

The General Langfitt Story

Appendix 2 - Methodology

Planning the Research

It was in Melbourne, where an informal 'Langfitt Group Association' has been formed, that the idea for this project arose, the desire to record their history being the motivation. In cooperation with 'Langfitt' people in Perth, where the majority of the group have settled, a funding submission was successfully made to the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research and consultants Allbrook Cattalini Research Pty Ltd contracted to carry out the historical research and prepare the report.

The project was to result in this written document, together with transcripts of interviews, a photographic collection, mementoes and copies of archival material. A number of objectives were identified in the research brief:

- to preserve a specific piece of Australia's settlement history;
- to preserve a record of the names of the 'General Langfitt Group';
- to add to the record of Polish immigration to Australia;
- to record the experiences of a group of immigrant women and children;
- to provide material for future generations of the Polish community.

This report forms the major part, but only one part, of the project. The recordings of interviews and other materials which have been identified and preserved by members of the group are valuable, lasting, historical materials.

Collecting the Material

The material for this report came from two main sources: archival material from the Commonwealth Archives in Perth and Canberra; and interviews with members of the 'General Langfitt Group' in Perth and Melbourne.

A steering committee comprising the following members of the 'General Langfitt Group' assisted the consultants by selecting people to be interviewed, monitoring the project and reading drafts:

- Mietka Gruszka (convenor)
- Stanislaw (Stan) Harasymow
- Barbara Kaluzynska
- Tony Kozlowski
- Janusz (John) Smenda

- Halina Szunejko
- Mrs Z. Wasylkowski (Melbourne contact)

Several individual interviews were recorded, some with people who were adults at the time of their deportation and a number with people who were children. Many of those who were adults at the time have since died and it was fortunate that at least a few older participants were able to be interviewed. Some of these older people found it confusing to go back and remember, as they had lived through two wars and had family histories of previous exile in earlier wars. Most found it too painful to give more than a brief overview.

Each individual interview consisted of between two and six hours of recorded discussions. Parts of each interview were then transcribed. In addition group interviews were held, some with family groups.

The interviews recorded the experiences of people within the following broad themes:

Pre-1940: memories of Poland, family life, education, work and leisure, religion and politics, community life.

The war: the growing threat of war, the days before exile, separation of families, deportation, the journey to Siberia, survival in Siberia.

The camps: 'freedom', the journey to Persia (Iran), arrival in Africa, creating a new settlement (structure, work, school, accommodation), life in the settlement camps (the new environment, social, cultural life), news of the war, news of homeland and loved ones.

After the war: realisation that Poland could no longer be 'home,' camp life, continuing after the war, 'choosing' a new 'homeland', acceptance as immigrants to Australia, leaving Africa, expectations of Australia, the journey aboard the USAT *General W. C. Langfitt*

Australia: first impressions of Fremantle, Cunderdin and Northam transit camps, school, work contracts, settlement (accommodation, permanent work, community and family life), hardships and rewards of migration, ties with Poland, return journeys.

One of the major outcomes of this project has been the identification of valuable historical documents held by individuals. Many have collections of photographs, some from Poland, few, of course, from their years in exile but many of the Iranian, African and Indian camps and early times in Australia. Other interesting documents have also been preserved, such as transit documents, education records and copies of letters, some of which are final letters from loved ones, especially husbands and fathers who died or were killed in Russia. Copies of photographs and documents, along with the taped interviews, form part of a collection which will be retained by the 'General Langfitt Group'.

The archival searches led to the discovery of two files held at the Australian Archives in Canberra. One of these remains closed to public access but the other provides details on how the decision to bring the Polish refugees from Africa to Australia was taken, the visit to the Polish refugee camps by the Australian Immigration Commission and how the selection was carried out. A copy of this file forms part of the collection.

