



Polish Apprentices' Wing

It was in August, 1943, that transport laden with Polish Apprentices arrived at Halton Camp. No they were hardly apprentices yet, just small, miserable Polish boys who marched in perfect order along the road but looked around very uncertainly and wondered about the future as they took over Barrack Blocks 9 and 10 from No. 1 Wing R.A.F. Apprentices.

The arrival of so many Polish boys was a novelty for the British. It was no secret that these boys had many hard experiences behind them, and the R.A.F. staff did not mind the little troubles that their appearance caused. How was the Station Store to find shirts for these boys, smaller than any catered for by the R.A.F.? Polish Apprentices now quite full grown need not be ashamed to know that they had to be kitted out with the smallest size for W.A.A.F.s.

They quickly got used to Halton and its surroundings and it was not long before they were joining in everything, but until today mention of them has not appeared in the Halton Magazine. Life was not easy for these boys; strangers in a strange land and learning English for the first time, they had to try to come up to the British standard, fit into the British time-table and syllabus and conform to King's Regulations. Their new, unknown surroundings held lots of surprises in store for all of them. One surprise was the cordial welcome they received after the terrible conditions they had passed through.

At first the English apprentices from "A" and "B" Squadrons examined the boys from 9 and 10 with curiosity, as beings totally new and strange. They were as surprised as the Polish boys. If John passed Jozek and said, "Hullo!" Jozek would stare and ask what he meant. It was weeks or months before a talk between the two became possible, and then only with the help of gestures. But gradually polite conversations began, always with the British boy asking, "Do you like Halton?" or "What do you think of England?" From that real interest began and John was soon asking Jozek about his experiences and about Poland. Soon friendships were made, Poles became accustomed to taking part in general parades, British boys began to spend

their time off in the Polish Recreation Room and even offered to take their Polish friends home with them. The Polish boys, many of them orphans and homeless, appreciated this hospitality very much and were grateful for the chance of spending a few days in a friendly home in a Yorkshire town, a Devon village, the hills of Scotland or a great seaport.

Work now goes on as normally for Polish as for British apprentices. The Polish band is as well known to the S.P. at Main Point as the R.A.F., as it leads the Polish apprentices to workshop and school. Polish boys are trained for the same trades and to the same programme as British boys. Lectures and instruction have, in the past, been given by Polish teachers in the Polish language, and now the gradual introduction of Technical instruction in English is being brought about. At the time of writing the second year of training has been completed and Polish apprentices have started their last year as the oldest Entry at Halton.

They have always been very keen to take a full part in the sport and social life of the Station, but it has been difficult for two reasons. There was the difficulty of the English language, which made Polish Apprentices a little shy in mixing in the Sections of the Halton Society, when they had only a few English phrases, such as "Yes" and "I see," spoken with a strong accent. And they found, too, that they had less time to spare than British boys for they had to work harder at their studies to make up for their previous lack of opportunity for education. It is no shame to them to say that they had to work every evening from six to seven o'clock, while other apprentices could spend their time at the Cinema or in other pursuits.

But it has not been all training and learning. Polish football teams were victorious in many matches ; Polish boxers and swimmers won more than one prize. In the Polish Recreation Room activities have been organised with the idea of preparing boys to join the Halton Society. There are a Book-lovers' Circle, a Wireless Club, Photographic Club, Fine Arts Club, Chess Club, Rovers, Choir, Band and Stage Club. The last named has entertained Polish Apprentices with many different shows and plays. Some time ago it organised for the Station a play in English, specially written for the occasion, called "A Visit to Poland" and containing Polish music and dances. Some Polish apprentices are now members of the Chess and Wireless Sections of the Halton Society and a good number are taking glider training. Generally speaking the year 1946-7, the last year for the oldest Polish Entry, is expected to see a strong development of Anglo-Polish co-operation in sport and social activities.

Cy. P.

LIFE IN THE POLISH SQUADRON

Usually when young apprentices arrive at Halton, they look on older entries with certain admiration. No doubt it was the same with Polish Apprentices, who came here four years ago—after many trials and tribulations. But time passes very quickly—“All that is very nice passes with the speed of wind, but even all that is not so nice comes to an end too.” The first Polish Haltonian is now in a senior entry and the passing out parade is in sight.

