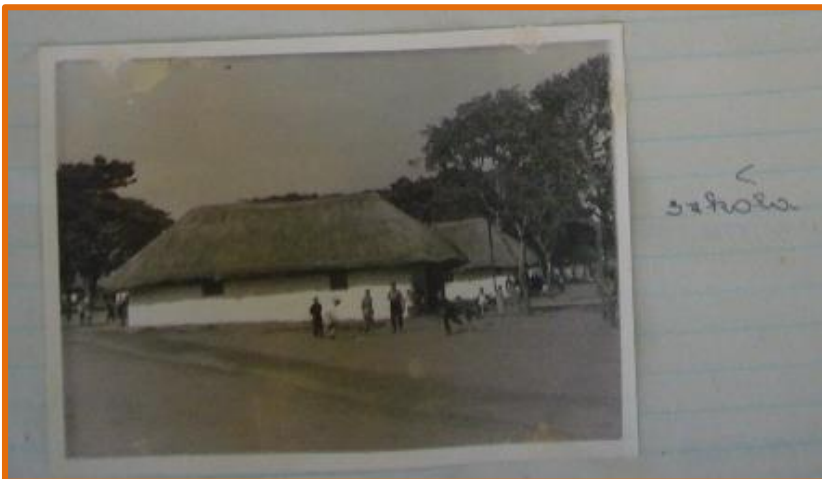


# World War Two: The deportation of Polish refugees to Abercorn camp in Northern Rhodesia



Picture 1:  
Polish grave in Abercorn with the  
Polish National Coat of Arms:  
a white eagle.



Picture 2:  
A school in Abercorn camp

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### **Sources of pictures on front page**

Picture 1:

Polish grave near the former premises of Abercorn camp.

(Picture: Mary-Ann Sandifort, Mbala, July 2014).

Picture 2:

School in Abercorn camp - next to the picture the word “szkola” is written, which is ‘school’ in Polish.

Source: Inventory Vol III L-Z. Camp Chronicle. ZMA 2/1 Kronika Osicla. 1942 Sept- 1947 Feb.

(Picture: Mary-Ann Sandifort, National Archives in Lusaka, August 2014).

## Foreword

Since 1989 I regularly visit Zambia, former Northern Rhodesia, as a journalist, a traveller and to visit friends. Throughout the years I travelled several times to all parts of the country. In December 2013 I was for the first time in the Northern Province and visited the port of Mpulungu to investigate the infrastructure in the northern part of Zambia for a feasibility study about the possibilities of a port expansion of Mpulungu<sup>1</sup>.

On this visit I came across Mbala, which was called Abercorn in colonial times. Mbala is a small town in the middle of nowhere and apart from maize, tomatoes, beer and onions, there is not a lot for sale. In the Moto Moto museum, just outside the small town, the staff of this museum was busy setting up a temporary exhibition about a camp for Polish refugees, which was situated near Mbala during the Second World War. The museum had remains of the camp and there was one information board.

When I was back home I started to look for information about those Polish refugees and discovered that East Africa had more Polish camps in World War Two and Zambia, which was called Northern Rhodesia, had three other camps further to the south. I started to search for data on the exodus to East Africa and found out that the Poles who ended up in Abercorn camp were deported many times. I tried to reconstruct their exoduses and their life in Abercorn camp, but because I could hardly find anything about the camps in Northern Rhodesia and especially not about Abercorn camp, I had to go back to Zambia to find sources.

Mary-Ann Sandifort, April 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> My husband Frank Maasson is an economic consultant, specialized in port and infrastructure, and both of us often mix work and travel – me as a journalist and writer.