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Appendix 3 - List of Participants

PERTH	
GRUSKA,	Mieczysława (Mietka) nèce Nowak
GRUSKA,	Tadeusz (Tadek)
JUTRZEN KA- TRZEBIAT OWSKA,	Stanisława (Adamska) nèce Grzelak
KALUZYŃ SKA,	Barbara nèce Horbaczewska
MAZAK,	Jerzy
MAKOWIE CKA,	Irena nèce Glowacka
PATRO,	Zbigniew Stanisław
PATRO,	Elizabeth nèce Nahajska
SMENDA,	Władysława
SMENDA,	Janusz
SEDZMIR,	Teresa nèce Smenda
SZUSTER- NOWAK,	Maria
TABACZY NSKA,	Regina nèce Tijewski
MELBOU RNE	
DOBROST ANSKI,	Tadeusz

HARBUZ,	Bogdan
JARZEBO WSKA,	Krystyna n�e Kojder
JUSZCZYK ,	Halina n�e Kojder
LANCUCK A,	Helena
NADACHO WSKA,	Zofia n�e Zebrowska
PASZKIE WICZ,	Wieslawa n�e Wojtasiewicz
PASZKOW SKA,	Urszula n�e Trella
PAWLOW SKI,	Ryszard
PIENKOS,	Janina n�e Huszczo
SKARBEEK,	Zofia n�e Kurzeja
SOSNOWS KA,	Maria
SOSNOWS KI,	Kazimierz
SOSNOWS KA,	Teresa n�e Zebrowska
TRELLA,	Boguslaw
WASYLKO WSKA,	Zdzislawa n�e Rewaj
WISNIEWS KA,	Aleksandra n�e Rewaj
ZEBROWS KI,	Zenon

In addition interviews were conducted in Melbourne with a group who had similar experiences

of exile from Poland, deportation to and escape from the Soviet Union, but who were moved to refugee camps in Europe before the arrival of the Australian Selection Commission in East Africa. Their stories could not be included in the main body of this report because they did not arrive in Australia aboard the USAT *General Langfitt* although their experiences of survival and adaptation are no less dramatic. Their contribution to this research highlighted the arbitrary nature of categorising the experiences of Australian Poles on the basis of the ship which brought them to these shores and the need for recording the diverse experiences of Polish people who arrived in Australia in the post-war years.

KUCHTA,	Irena n�e Bielicki
MIELNIK,	Andrew
MIELNIK,	Jadwiga n�e Fuglewicz
PIETRZAK,	Czesława n�e Szcz�ch
WOZNY,	Aniela n�e Wierzbinska

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References

Primary Sources

- Australian Archives, Department of Immigration Files, Series A 445/1 item 225/1/3 & 225 /1/14, Canberra.
- *Polak w Indiach*, No. 18-19, 15 Sept.-1 Oct. 1944, April 1946 (provided by Mrs Urszula Paszkowska, translated by Mr Boguslaw Trella).
- List of interviewees - see Appendix 3.

Secondary Sources

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(courtesy of Mrs Ursula Paszkowska, Melbourne).

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- Zawodny, J. K. 1962, *Death in the Forest*, University of Notre Dame Press, South Bend.

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Notes

1. While the report in the *West Australian* noted the date of arrival of the USAT *General W. C. Langfitt* as 15 February 1950, the 'Certificates of Registration' issued to passengers who disembarked at Fremantle were stamped on 14 February 1950.

2. Estimates of the inter-war ethnic composition of Poland vary slightly. Norman Davies (1983, p. 406) maintains that Poles made up 22 010 000 (69 per cent), Czechs 30 000 (0.09 per cent), Germans 700 000 (2.2 per cent), Jews 2 700 000 (8.5 per cent), Byelorussians 1500 000 (4.7 per cent), Ukrainians 4 800 000 (15 per cent), Russians 80 000 (0.25 per cent) and Lithuanians 80 000 (0.25 per cent).

3. The spelling of place names within quotations is the preferred spelling of the speaker and may appear in different forms in the text and maps.

4. Pork fat or lardoon.

5. Estimates of the number of people at Valivade vary. Most participants in the project estimated

5000.

6. Stanislaw Harasymow. Personal communication, December 1994.

7. Abercorn, Bwana M. Kubwa, Digglefold, Fort Jameson, Ifunda, Kidugala, Kigoma, Koja, Kondoia, Livingstone, Lusaka, Makindu, Manira, Marandellas, Masindi, Morogoro, Nairobi, Nyali, Oudtshoorn, Rongai, Rusape, Tengeru (Królikowski, 1983, map). Two participants also mention a camp at Gatooma, in Rhodesia, although this is not mentioned by Królikowski. This may have been because Gatooma had been used as a camp for Italian prisoners of war during the war and was only used briefly as a holding camp for Poles as UNRRA and the IRO tried to encourage them to return to Poland.

8. All the documentation pertaining to the Australian Selection Commission comes from Department of Immigration files lodged in the Australian Archives in Canberra, Series A 445/1 Item 225/1/3. The date and type of document has been included in brackets in the text.

