent, the consequences of war remained. Japan would soon undergo occupation, led by the United States, and begin rebuilding from devastation. Across the world, nations reflected on the cost of the conflict and prepared for an uncertain future.

Japanese surrender ceremony on USS Missourri, 2 September 1945.

The World at a Turning Point: September 1945

Perhaps one of the most significant events of the month occurred later that same day, when **Ho Chi Minh** stood before a crowd in Hanoi and declared Vietnam independent from French rule. His words carried echoes of the American Declaration of Independence, making clear that Vietnam sought self-determination and freedom after years of colonial control.



Ho Chi Minh, 1946.
Wiki Commons

For many, this moment was a signal - colonial rule across the world was on borrowed time. Countries throughout the British Empire, from India to Kenya, were already beginning their own struggles for independence, inspired by similar movements. The war had weakened imperial powers, and many in Asia, Africa, and beyond saw an opportunity to assert their rights.

Here in Halifax, the shift from wartime to peacetime took a different shape. The town marked the change with a Thanksgiving Week between September 22nd and 29th, a moment for reflection and optimism about the future. Exhibitions were held to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of women in the war, the role of local industry, and the reconstruction of Britain following the devastation of conflict.

The World at a Turning Point: September 1945

While Halifax prepared for a new era, one returning soldier provided a stark reminder of what had been endured**. James Crossley, a director of Economic Stores (Halifax) Ltd**, was the first prisoner of war to return home from the Far East. His treatment at the hands of the Japanese was, in his words, "pretty grim"—a classic British understatement. Having lost so much weight and changed beyond recognition, his own father failed to recognize him when he arrived home. Crossley's return reflected the bittersweet reality for many soldiers who had survived the war: while they were returning to their families, the scars - both visible and invisible would remain.

September 1945 was not just a month that marked the end of a war - it was the beginning of a new global chapter. The independence movements sweeping across Asia and Africa showed that colonial empires would not last forever. In towns like Halifax, people took stock of what they had been through and looked ahead to a future of rebuilding.

[This article was originally published in Halifax's monthly *Grapevine* magazine as part of our Society's *80 Year Ago* series following the events of the Second World War]

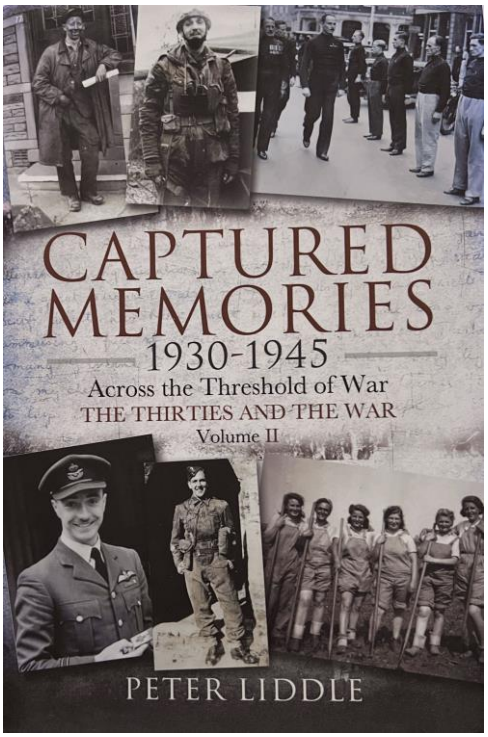
Maria Jankowska and the Warsaw Uprising

Peter Liddle

Introduction (Editor)

I think most of our members are aware that our patron, Peter Liddle, was an early oral history pioneer. He has been responsible for literally thousands of priceless recordings now stored at the Liddle Collection in the Brotherton Library (Leeds University) and the Second World War Experience (Otley). A selection of the transcripts from these accounts were reproduced, verbatim, in two books – *Captured Memories 1900-1918* (Pen and Sword, 2010) and *Captured Memories 1930-1945* (Pen and Sword, 2011). They feature several high-profile figures from History but significantly most of the accounts are from people of all ranks and from all walks of life. It is this which makes oral history so valuable. They are indeed 'captured memories' which in the normal course of time would, in most cases, have been lost forever.