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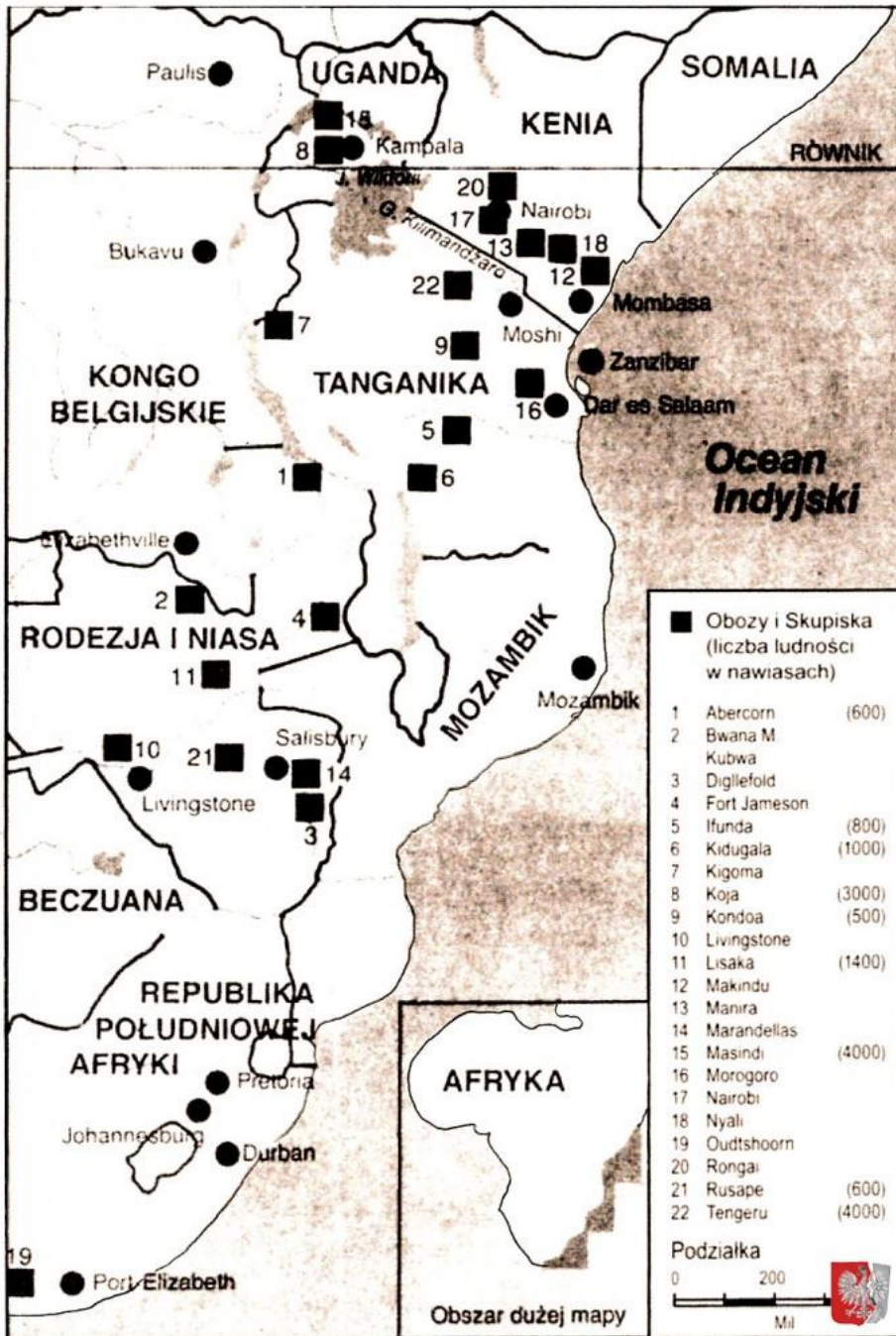
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**Map 1**  
**Location of Polish refugee camps in Africa, 1942-1950**



Source: Kresy Siberia Virtual Museum. <http://www.kresy-siberia.com> (December 2014).

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Subject description

In World War Two almost six hundred Polish refugees arrived in a camp in Abercorn in the remote Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia, which was in those days a colony of Great Britain. Before they arrived in Abercorn most refugees traveled three to five years under harsh conditions. Their exodus began shortly after Poland was occupied by Germany, which annexed the western side of Poland, and by the Soviet Union, which took the eastern part. The Soviet Union and Germany settled this annexation via the non-aggression pact, the Molotov-von-Ribbentrop pact.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the take-over by the Soviet Union, Stalin deported 283,000<sup>3</sup> to 1,5 million<sup>4</sup> Poles to areas like Siberia and Kazakhstan.