Owing to the hospitality of the British nation the Polish boys entered this school with the purpose of being ready after the war for rebuilding and for work in the Air Forces of their own country.

During the years of war we observed in the world many political changes. In these conditions a great majority of Polish Apprentices decided for the time being not to return to Poland. When they finish training, as members of the Polish Resettlement Corps, they will be absorbed in British civil life or will join the R.A.F. No matter what happens, one thing is certain—that days spent at Halton will be always in our memory.

In some ways change of aims had to change the plans of many apprentices. At first they are determined to master the English language, but it is not a very easy matter. Last autumn several of them had a first trial of their possibilities—when they took the Lower Cambridge Certificate Exam. The result was that 10 boys passed and the others came to the conclusion that it is not enough to talk only to sweethearts because sometimes grammar is very essential too. While we are talking about studies it is worth mentioning that 10 apprentices are doing matriculation in English. These few words might give the impression that Polish boys are only studying, but that is not so. Quite a lot of time is spent on sport. Of course the most popular game is soccer. This is natural as this sport had a lot of followers in Poland, and also there is an opinion in Europe that even when an Englishman is dying, if he is asked to play football he will get up. So we very willingly follow our hosts. The ball is round, therefore the results are various. The following apprentices represent the Squadron :—

App/Air Basztabin, W. Cpl/App/Air Feretycki, A. Cpl/App/Air. Szpak, A.
App/Air Stazka, L. App/Air Kowalec, M. App/Air Wlodarski,
App/Air Langner, B. App/Air Sobanski, Z. App/Air Kaminski, T.
App/Air Marcinkowski, J. App/Air Skokowski, A.
App/Air. Langner, B. during the last season represented School's team.

Boxing

Hard work and the enthusiasm shown in this sport made the results quite good. App/Air Hajduk, J., App/Air Basztabin, W., App/Air Ochyra, F. won School and Station bouts and several times, represented the Station against the other Boxing Clubs. In addition App/Air Skokowski won individual bouts.

This winter was not very suitable for sports, but with the coming spring, conditions will improve and sporting life will be in full swing. While the British boys will play cricket, their Polish comrades will appreciate more the game of basket and volley ball, as their interest in the essentially English national sport, is not aroused.

POLISH APPRENTICES

Halton's tradition and achievements are widely known in the world. Halton has its place in the life of the British Commonwealth. Last year one more notable event was added to the history of No. 1 S. of T.T.

At the Passing-Out Parade on 30th July, 1947, beside the 49th Entry marched the 1st Polish Entry, consisting of 136 Apprentices, and with the 50th Entry on 10th March, 1948, passed out 31 Apprentices who had successfully completed their training.

How it happened would be rather a long story, partly told in previous issues. One thing is certain, the time spent at Halton was not wasted. This is proved by the final results for the two Polish entries, whereby all candidates passed the examination:

- 7 Apprentices completed training with classification L.A.C.
- 81 Apprentices completed training with classification A.C.1.
- 79 Apprentices completed training with classification A.C.2.

These results could only have been achieved in the atmosphere of hospitality and understanding surrounding the Polish apprentices from the very beginning up to the end of their training. Therefore the period spent at Halton will not be forgotten. Their sincere and deep gratitude towards the British nation has been expressed by the planting of Birch trees along the road where they have marched during the last four years. In addition a commemorative plaque has been placed on Block 9, inscribed "Polish Avenue," which was unveiled on 21st June, 1947, by the Station Commander, Air Commodore J. F. Titmas, C.B.E.

No doubt during their training and later, the Polish boys encountered more difficulties than their British comrades, and shortly before the Passing-Out Parade they had to solve a very difficult problem regarding their future. In the present political situation of Poland the majority have decided to stay abroad instead of returning to their own country. One hundred and two of these boys enlisted with the R.A.F. for five years, the others will either emigrate or be absorbed into industry. Five returned to their parents in Poland.

On 12th March, 1948, the Polish Apprentices' School was disbanded. On leaving the Station I would like, on behalf of all Polish personnel, to thank the Air Officer Commanding and all at Halton, for their hospitality and assistance during training.

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