9. The Selection Mission consisted of Mr A. Joynes as Officer in Charge, Mr J. B. Kemp as Welfare and Information Officer, Dr J. B. Mathieson as Medical Officer, Mr J. Wilcox, Department of Information Representative in Cairo, and a Military Intelligence Officer, Capt. I.G. Shapley, 'to attend to security aspects'. Letter to Secretary of Public Service Board from T. H. E. Heyes, Secretary of Immigration Department, dated 23 September 1949.

10. In Cairo, 36 people were accepted (cablegram from Joynes, dated 31 October 1949), while in Lebanon 228 out of 312 applicants were accepted (letter from Wilcox to Heyes, dated 30 October 1949). This selection team also diverted to Greece once they had finished in East Africa to assess 600 Greek applicants who had become refugees after they returned to Greece from bordering nations after changes of regime (cablegram to Joynes dated 3 November 1949).

11. In Joynes Report on Tengeru (dated 3 December 1949) he gave the following figures for those who had been accepted for immigration: 17 unaccompanied single men; 19 unaccompanied single women; 6 married couples without children; 75 married couples with children; 278 children under 16 years of age; 50 over-age parents for whom a maintenance guarantee was furnished; 181 unmarried women or widows under 50 years of age with one or more children; and 209 children over 16 years of age accompanying parents. He also noted that among those accepted there were 'only approximately 30 people of Jewish faith'. A total of 835, which does not tally with Mathieson's figure of 895. This may be accounted for by last-minute decisions to accept a few families who had previously been rejected because of an unfit family member and some with over-age parents whose children were too young to sign the maintenance guarantees. (See Memorandums dated 5, 22, 23, 28, 29 December 1949.) Final figures of 913 accepted and 843 rejected from Tengeru were supplied in a letter from Joynes to Heyes (dated 23 December 1949).

12. Again, these figures do not tally with the breakdown supplied by Joynes in a letter dated 15 December. Here he noted that those accepted included: 8 unaccompanied single men; 21 unaccompanied single women; 4 married couples without children; 29 married couples with children; 101 children under 16 years; 20 over-age parents, for whom a maintenance guarantee had been furnished; and 39 children over 16 years accompanying parents. A total of 222. He did note here that families ineligible because of one family member had been fully documented for 'future possible use'.

13. This and subsequent documentation on the Australian Selection Commission can be found in the Australian Archives Department of Immigration Files, Series A 445/1 Item 255/1/3. A copy of an IRO letter dated 27 July 1950 notes that four families who had been accepted decided to remain in the East African camps at the last moment.

14. This was according to the report in the *West Australian*, 16 February 1950. It seems more likely that the passengers on the *General Langfitt* disembarked on the South Wharf where the passenger terminal was, as several participants remember. The *West Australian* also recorded the date of arrival as 15 February 1950 while disembarkation documents were clearly stamped 14 February 1950.

15. The idea of the 'Polana' youth centre came from 'three selfless bachelors, Messrs W. Czarkowski, A. Gruszka and H. Pienkos' who purchased the land in 1960. *Imprint*, DILGEA Staff Newsletter, Melbourne 203, 30 July 1993, p.6.

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Maps

Approximate routes of the Polish exiles, 1939-42

Location of Polish refugee camps in Africa, 1942- 50

Photographs

Cover: The USAT General W. C. Langfitt(detail)

Family photograph 1931

Polish children deported to USSR after 1941

Boy soldiers (Junaks) 10 to 15 years of age, USSR, 1942

Polish orphans in Uzbekistan, 1942

Cotton fields near Bukhara, USSR

Quetta, 1942: Polish children evacuated from Aschabad, USSR, to India

Polish children, Pahlavi, Iran (Persia), about 1942

Visiting Polish graves in Tehràn, 1942

Maharaja Jam Saheb with Polish children, Balachadi, India, 1943

Valivade, 1944: main street on a Sunday morning

Students from Valivade secondary school on excursion, India, 1946

Tengeru settlement, Tanganyika (Tanzania)

Koja, Uganda, 1949: members of the Australian Selection Commission with Polish employees of the IRO

Young people on the voyage from Africa to Australia 1950

Disembarkation at Fremantle, Western Australia, February 1950

Migrant transit camp, Northam, Western Australia, 1950

Cunderdin Camp, Western Australia, 1950

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Cover photograph - detail

