December 3, 1944

Dear fellow countrymen and countrywomen, I greet you with the words: Praised be Jesus Christ!

Soon after the outbreak of the war in 1939, came the flood of Polish displaced persons. This exodus lasted until 1942! It consisted of important people and well as common people - Armed service personnel and civilians of various kinds. Some sought and found honest work and were not ashamed to work fora piece of daily bread. Those are worthy of praise. Others, as soon as they entered the country, became party workers forgetting that they were American citizens of Polish persuasion and were not Polish colonists. Others began to enlighten us according articles in the press issuing their personal venom at honorable and knightly people and praising to the high heavens, people of dark reputation and of a shady past. There are those also who claim their bread and butter despite the fact that “they never sow and they never reap. These, generally, play the role of defenders of the faith and advocates of morality. They maintain that polish people amidst those from Persia, Africa, and the British Isles no longer are among the faithful. They also say that among the military the religious believers fell to zero and lower. They secretly tell that among the Polish government, there is no sincere person, only traitors and irreligious; that there is nothing good happening on Polish soil. They rend their clothes and tell with tombstone voices, made up stories, fantastic and untrue. How deliberately and readily they forget that they are guests in a foreign land; that we won’t permit them to be led on a leash. And that with all graciousness and unconditionally we are forced to tell them that they not tell us what we should do; that we will not permit them to push their Polish ways on us. - As you know, in more peaceful times, I was in Poland 8 times. In the first three months after the outbreak of the war in 1939, I visited camps of immigrants in the Balkans, especially in Rumania. I met thousands out of 4 million civilians and military personnel. In 1942, I flew to the British Isles on a military bomber. I stayed there four weeks. I spent my entire time there with soldiers, marines and air men. I took part in talks and conferences. It was not my fault that I began to know people, their manner of life. To tell the truth was also convinced of the political intrigues and party pressures. And more that once to present in my radio talks the true picture. Today, I will present in my words several scenarios before your eyes under the title,

FACTS, NOT WORDS

Gerald Pietrkiewicz writes this story of a certain prisoner: terrible piece, but plain, heart-felt, and emotional in content. Please listen: In the bottom bunk, face up against the window, lay a man with no hands. He had a huge body deformed with bandages, which were thickly woven around his neck, hiding a bit of his beard. He was white because of the lack of blood, and he was wracked with fever which blazed his eyes to insanity. The German doctor was not interested in him at all. He saw that he faced imminent death. From the instant he came into the barracks, he did not say a word to me. It was even more curious because all the sick gave me great trust, sharing with me their troubles garnered from their fields of battle. Slightly hurt in the back, I could move about a bit, but at night the pain was unbearable; I lay on my belly, hiding my face. I wanted to be useful. The Germans, suffering because they did not have their usual caretaker, let me bandage the wounded, take their temperature, tend to their wounds. I made the rounds of the barracks from six in the morning to the late evening. Sometimes, at night I was awakened by a feverish shout so I lit a candle and ran to the sound. They called me a lieutenant even though I wore a cadet’s badges; it was an advancement dictated by sympathy, perhaps even by brotherhood. They seemed to look upon the situation with awe; they realized that it is important to stick together, to check out ones surroundings and not get into enemy hands in one way or another. Therefore, when a strange priest came making confession available to them no one asked for it even in the presence of imminent death. In the span of two of the first nights, thirty people died in the ward; I carried them out with a German caretaker. It made way for others who took their places and were brought by the Germans from Warsaw. My role grew and I suddenly became an advocate, a counselor and as it were, a confessor. Five days was enough to get an idea who the war most painfully touched on the wooden, stuffy room of death. The peasants, workers, artisans and unemployed bled on straw and furry blankets, moaning in delirium, tapping heavily into messages in narrow cages of sleep. I've heard bits of all Polish buzz of all dialects, and recognized features of all types of individuals that were born between the Warta and the Dniester rivers. In this makeshift hospital barracks, scented with blood and dust, I went through a course in Polish sociology and geography. I will never forget it.