I have invited Peter to make a personal selection of some of these voices and to add a few notes of reflection. The first one is **Maria Jankowska**, a young Polish woman drawn into Resistance, the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and captivity. Because of space this is a shortened account, but if you wish to read this in full then it can be found on p321, *Captured Memories 1930-45,* Peter Liddle, (Pen and Sword, 2011)



Maria Jankowska and the Warsaw Uprising

By way of some background, I'm including an extract from an article written by Rob Hamilton in the October edition of the *Grapevine Magazine* (ed Liz Kenny).

Background (Rob Hamilton)
On the 2nd October 1944, the Germans finally crushed the Polish uprising in Warsaw. In August, with the Russian army rapidly advancing to the gates of the city, the **Polish Home Army rose up** but, in a decision of the utmost cynicism, Stalin ordered his armies to halt. He had no intention of allowing any opposition to Soviet rule in the occupied countries of Eastern Europe and was quite happy to let the Germans crush any resistance for him. The seeds of the Cold War were beginning to be sown.

The Poles had good cause to fear Soviet rule. As part of the German/Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in September 1939, as Hitler attacked from the West, the Russians advanced from the East and occupied half of Poland. They were only driven out in the summer of 1941 when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia. In May 1943, the Germans discovered the mass grave in the **Katyn forest** of nearly 22,000 Polish military and police officers, border guards and intelligentsia who had been murdered by the NKVD (the Soviet secret police). A ruthless Stalin had been determined to accept no possibility of opposition to his rule.

Warsaw in ruins after the uprising

Maria Jankowska and the Warsaw Uprising

Peter Liddle

MARIA JANKOWSKA

Without exception when meeting elderly Polish people, I have been entranced by their courtesy and delighted by their hospitality. I remember so clearly visiting Maria Jankowska in December 2000 at her home in Edinburgh, indeed because of her tale of wartime tension, danger and courageous conduct, but also because this **gracious lady** exemplified the Polish standards referred to above.

Partial transcript of Maria Jankowska's interview

'My name at birth in January 1916 was Maria Finck. It is of German origin from Germans who came to Poland four hundred years ago and developing a Polish identity. I was born in **Krakow**, in what was then Austrian Poland. I went to school in **Poznan** and then to University there, finishing in June 1939.

On September the first I was still at University. We heard the bombs, and everybody was simply told to go home. After some time, perhaps two weeks, a German officer came to our door, and he said: "We know that you are of German origin. We can do anything for you that you like to make your life easier. We leave you in your home." When he left, we decided straight away, my mother and me, to try to get away to the South. We had family in Krakow and so we managed to "disappear", living initially within her big house.

Well, on a suburban train I met a very nice girl in the same compartment, and she was asking me what I was doing, and I told her. This was in 1942. She asked me if I could carry some papers to some person, to deliver them. That was the **beginning of my underground work**. We met in my station, and she gave me the papers in Warsaw. You know, whatever the little packet contained. I didn't know of course, what was inside, and I delivered it to the address I was given.

Then the girl said that I should **move to live in Warsaw**. "Your work demands it." Then I was asked to come to a certain place - I cannot remember what the name of the street was but I can visualise it clearly - and I was sworn in and I had to have a crucifix on my hand and a Bible and I had to recite a sacred oath in front of my Chief, a Captain, or Mr. Falkowski, I think, but that of course would not have been his real name. I had to promise that I would do whatever was asked of me. .

During the **Warsaw Rising** we were together and at some stage then or after the war I learned that he had been a Polish Cavalry Officer based in Lvov. Yes, in response to your question, quite emphatically I took that oath in full knowledge that if captured I would in all probability be tortured to reveal things I knew and then shot. When we were doing very difficult jobs we were carrying a little cyanide pill – yellowish green.