When, despite the non-aggression pact, Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Soviet Union signed the so-called Maysky-Sikorsky pact with the, in London exiled, Polish government. The two countries agreed to fight side-by-side against aggressor Germany and the Soviet Union promised to release all the deported Poles.<sup>5</sup> The released families were allowed to leave the Soviet Union if a family member joined the army, which many did.

In 1942 the deportation of military and civilian men and women and children from the Soviet Union to the British Territory Persia began; 41,000 combatants and 74,000 Polish civilians left the Soviet Union. They went via Uzbekistan to refugee camps in the English Territory Persia. (Although from 1935 the name 'Iran' was introduced, the English Authorities kept using 'Persia' for many years. In accordance with the official documents of the English Authorities in the National Archives of Lusaka, I will use 'Persia').<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Polish Government Information Centre, *Polish-Soviet relations 1918-1943* (New York 1943) 25 [http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b532493;view=1up;seq=1](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b532493;view=1up;seq=1) (March 2015).

<sup>3</sup> N.S. Lebedeva, 'The deportation of the Polish population to the USSR, 1939–41', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics. Special Issue: 'Forced Migration in Central and Eastern Europe, 1939–1950'* 16. 1-2 (2000) 30-42.

<sup>4</sup> R. Antolak, 'Iran and the Polish Exodus from Russia 1942'. [http://www.parstimes.com/history/polish\\_refugees/exodus\\_russia.html](http://www.parstimes.com/history/polish_refugees/exodus_russia.html) (March 2015).

<sup>5</sup> H. Pavlovich, 'The Anders army'. <http://henrypavlovich.com/The-Anders-Army-> (March 2015).

<sup>6</sup> E. Yarshater, 'When Persia became Iran' (version 1989). [http://www.iranchamber.com/geography/articles/persia\\_became\\_iran.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/geography/articles/persia_became_iran.php) (March 2015).

In Persia the soldiers were integrated in the British army. When the Polish refugees could not stay there, because Soviet Army Units in northern Persia became hostile and the Germans were already in the Caucasus, Great Britain and the Polish government searched accommodation for them. The refugees were brought to Mexico, Lebanon, Palestine, India, New Zealand (only orphans), Southern Africa (only orphans), Kenya, Nyasaland, Uganda, Tanganyika, Southern Rhodesia, and Northern Rhodesia.<sup>7</sup> The majority of those destinations was British Territory.

There is hardly any information about the camps for Polish refugees in the British Territories, but fortunately the Polish-American sociologist T. Piotrowski interviewed Polish refugees who were brought to Persia and from there to other British Territories.<sup>8</sup> Via these interviews an impression of the camps can be distracted. In Persia for instance, the Poles were allowed to go outside the camp, like to the beach, and buy products from the local stalls and shops. Some camps in India had its own fire brigade, shops, like a cake shop and Indian doctors, as well as other high skilled native staff, like technicians. The Polish refugees mixed with natives by playing games with them and building things together. The refugees in the camps in Africa were less free since the camps were watched by a Polish and an African camp guard and in general the natives were not allowed to visit the camp. High skilled staff, like medical staff, teachers, priests, technicians and so on were never natives or English, but always Polish.

Northern Rhodesia had four camps – Lusaka camp, Bwana Mkubwa camp, Fort Jameson camp<sup>9</sup> and Abercorn camp. The Lusaka camp was located near the present capital Lusaka. The refugees in this camp played football with local British, were free to walk in and out of the camp and could go to public places in the city, like the cinema. Bwana Mkubwa camp was at the Copperbelt, near the city Bwana Mkubwa. The camp was striking green, full of fruit trees and the parish of this Polish camp organized mass with a native parish and the Polish refugees sometimes went to the native parish in the city Ndola.<sup>10</sup> Abercorn camp was the last camp that was built and the only one situated in the rural, remote Northern Province, an area which was from the beginning of colonial times seen as one of the British outposts.<sup>11</sup> Wanda Nowoisiad-Ostrowska says

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<sup>7</sup> T. Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II. Recollection of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World*. (North Carolina, London 2004) 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 97-202.

<sup>9</sup> Fort Jameson is today's Chipata. About camp Fort Jameson nobody was interviewed by Piotrowski.

<sup>10</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 169.

