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The Weekly

JIM PARSONS
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BELLA VISTA

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Bennett Horne/The Weekly Vista Bella Vista resident and World War II veteran Basia Barbara Berner (left) was recognized by Bella Vista Patriots Chairman Lt. Colonel Jim Parsons (RET) at the outset of Monday night's City Council meeting held at the District Court. Berner was a young girl in Poland when she joined the Polish Corps to fight against the Germans.

Polish native Berner recognized for WWII service

Basia Barbara Berner, a resident of Bella Vista who was a young girl growing up in Poland when she joined the Polish Corps to fight against the German invasion of her country, was recognized ahead of Memorial Day at the outset of Monday night's Bella Vista City Council regular session at the Public Safety Building's District Court.

Berner was presented a framed photo and certificate of appreciation commemorating the event by Bella Vista Patriots Chairman Lt. Colonel Jim Parsons (RET), who also wrote the following letter describing some of the things Berner went through during WWII:

On Sept. 1, 1939, Hitler's Panzer tanks roared across the Polish border. At the same time the German Luftwaffe with its Stukas, Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitt fighter planes were bombing and strafing Warsaw. Wehrmacht's (German defense force) armor raced along the highways toward the heart of Poland. The Blitzkrieg was on. In one month, Poland surrendered making it the shortest takeover of a sovereign country in the annals of history warfare.

Basia Barbara Berner was only 9 years old at that time and living in Warsaw. Basia's father, who was a Polish Naval Commander, went on duty the next day, Sept. 2. Basia didn't see her father again until after the end of the war. At our Bella Vista 4th of July Patriot Parade, Memorial Day event and Veterans Day I introduced her as joining the Polish Underground. Later, when I interviewed her, she corrected me by saying she joined what was referred to as the Polish Corps and she was on active duty with the army for the next five years after the attack. The Polish Corps was well organized with platoons, companies, battalions, brigades, etc. and with soldiers designated by rank as enlisted personnel and officers. They were well trained in espionage, sabotage and assassination. Much of the activities that they experienced carried over to today's American Special Forces (Green Berets), Navy Seals, CIA and other sneaky-creak type organizations.

Not only did Poland man an Army for the duration of the war, but little was known to many that Poland maintained an Air force that flew missions out of British Airfields with a stellar "shoot down" record.

April was Women's History Month. Many clubs and organizations selected an outstanding woman to be their choice to honor for the year of 2022. Basia Berner was an easy choice for the Patriots. We don't know of any woman who for any given day for five years volunteered to put herself in a position to possibly go before a firing squad or be shipped off to Auschwitz or some other concentration camp.

Throughout our interview she talked about food. At first, they were able to find dead horses to eat and at one point she mentioned how lucky they were to split one potato between four people.

One of their favorite hiding places were the sewer canals under the city streets. Basia said one day her group opened a metal manhole cover and when they looked down in there they saw a crowd of men, women and children in filthy rags who were literally starving to death.

As the war was coming near an end in 1944 the residents of Poland noticed that the number of older combat-tested SS type Nazi soldiers were dwindling, and they were being replaced by younger teenage boys in uniform. One day, Basia's group captured several of these young soldiers and they were trembling and scared stiff. They knew what would happen to them if the shoe had been on the other foot. The "Boy Soldiers" were pleading for their lives. Basia remembers that one of the Polish soldiers stepped forward and said, "We don't do that, we're not Nazis."

When the Germans surrendered on May 8, 1945, Basia said no one can imagine how jubilant the Polish people felt. Celebrations of relief and joy rang out throughout Poland. But, that celebration was short lived when the realization of Russian occupation was in some cases just as bad or worse than that of the Nazis. In particular was the fact that the Russian soldier stole anything and everything he could get his hands on and their sadistic treatment of women and young girls when the soldiers were drunk on vodka, which was most of the time.

We pray that these awful times will never come to us in America, but if past history means anything to us at all we must be forever vigilant and prepare ourselves that this won't ever happen. The Russian leader Khrushchev once said, "America will never fall militarily to a foreign power, she will simply spend herself to death."

I wonder if he knew something that we didn't?

Jim Parsons

Lt. Colonel, Jim Parsons (RET)
Chairman Bella Vista Patriots
29 Duvall Lane
Bella Vista, AR 72715
(479) 876-2624
Jlparsons1933@gmail.com
BellaVistaPatriots.com