

## Solve the Mystery

### Answer sheet

**Here is Szytko's story in order, including the relevant bits of context:**

- Alekzander Szytko was born in Eastern Poland in 1918.
- In September 1939 Germany invaded Poland and Russia occupied the eastern part.
- Aleksander Szytko was conscripted into the Russian army in May 1941.
- The Russians put Szytko in a labour camp in Siberia in July 1941.
- In 1942, Aleksander Szytko joined the Polish Army in Iran.
- Summer 1942: Aleksander Szytko sailed from Palestine via the Cape of Good Hope to Liverpool with thousands of other Poles.
- Travelling by train from Liverpool, Aleksander Szytko looked out of the window and asked 'Why are all the stations called Bovril?'
- September 1942: Szytko joins the Polish Navy in Devon.
- Aleksander Szytko served as an Able Seaman on ORP Piorun, escorting Arctic convoys taking supplies to the Russians in 1943.
- In June 1944, Aleksander Szytko was awarded the Cross of Valour for saving his ship.
- From 1946 till 1949, over 150,000 Poles settled in the UK.
- In 1947 the Okehampton camp became a resettlement camp for 4000 naval personnel and their families.
- Several thousand Polish sailors went through the camp at Okehampton.
- August 1948: Aleksander got a job at Countess Weir House in Exeter.
- At the Okehampton camp Polish men and women received lessons in agriculture, building and mining.
- Aleksander Szytko took training courses at Okehampton camp in cookery and English language.
- All the Polish Resettlement Camps were closed in 1949.

- Aleksander Szytko leaves the Okehampton camp, moves to Exeter and becomes a painter and decorator.
- Aleksander married June Squire at the Catholic church in Heavitree in Exeter in 1957.
- Aleksander died in Exeter in 2010, a few days before his 92nd birthday.
- Today Okehampton Rugby Club & Okehampton Primary school are on the site of the Polish Navy camp.
- Four Nissen huts can still be seen near Okehampton Rugby Club.

### **Red Herrings (which may still be of interest!)**

- The RAF 307 Squadron were all Polish.
- All the men of RAF 307 squadron were Polish.
- The RAF's 307 squadron defended Exeter from 1941-1943.
- 146 Polish Naval officers were trained at the Academy.
- A team of Indian soldiers played hockey against a youth club in Kingsbridge in spring 1941.
- August 1939 three Polish ships sailed to Britain: Burza ('Storm'), Błyskawica ('Lightning'), and Grom ('Thunder').
- German POWs painted a mural in the Fox and Hounds pub in Okehampton.
- In December 1944 the Polish Navy officer cadet training camp moved to Okehampton.
- Jan Pieńkowski left Poland at the age of three in 1939.
- The Meg and Mog books were illustrated by Jan Pieńkowski.
- Many German POWs worked on Devon farms after WW2.
- Okehampton Rugby Club won 13 out of 25 matches in 2016 / 2017.
- Poland joined the EU in 2004, starting a wave of migration to the UK.
- During WW2 Poland lost a greater percentage of its population than any other country.
- Black American soldiers were based at the Rugby Ground in Exeter in 1944.

- The Mariners Way was a footpath for sailors from Bideford to Dartmouth via South Zeal.
- The Polish Army in Italy in 1943 included a bear called Wojtek.
- The Polish Navy in exile was created in November 1939, to serve with the British Navy.
- Mewki means 'little seagulls'. This was the name for Polish women in the Navy.
- Today the Polish resettlement camp at Stover is now a nursing home for Polish Britons.
- Marynarka wojenna is the Polish word for Navy.
- Today there is still an army base on the edge of Okehampton.
- There were 336 French Prisoners of War in Okehampton in 1810.