<sup>11</sup> R.I. Rotberg, *The rise of nationalism in Central Africa. The making of Malawi and Zambia 1873-1964* (London 1965) 20.

in Piotrowki's book about Abercorn camp: "The settlement of Abercorn was built near a town by the same name. The town had a hotel, bar, post office, one English shop and several Negro ones.(...) Everything that was accomplished in this settlement, located in the deepest and most primitive corner and isolated from all cultural centers, was the fruit of our own initiative and the work of our own hands."<sup>12</sup>

I want to know the reasons behind the building of this camp in the remote Northern Province and the way the approximately six hundred Polish refugees in Abercorn camp were treated and welcomed. That is why I first researched:

1. Why the Poles came to the Abercorn camp.
2. How the Poles came to the Abercorn camp.
3. Why and when the Abercorn camp was built.
4. How the Poles in the Abercorn camp lived.
5. How the Poles in the Abercorn camp were treated by the authorities, native Africans and English colonists.
6. How long the Poles stayed in the Abercorn camp.
7. Why the Poles left the Abercorn camp and who stayed.

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<sup>12</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 172-173.



## 1.2. Theory

In the middle of the Second World War Polish women, children and some men were brought to a camp in a remote part of East Africa, being the Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia. How and why did this group of Poles end up in East Africa and why were they brought to the northern part of Northern Rhodesia, where the last camp for Polish refugees in this country was built?

Based on the literature we can identify seven factors that might explain why the Poles ended up in East Africa in camps that were built for them. These seven factors are mentioned here briefly and will be elucidated in later chapters. In the first place it can be assumed that the size of the group was a problem; the number of Poles seeking refuge was huge and could even become larger, so it was difficult to accommodate them. East Africa had space for them. Although it is clear the group was large, the precise number of Polish refugees is still debated. Piotrowski estimates 115,000 Poles were brought to Persia and claims that half of them were deported to East Africa and Southern Africa which would be 57,500.<sup>13</sup> In the literature it is also not clear how many of the total number of refugees were women and children, but to get an idea: of the group which came to Persia in April 1942 1,549 were men (probably soldiers), 7,066 were women and 3,626 were children.<sup>14</sup> After a certain date the number of Poles did not grow anymore due to regulations in the Soviet Union, but this might have been unknown to the people who were seeking for accommodation for the refugees.<sup>15</sup>

The second factor might be that the British could have felt morally obliged to find accommodation for the Polish refugees because their family members were integrated in the British army.<sup>16</sup> Once the refugees were in Persia, the British most likely wanted to move them towards safety. That is probably why they searched for locations which were reachable from Persia in a relatively easy way and which had space. Great Britain itself was no option, because the country was not very welcoming towards refugees and other countries might have been not very

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<sup>13</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Vereniging Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie Nederland. <http://www.vereniging-1epoolsepantserdivisie-nederland.nl/polen%20na%20ww%202.htm> (April 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Lebedeva, 'The deportation of the Polish population to the USSR, 1939–41', 44.

<sup>16</sup> Pavlovich, 'The Anders army', <http://henrypavlovich.com/The-Anders-Army-> (March 2015).

cooperative.<sup>17</sup> This could have been the reason why Great Britain searched for safe temporarily places for the refugees in its English Territories, being dominions, protectorates<sup>18</sup> and mandates.<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, the Poles might have wanted to stay far away from the Soviet Union, because they did not trust the Soviets. This suspiciousness was deeply rooted, since the Poles were firstly deported by the Soviets, after the occupation of Poland. Later, when they were released and went to Uzbekistan, they were maltreated by the Soviet soldiers, who often kept the little food or clothes they had for themselves since they were poor and unorganized.<sup>20</sup>

The fourth factor could be that, due to the war-time circumstances and the lack of transport facilities and manpower, it might have been difficult and undesirable to deport large numbers of civilians, so the new camps should be not too far away. The journey over sea from Persia to Mombasa in Kenya is 2,652 nautical miles.<sup>21</sup> The average speed of ships in this period of time was eleven to thirteen knots.<sup>22</sup> This means the voyage could have been about eight to ten days.<sup>23</sup> The journey presumable had to be as short as possible since the refugees were vulnerable; the group consisted mainly of women and children who were deported under harsh conditions from Uzbekistan to Persia. Lack of food, transport and the cold during their exodus had made them psychically weak and the loss of family members and trauma's from the difficult journey had made them mentally weak.<sup>24</sup>