The man without hands, bandaged up to his neck, did not speak to me even once. He shunned my glance when I took his temperature; he did not hear what I said or made believe he didn’t hear me. He found himself a way to avoid a glance and to avoid his pain. He kept his eye looking out the window which autumn had decorated.

Nights were the darkest even with the stars reflected from silvery barks of trees and the wind shuffled the vegetation. About two in the morning when the moon appeared between the clouds, I heard a whisper…a whisper that penetrated my dream and pushed me to the floor. I felt for the candle, lit it, and waited to hear the direction of the whisper again. The whisper repeated itself and thought it wrapped in pain and hurt. There by the window where I had seen the silvery bark, I heard the same whisper. I heard its content: “Letter!”

The man without the hands looked at me, trying to free his neck and beard from the soft pinch of the bandages. I leaned toward him, dimming the reflections of night from his eyes. I placed the candle on the basket.

Did you mean: [Przytwierdzona do złamanego ***plichta***](javascript:void(0))

Attached to the broken sconce was a red string, a reminder of blood. He moved his shoulder blades, as if he wanted to use his non-existent hands; the bandages freed from his neck again and he started to talk, startling the candle flame: "Lieutenant, Sir, I have very little time left…on this earth…I’d like to say “good bye” to those who are closest to me…you know what I mean, Lieutenant, with my wife and children…five of them. The eldest had already 18 years…he was my apprentice…I was a tailor: I was a good tailor; people praised me; there was plenty of work… People recognize good work… Walter helped… it is a big help to have a son in your business. He was my eldest…you know how it is, Lieutenant….” He broke his whisper and the flame of the candle settled for a while. I was so taken by his narrative that I forgot about his “letter.” But he reminded me. Looking directly into my eyes, he said with a stronger voice –“Sir, write a letter for me. To my family…my father lived with us. And his wife also…we were a crowd. Please write to my family. I…I can’t.” He cursorily looked at his bandaged arms. “Lieutenant, I will tell you what to write… Word by word, Sir, as if it were from me.” He saw me take out paper and pencil, and he began to dictate. I heard him say sacramentally: “In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” and then he said immediately: “In the first words of my letter…: I thought for a moment about the sacred conventions of family life, which in the midst of the common man, are obligatory… The man without hands related his experiences on the field of battle, his wounds and his sojourn in the barracks hospital. He used short sentences calling to mind the Providence of God and the love of Christ. They took on the tone of a sermon, although not sentimental in any way. The tailor was concrete in his narrative about the war and his allusions to the Omnipotence of God in heaven and on earth. Listening to his cautionary remarks and his soldier’s helplessness and loss of hope, I waited nervously for the tragic moment when, at last, the tailor would reveal the whole truth about his hospital existence. To think of it: Here was a tailor, a good tailor and a good man, father of five children – without hands, both hands. I waited…when would he mention it? When would he speak of his hands? But he battled with his suffering and his white bandaging, and he did not mention the most significant and major happenings which bothered him the most. A father of five children without hands. Would he tell of it or not? The patient went on, stumbling through family trivialities, through allusions whose meaning I often did not comprehend. “Let Sophie learn well and not chase boys. Did Bolek return to Stasia? Remember Uncle Alexander, who got sick over this war…” He looked through the window, avoiding my eyes, taking a deep breath, and looking as if he wanted to end the letter. Again he moved underneath the bandages and looked at both handless arms. My fingers lingered on the pencil. The critical moment was coming nearer to the real truth. He surely must tell the truth to his family, to tell of his amputations…without hands, without work… “everything is ok here,” he whispered to himself – disturbing the flame of the candle. “Don’t worry!” I’m just wounded a bit. “Let Jaska mind the young ones…because when Dad comes back, he will want everything to be in order, and that the little ones be healthy…May our Lady keep you under her care. With kisses for alll. Your Father.” In an after thought, the tailor added, “My dear wife, pray for me. Dad and Mom, help my wife”. I breathed a sigh. However he did not acknowledge and he didn’t have the presence to destroy their hope. He left them his tailor’s hands for their joy. Let them think he will return whole.” Lieutenant, if I die, please write to them and let them know. They should wait in hope if there was no hope. Don’t tell them about the hands. War is war and there is death…. But, the hands…” His words stuck in his throat. I was a good tailor, Lieutenant..” He smiled with a curious smile which predicted a calm death.