With regard to my carrying out my duties, I went to a certain street, and my contact sometimes was there, sometimes not there. Sometimes there were just other girls there who were passing information to me and usually it was an address on an envelope, the address I have to deliver this message to, and it was just day in and day out like that.

I know it is barely imaginable, but every few days in the city streets, people were rounded up and shot; shot on the streets in public view. I saw it myself. I was coming from some errand, and I noticed these blindfolded people. They were facing the wall. They were cordoned of course by soldiers, and we couldn't move. They were nearly ready to shoot them, and we were knelt down and started loudly to say the Lord's Prayer. That is all we could do, nothing else was possible. You couldn't stop them shooting. Many, many places in Warsaw saw such happenings.

I did not know then about the extermination camps where so many Jews perished but of course I knew about the ghetto in Warsaw and the ghetto uprising of 1943. Through the Polish Home Army, the AK, we had some connection with the Jewish people, but we couldn't do anything at all for them really. We were very sorry for them. We really were very sorry for them. I have to admit that some Poles were very much against Jewish people. I admit it because I knew it.

Could I tell you something about this anti-semitism from my experience before the war? As I told you I was at Poznan University. Around Poznan there were no Jewish people at all and a lot of Jewish boys and girls wanted to come to the University in Poznan to study medicine. They couldn't get in because, well I don't know why - I was too young to understand that. I shared the table for Chemistry with a colleague who was a Jewish boy. Now, very Jewish, couldn't have been more Jewish, and we got on very well together, but the students, generally speaking, didn't like Jewish fellow students. Why? I don't know quite how to say it but they felt they were doing too much as a "people", controlling commerce and not always honest about it. Too much business in Jewish hands.

Now you have asked me whether I were in any way involved or aware of preparation and planning for the uprising of 1944? We were aware of what was afoot and I am as guilty as others in my judgement that we were going to get Russian help. I know now how stupid I was to think like that. We knew it was essential that we had outside help. After all, we knew that without such help the Jewish rising had been ruthlessly crushed and the consequence had been more and more being sent to the concentration camps, and not just Jews, my cousin, a young girl, went, and she was shot.

Simply terrible things were happening which we couldn't stand any longer. It was something you couldn't really halt. It was a breaking point. You couldn't say "no."

Maria Jankowska and the Warsaw Uprising

A day before the uprising, I was sent to a Square to collect a big supply of weapons. It was huge and I had to take a *drosky*, a horse and cart. The weapons were in little wooden boxes. I was terribly happy that I was doing it. It was quite a long way to where I had to deliver them, but everything seemed to be relaxed that day.

A few of us were given rifles. There were perhaps ten or twelve of us in a particular Square and we were on the pavement and saw the Polish Army marching in three columns. That is what we saw. There were no Germans in that neighbourhood. It was so uplifting to share in the spirit of the beginning of it. Of course, that was just maybe for half an hour between four and five o'clock that morning! Then we were to face the guns and the *Stukas.*

We had had no training in the use of our weapons, but we just **went to demonstrate the liberty** associated with freedom, Polish freedom. I didn't do any fighting. We were every day in different places. We were bombed and shelled constantly as we moved from street to street.

The Germans brought up very heavy guns, even rail-mounted guns, and one colossal shell, mercifully without exploding, crashed into the dance-hall. We were completely covered in rubble and it was some hours before we could emerge from the wreckage under that bombardment.

The Uprising was facing a well equiped foe with heavy duty weapons

Maria Jankowska and the Warsaw Uprising

Soldiers of the Polish Home Army take cover behind a barricade during the Warsaw Uprising. IWM

Civilians in Warsaw Uprising
National WW2 museum
New Orleans

Fires destroy buildings at the intersection of Nowy Swiat and Warecka Street in Warsaw. National WW2 Museum New Orleans

Maria Jankowska and the Warsaw Uprising

You ask me about fear or apprehension but there was no fear at all. We know we have to do it, and funnily enough **I was never frightened** - never. I am telling you really truthfully that I was never frightened.