A fifth factor could be the presumed temporary nature of the camps. The Poles were expected to stay not too long, but maybe also not very short, since the camps were "longer term displaced persons camp".<sup>25</sup> The English might have been searching for places with space where they could built makeshift housing. In East Africa this was probably relatively easy because these

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<sup>17</sup> A. Bhattacharjee, 'Polish Refugees in India. During and After the Second World War', *The Sarmatian Review* (2013) 1743-1756. 1751.

<sup>18</sup> Dominion refers to an autonomous country in the British Empire and British Commonwealth. Protectorate refers to a British colony or territory that is 'protected' by a stronger state or empire. The protectorate must deal with the outside world solely via the protecting power. 'The Cabinet papers 1915-1986.' <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/help/glossary-m.htm> (March 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Colonies and territories that had been under the sovereignty of the defeated states of World War one, became British mandates. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23830/ernest-a-gross/the-south-west-africa-case-what-happened> (March 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 77-96.

<sup>21</sup> Seaports. <http://ports.com/sea-route/bandar-abbas,iran/port-of-mombasa,kenya/> (April 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Go2war2. <http://www.go2war2.nl/artikel/4097/Nederlandse-niet-gemilitariseerde-hulpschepen-zinkschepen.htm?page=4> (April 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Seaports. <http://ports.com/sea-route/bandar-abbas,iran/port-of-mombasa,kenya/> (April 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Piotrowski, 97-125.

<sup>25</sup> Siberian exiles. <http://www.siberianexiles.org/history> (March 2015).

countries had cheap material like wood and clay which the natives also used – and still use - for their houses. Moreover East Africa had a warm climate where no heating, blankets and winter clothes were needed. Factor number six relates to the assumption that the Polish refugees were looked at as useless, because the women and children were not seen as useful working force. This brings us to the seventh factor, namely that the British maybe felt uncomfortable about accommodating the Poles in their colonies, since they could form a threat against the image of the colonist and against the colonial system. This thought builds on publications of Stoler who claims colonies had a role model for the ideal colonist, the so-called Homo europeus and she states that a group of poor white paupers could be a threat against the colonial system where the Homo europeus ruled.<sup>26</sup> This Homo europeus had to be healthy, wealthy and intelligent and an example of superior citizenship in the colony. The wives of the Homo europeus had to act accordingly. Stoler suggests that male and female white paupers who were not able to meet the demands of the Homo europeus were seen as a threat to the colony because they could besmirch the imago of the superior white colonists. Stoler states that in British colonies the people who did not have the Homo europeus image, like poor and physically or mentally weak people, were put in special homes or sent back to Great Britain.

The Polish refugees in Northern Rhodesia were poor and physically and mentally weak. Furthermore the Poles did not have any colonies themselves.<sup>27</sup> Due to this unfamiliarity with colonies and their poverty, the Polish refugees might socialize with natives in colonies. By doing so they might become a threat against the colonial system. Arnold's publication confirms Stoler's theory.<sup>28</sup> He uses the same assumptions as Stoler when he suggests that the behavior and culture of poor whites could influence and perplex the natives and lead to a revolt. Butcher adds an interesting point when he states that in Malaya colonists were strictly selected in order to be sure that they would fit into the characteristics of the Homo europeus.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> A.L. Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures', *American Ethnologist* 16:4 (1998) 634-660.

<sup>27</sup> T. Hunczak, 'Polish Colonial Ambitions in the Inter-War Period', *Slavic Review* 26:4 (1967) 648-656.

<sup>28</sup> D. Arnold, 'White Colonization and labour in 19th Century India', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 11:2 (1983) 134.

<sup>29</sup> John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941. The social history of a European Community in South East Asia* (Oxford 1979) 48-49.

