The ***SZPIN*** family

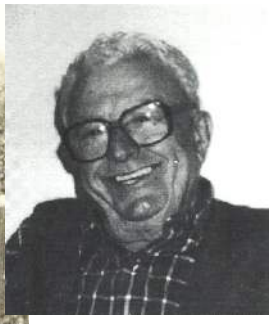




Polish officers' mess



Olga & John Szpin



my dad, 1996

Reluctant recollections of the war…

My father, *John Szpin*, a Polish cavalry soldier, was captured and imprisoned very soon after WWII started. Poland fought WWII as if it were WWI. Horses and infantry were no match for tanks and artillery. Poland was defeated in 6 short weeks.

As prisoner of war, his first imprisonment was relatively good as he was forced to worked on a farm. He had access to food, clandestinely but as Germany began to lose the war, prisoner life changed. My father was put into a concentration camp for three years.

Life in the concentration camps was as brutal as movies portray. Likely worse as my father avoided talking about this period of his life. Over time, I learned bits and pieces about his prisoner days: cold, death a board cot away every night, days of bitter cold working outside in the winter, and worst of all, constant hunger, being starved to death.

I did learn things like…food was so scarce they made a soup from sawdust and potato peels. The winters were indescribably cold. Wood shavings were inserted into 'rag' shoes to insulate the feet.

When the British army liberated the camp, freeing the prisoners, my dad walked out a living skeleton. He guessed his weight at about 75 lbs. He was 5 ft, 8 in.

The British assigned work duties to the prisoners relative to what they did before the war. My dad astutely claimed to have been a cook and so was assigned to work in the British army's kitchens. Food, finally.

He worked as a cook for the British for next three years. When the British camps closed, my dad's destination of relocation was Canada as Britain's immigration quotas had been reached.

My father was very fortunate as a British officer, Canadian Forces, a wealth civilian remembered him and had him assigned to travel to Canada to be employed a hotel he owned. My father became a cook at the Windsor Hotel in Sault Ste. Marie in 1948, never to be hungry again but never forgetting his near starvation during WWII.

by ***Richard Szpin***