At one time we were in the big telephone building to which wounded were brought. I was not a nurse of course but I have to help them because there was nothing else at that time to do. You would do everything that needed to be done, and I remember there was a boy came in on a stretcher and put on the floor and I was told to sit beside him and from time to time do what I could for him. He was a beautiful young boy with just a small puncture in his throat, no blood, but he was fading away and all I could do was moisten his lips**. I still remember that boy.**

Over the weeks, the amount of free Warsaw was getting smaller and smaller. At the surrender, signed on October the second, the group I was with dug a hole and everything we had was deposited in it and then we were marched out to a station to be transported by train to a prison camp. We were properly treated as prisoners of war. This had been secured by our Commander, General Komorowski.

Warsaw inhabitants marched in captivity to camps after collapse of uprising. Hoover institute

We were put in cattle trucks at the station, men and women in separate trucks - fifty two in each, and we were travelling about two to three days until we came to **Fallingbostel**. That was our first prisoner of war camp, a big one and there were British troops there with red berets, Airborne men, terribly nice and very well-organised. There were French too, working in the kitchen. Both the British and the French saw that we had food. Our morale was not too bad. It was simply a new experience for us but there was anxiety as to what had happened to our families. We got no news on this at all. I think we were sustained by our sense of achievement, staving off defeat for so long. We were proud of ourselves a little bit.

After a month in Fallingbostel, we were dispatched to **Bergen-Belsen**, again just for a month, thank goodness. We had been next to the Concentration Camp, just separated by a fence, and that is where I saw the Russians. They had nothing Believe me or not, they had nothing on them. They just had a dirty blanket. They were walking up and down, up and down, endlessly, until they dropped, and when they fell, it meant that they were dead.

I was very ill there and a German doctor examined me and declared me *Kaput*. I would soon be dead. However, the other girls brought the Polish doctor from the men's side. The doctors could move from place to place, and he said: "If somebody has some milk she can be saved," and my friends got some milk. One of the Polish men had some gold coins sewn into his jacket by his mother. A coin was used to buy milk from an Italian and the milk saved me, I suppose.

In the meantime, everybody was transferred to **Oberlangen**, but I was too weak to be sent to work there – we were all doing work from Bergen Belsen. So they left me with two other girls until I got a bit stronger. Then, after a few days, the three of us, under the guard of a very old German soldier, were taken to **Hanover** station. The city was devastated by bombing and there was a raid on at the time. The soldier simply went away so we were free, but where to go? We had no idea. We were too weak anyway and we didn't know the place at all.

After the bombing stopped, the man appeared again. He took us to another train and we arrived in Oberlangen to join the Polish female PoW's there. It was Christmas Eve, 1944. We weren't searched – very unusual. I was put into some underground place on my own.

During the last month of our being in Oberlangen, we were hardly getting anything to eat and we heard the artillery from a distance. Especially at night. We knew the end of the war was coming. In fact it was Polish troops who liberated us. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience. **April 12th, 1945.** With Poles liberating Poles it was more like a film than real life.

Sadly we were full of lice and what the troops had to do for us was not celebrate with us but send in a DDT vehicle to disinfest us. We were shaved completely, our clothes were burned, and we were given replacements.'

Review (Editor)

I then put a series of questions to Peter to allow him to reflect on his interview.

Q. Out of the many interviews you have available, what led you to single out this one as your first choice?

A. She had been in the Rising! My first such interview. She was so spontaneous and frank, not trying to please. She took ME into chilling experience and as for your readers and my choice, I would not have expected them to think I would choose a WOMAN first but a soldier. I stlll feel – yes, I know subjectively - this is one of the best.

Q. Can you recall what most you took away with you from this interview?

A. You feel the thrill/chill of listening to someone who had been under prolonged nearness to exposure, torture and death

Q. If you were able to reinterview Maria what additional questions would you like to ask her now?

A. Yes, perhaps anti-semitism by Poles at the time.

Q. At the end how did you feel about the outcomes you had achieved from the interview?

A. I came away lastingly and memorably enriched by meeting and working with her

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