

2014 Second Place Winner
Estelle Wachtel-Torres, M.D. Literary Competition

Star of the Red Army
By Walerian Domanski

I was five years old when my mother took me to Wroclaw, the capitol city of the province of Lower Silesia. I do not remember for what reason. Maybe it was to visit a specialist at the Academy of Medicine, as I always had problems with my tonsils. But I am not sure, I do not remember. But I remember exactly the meeting with the Red Army soldiers on the railway platform. The soldiers looked out through the windows of a military passenger train standing at the platform. Perhaps the train was carrying them from Poland to Russia, to the city of Legnica, which housed the Command of the Northern Group, the Red Army in Eastern Europe.

I was bored on the platform, waiting for our train, so I walked it up and down while mother sat on a bench. Fortunately for me, the soldiers also were bored. How long can you sit in a closed carriage and stare blankly out the windows? One of the soldiers said something to me, but of course I did not understand. I ran to my mother.

"Mom, what did he say to me?"

"He speaks Russian, so you do not understand anything."

My mother came with me to the carriage window. She began to talk with the Russian soldiers. They were surprised that they had met someone familiar with their language. I also talked with them, but in Polish, although my mother had to translate my words. It was cool, because I was not bored now on the empty platform. The soldiers were a big

attraction for me. Probably I was a big attraction to the soldiers too, because they laughed loudly "talking" with me. The soldiers had green uniforms and caps with beautiful red stars made from porcelain. I liked those stars very much. They shone in the sun like diamonds. Soldier's uniforms and caps were made from poor quality fabrics. But the stars were wonderful! I looked at them with admiration. Apparently, the soldiers noticed my admiration and asked:

"Do you want a star?"

My mother did not have to translate. I nodded I want to! The soldier then disconnected a star from his cap and gave it to my mother who handed it to me.

The fullness of joy!

From that moment, I was not interested in anything, but my beautiful, shining star. Our train arrived, and the soldiers said goodbye. While traveling, I held my fantastic acquisition tightly in my fist. We arrived home in the evening. Time for supper, and time to sleep. I slept with my cap on my head (it was of course not a military cap), to which my mother attached the star. I had a military night dream, and in this dream I was the captain of the Red Army chasing the Nazis. But the greatest fun I had occurred the next day. I showed the star my friends. They admire it, and each of them took turns wearing my cap with the star. The star made a great impression on all the boys, none of them had seen such a star. Then we played our usual game, about war against Germany. I was assured, thanks to the star, the title of General of the Red Army. Besides, I was the only the one who had a toy, a wooden green tank. It had a moving tower, and wooden wheels, which simulated tank tracks. From time to time, when I was in a good humor, I gave permission to some of the boys, to wear the cap for a few

minutes. One day, however, a strange event occurred. Returning from a restaurant, the old drunk Jurczyk, saw me in my wearing my cap.

"Remove immediately this star from the cap, you "kacap", you Russian shit! You are a Pole, you should wear a cap with a pinned Polish crowned eagle. If not, I will do to you, what Polish Marshall Pilsudski did to the Russians, like the miracle on the Vistula!"

I did not quite know what he meant, but I decided to run away from him, just in case. With drunk people you can expect anything.

"What does he want?" I asked the boys later. But no one knew.

"What does "kacap" mean?" I asked.

"Kacap means Russian", said Adam, son of the owner of the restaurant.

"Well, and what does it mean "the miracle on the Vistula River?" But even Adam did not know.

"Jurczyk told me to wear a cap with a crowned eagle. But where can we get one?" This question was not answered. In any case, we moved our play game-war against Germany to the garden. One of us stood at the gate to the garden as the guard, to issue a warning whistle should he see Jurczyk coming. Moreover, in the garden we had good conditions for playing. The Garden was huge, fenced in and full of trees and bushes, good for hiding. At the old, large pear tree, we established the Stalin's headquarter. At the big cherry tree at the edge of the garden, we established Hitler's headquarter. The strange accident with Jurczyk had ended well.

Walerian Domanski

24 February 2014