“There are no cripples in Heaven”

In the weekly newspaper, “Poland at War” I read, “In the Autumn of 1942 Warsaw decided to give the Polish Parachute Agencies in Scotland, the banner : “Under this banner we shall conquer.” In Warsaw, in the autumn evenings of that year, secretly, changing their addresses regularly, at every opportunity, looking out for the enemy, the embroiderers sewed the badges for the paratroopers. When they couldn’t obtain the yard for the job, they cut up the Cardinal’s cape which they had saved as a remembrance of Polish families. The silver and gold thread were replaced; they could not get the tassels. Christian banners from underneath churches made for baptisms were used. No priest exists who utilized one of these clothes. Other hands managed to deliver the banners to Great Britain with apologies that they were not made as they intended to be made. There would be no criticism of the work that went into their making for it was born of goodness and caring.

Hope and faith, dedication and trust!

I will add to that article only to say that on that banner at the foot of the Polish Eagle was the title, “God and Country.”

Thaddeus Pniewski, a correspondent of the Warring Poland, writes: “In one of the many camps existing, stands a roadside chapel like in Poland with white stones. It’s a place used to pray for those who didn’t make it. The members of the brigade built it. Then when they were ordered to move on they left it as a mark of Polish faith and a greater faith since the brigadiers were religious youth, the very young. The chapels symbolize a very great faith. Today, the chapels are empty and are passed by soldiers of many countries in wartime. “Polish”, they say..Polish..in recognition of their representation.

In a Polish church in London on September 15th, three events are observed, namely the Assumption of Our Lady, The feast of the Polish Soldier and the bringing of a Polish Votum to the church in London. On this occasion, Bishop Radoński preached a significant sermon. Among other things he said, “And we pray. Perhaps at times our prayer hands seem very heavy.. Not so. We pray ceaselessly and with undaunted hope. Shortly before the battle for the capital, the “Polish warring Church” or votum, to add to Our Lady of Czestochowa prayers for safety. At her feet are laid gifts from the army, navy, chaplains and volunteers, all who are near. The Church in London and Warsaw are united in heartfelt hopes.

Just a few events, perhaps at first not seemingly important. This year, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, in London, Bishop Radoński was the celebrant. A baldachin was carried by a contingent of Armed Forces. After the Blessed Sacrament, the President of Poland, Walter Raczkiewicz, the Vice-Premier J. Kwapinski, general K. Sczkowski, the President of the national government and Professor S. Grabski, and representatives of the Armed Forces. The “Te Deum” was being sung”. Similar scenes were unfolding in Polish Camps from Plymouth to the Northern parts of Scotland.

In June, one of the Polish Air Force brought a bouquet of flowers from the fields of Normandy and put them at the foot of the altar in the Polish Church in London.

At the first anniversary of the death of General Walter Sikorski, uncommon ceremonies were celebrated at the church of the Brompton Oratory. And, again, The President of the National government was president.

I had a purpose in mind in presenting the above events. They demonstrate the deep and great faith of the Polish people. I stood in the midst of these hurting and prayerful military and civilian men and women. I saw their piety, in camps, in airport, on ships and in their homes. I marveled at their great faith, sometimes shamed by my faith which seemed small compared to theirs.

Such faith gives them the strength, to oppose, to survive, and to have the patience to do so. If someone tells you that the Polish people’s faith does not survive. It is not true.

To all those who pretend to be good doers, protectors, advocates and play the role of protectors in word, I put the aphorism: “Talk is cheap. Act and deliver the goods!”