This thesis does not seek to explain why the Poles were deported to British Territories in East Africa nor why the British strived to find them accommodation in British Territory. Rather it seeks to explain the choice of the location of Abercorn camp in the remote Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia and it investigates the policy behind this choice and if the threat posed by the white paupers might have played a role. As such I am going to look mostly at the fifth, sixth and seventh factors which are mentioned above. Based on these my hypotheses are: 1. Due to the temporality of the camp and the space in the Northern Province, this location was chosen. 2. The composition of the refugee group - mainly women and children, poor and destitute - led to this choice. 3. The remoteness of the location made the group less of a potential threat to colonial hierarchy.

The outcomes of this thesis will link the debate about the policies concerning refugees with the debate about colonial hierarchies. Moreover this thesis will interpret the political agenda of Northern Rhodesia.

### 1.3. Historiography

The theory of the threat of the white pauper applies in this thesis for colonies and that is why the specificity of a colony will be looked at. Stoler and Cooper for instance elaborate on the roots of colonies.<sup>30</sup> They first make a link between the policy in the European metropolis and the policy in the colonies. They state that the bourgeoisie in the European metropolis claimed power and social rights and social criteria were used to determinate lower class groups. This same elite had to think about the way those principles should be applied in the territories. Subsequently they made rules and regulations in the colonies via which it was decided who was allowed to fully participate and profit from the system and who was not. In the literature of Horvath eleven definitions about colonies, imperialism and domination are defined.<sup>31</sup> One that might apply to Northern Rhodesia is the definition about domination, being the control by individuals or groups over the territory and the behavior of others.

To get a picture of the deportation of the Poles from Poland to the Soviet Union, the literature of Roberts<sup>32</sup> and Lebedeva<sup>33</sup> open interesting perspectives. Roberts claims the Molotov von Ribbentrop pact, which was the cause of the first Polish exodus, got a new interpretation after the opening of the archives in the Soviet Union in the beginning of the nineties. He believes that with this new information he has found the underlying motive for the Soviet Union to sign a pact with Germany, being the failure of a pact with Britain and France. He states that the expansion to the Baltic States and East Poland was not the reason to sign, since this was an effect of the pact, not a motive. Lebedeva uses the opening of the archives in order to try to find out how many deportations were carried out from Poland to the Soviet Union and to which locations. The publication of the Polish Government Information Centre with official letters and minutes of the governments of Poland and the Soviet Union, creates a view on the atmosphere between the two countries from 1918 to 1943.<sup>34</sup> Especially the notes from September 1939 are interesting, when the Soviet Union wrote to Poland that after the invasion of Poland by Germany “The Polish

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<sup>30</sup> A.L. Stoler, F. Cooper, ‘Between Metropole and Colony. Rethinking a research agenda’, in: A.L. Stoler and F. Cooper (ed) *Tensions of empire: Colonial cultures in a bourgeois world*. (California 1997) 1-10.

<sup>31</sup> R.J. Horvath, ‘A definition of Colonialism’, *Current Anthropology* 13:1 (1972) 45-57.

<sup>32</sup> G. Roberts, ‘The Soviet decision for a pact with Nazi Germany’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 44:1 (1992). 57-78.

<sup>33</sup> N.S. Lebedeva, ‘The deportation of the Polish population to the USSR, 1939–41’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics. Special Issue: ‘Forced Migration in Central and Eastern Europe, 1939–1950’* 16. 1-2 (2000) 30-42.

<sup>34</sup> Polish Government Information Centre. *Polish-Soviet relations 1918-1943* (New York 1943).

[http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b532493;view=1up;seq=7](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b532493;view=1up;seq=7) (March 2015).

government has disintegrated and no longer shows any sign of life.”<sup>35</sup>

Hunczak describes the politics of the Poles between the First and Second World War regarding colonies.<sup>36</sup> He explains Poland had a colonial movement in 1918. However when 21 years later the movement reached its climax and the cry for colonies became loud, Poland was colonized by Germany and the Soviet Union. Hunczak explains that the desires of the Poles were to have their own colonies, but their plans were unrealistic and he elucidates the economic, political, and psychological factors behind those plans.

