

## Bernhard Storch

Born on November 10, 1922 near Krakow, Poland to a Jewish Polish decorated World War I hero, Bernhard Storch was a teenager when the Second World War broke out. On September 3, 1939, Bernhard's widowed mother, foreseeing the potential devastation of war, urged him to seek safer pastures. Bernhard complied, leaving his mother and three younger brothers behind. This was the last time he saw his family.

After ducking the fierce German Air Force bombardments, Bernhard settled in the western Polish city of Lwow. In the third week of the war, the USSR joined in the assault on Poland, and by September 27, 1939, the occupation of the country was complete. Bernhard was stranded without his family, without clothes, and without a sense of what the future may bring. Meanwhile, a harsh winter was approaching.

In the middle of one night in May 1940, the Russian secret police (NKVD) seized Bernhard from his room and took him to a secluded railroad stop. He, along with many others, were loaded into a transport railroad car and sent off to an unknown destination. Three weeks later, Bernhard found himself deep in Siberia, in a labor camp some 300 kilometers from the Ural Mountains, and under the watch of the NKVD.

On Jun 22, 1941, war broke out between Germany and Russia. As a result of the treaty which was signed between the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, all Polish citizens, including Bernhard, were released from the Russian slave labor camps. After some time, Bernhard learned that the Polish army was being reactivated in central Asia, near the city of Tashkent. After arduous travel, he managed to reach the recruitment point – but too late to join the initial force.

In November, 1942, Bernhard enlisted and reported to the volunteer First Polish Division in March 1943. Assigned to a Mortar Company as a gunner, he was sent to the warfront on September 1, 1943, where his company encountered the German Army on October 12, 1943. His unit advanced 5 kilometers in the ensuing fight, suffering heavy losses. Bernhard was awarded a Cross for Bravery during this battle.

After his discharge from a field hospital in November 1943, Bernhard was assigned to the First Artillery Regiment, and fought the German Army across White Russia, central Poland and into Germany – reaching a few blocks beyond the Reichstag in Berlin.

In July, Bernhard took part in the liberation of the Sobibor and Majdanek extermination camps. In January 45, he reached the Chelmno camp. After its final offensive on April 16, 1945, Bernhard's unit entered Sachsenhausen, where he found thousands of victims who were barely alive. Located 35 kilometers from the German capital, Bernhard engaged in hand-to-hand combat for nearly two more weeks, until the early morning of May 2, 1945.

With war's end, Bernhard learned that his entire family had been killed by the Nazis – his mother, brothers, grandparents, relatives, friends, and schoolmates. Even his father's tombstone was removed from its gravesite.

Bernhard was discharged from the army in September 1945. He and his wife Ruth, also a Holocaust survivor, left Poland in November 1945 and arrived in the United States in April 1947. They now have two children and three grandchildren.

Bernhard has undertaken a highly active role in his community, including extensive volunteer work with the Jewish War Veterans of the USA. In conjunction with several Holocaust museums and educational institutions, he lectures on Nazi Germany's atrocities as well as the Jewish resistance during World War II.

Bernhard Storch is the recipient of numbers medals and decorations for his bravery and service during World War II, including:

- Cross for Bravery – October 14, 1943, near the town of Lenino, in the region of the city of Smolensk
- Silver Medal "Virtuty Military" in the Field of Glory for volunteering on a dangerous mission over the Wisla River – September 1944
- Special Medal for Liberating "Warsaw", the capital of Poland – January 18 1945
- For participation in freeing the Polish Capital, Warsaw – Medal awarded by Marshal Stalin of the USSR, January 1945
- Cross for Bravery and Gallantry in the Field of Glory – March 1945, in Western Pomeria, Germany, for destroying two German Tiger tanks from the Himmler Division
- Medal for decisive Military Action over German Rivers Nyse and Oder, and the Baltic Coast – March and April 1945
- Cross for taking part in heroic and decisive hand-to-hand battle in the German capital of Berlin. Twelve days and nights of battle ending just past the Reichstag on May 2, 1945 at 2AM.
- Medal from the USSR for taking part in defeating the German Army in Berlin, Germany – May 2, 1945
- Medal for Victory over Germany, May 1945
- Additional participating ribbons and certificates

All medals were presented at the Polish Consulate in New York in 1992, 1993, 1994 in a special ceremony. All medals were sent through Polish President Lech Walesa.