There is hardly any literature about the exodus of the Poles from the Soviet Union to Uzbekistan, to Persia and to East and Southern Africa. Grossmann elaborates it slightly.<sup>37</sup> Although his article is specific about Jews, he does describe shortly the journey of Polish Jews from the Soviet Union to Uzbekistan and emphasises the harsh circumstances of the journey. The only comprehensive literature that was found for these exoduses was Piotrowski’s book, which is mainly based on interviews with Polish refugees.<sup>38</sup> The book also provides some background about the exodus of the three other deportations of the Poles but especially figures were not always traceable and sometimes contradictory.

For an impression of colonial Northern Rhodesia, its inhabitants, environment, infrastructure, (colonial) culture and politics, Roberts,<sup>39</sup> Gann,<sup>40</sup> Rotberg<sup>41</sup> and Hall<sup>42</sup> are very rich sources. Gann concentrates on the cities and the Copperbelt and one of his sources are records of the Colonial Office and private archives of Northern Rhodesian officials. Rotberg’s book is about the life and work of Gore Browne who was the Director of War, Evacuees and Camps during a part of World War Two. The sources of Rotberg are diaries of Gore Browne and his personal letters which were stored in trunks and boxes in Shiwa Ngandu.<sup>43</sup> It is the only book about the English colony Northern Rhodesia in which the Polish refugees are mentioned. Roberts book adds to the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, 26.

<sup>36</sup> T. Hunczak, ‘Polish Colonial Ambitions in the Inter-War Period’, *Slavic Review* 26:4 (1967) 648-656.

<sup>37</sup> A. Grossmann, ‘Remapping Relief and Rescue: Flight, Displacement, and International Aid for Jewish Refugees during World War II’, *New German Critique* 39 3:117 (2012) 61-79.

<sup>38</sup> T. Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II. Recollection of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World*. (North Carolina, London 2004).

<sup>39</sup> A. Roberts, *A history of Zambia* (New York 1976).

<sup>40</sup> L.H. Gann, *A history of Northern Rhodesia, Early days to 1953* (London, 1964).

<sup>41</sup> R.I. Rotberg, *Black Heart, Gore Browne and the Politics of Multiracial Zambia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1977).

<sup>42</sup> R. Hall, *Zambia* (London 1965).

<sup>43</sup> Shiwa Ngandu was Gore Brown’s country house and estate in Northern Rhodesia.

history of Northern Rhodesia as well as to the colonial period and emphasises the influence of Livingstone on the colonisation of, which was later called, Northern Rhodesia. Hall gives a thorough impression of the way the British governed the country.

The publications of Gewald,<sup>44</sup> Ranger<sup>45</sup> and Roberts<sup>46</sup> are very important for the view on the politics in Northern Rhodesia, since they emphasise that this country tried to conquer the colony by importing and implementing the British metropolitan culture by employing only people from the high classes. Ferguson's book about the Copperbelt creates more understanding about the relations between the British colonists and the natives who were working in the cities and were obliged to live on basic, enclosed urban compounds.<sup>47</sup>

This thesis will add to the literature of Polish refugees in World War Two and their destinations, their journey to Northern Rhodesia and life in the camps in Northern Rhodesia. This has not been yet been researched in the literature. It will also complement the literature about white paupers, because this thesis links policies concerning refugees to the debate about colonies and it emphasizes refugees in East Africa, whereas the white pauper theory concentrates on Asian countries and inhabitants of these countries. Moreover it will add to the discourse of Northern Rhodesian politics.

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<sup>44</sup> J.B. Gewald, 'Researching and writing in the twilight of an imagined conquest: Anthropology in Northern Rhodesia 1930 - 1960', *ASC Working Paper 75* (2007) 35.

<sup>45</sup> T. Ranger, 'Making Northern Rhodesia Imperial: Variations on a Royal Theme, 1924-1938', *African Affairs* 79:316 (1980) 350-351.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 175-179.

<sup>47</sup> J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity, myths and meanings of urban life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1999)

## **1.4. Methods and material**

### **1.4.1. Field work in Lusaka**

In July and September 2014 I went to the National Archives in Lusaka in Zambia, which are the main sources of his thesis.<sup>48</sup> In those remarkably well organized and preserved archives official letters, telegrams and receipts from the British authorities in Northern Rhodesia, the British authorities in Southern Africa and in Nairobi, as well as from Polish authorities and Polish inhabitants of the camps in Northern Rhodesia and Polish camp commanders of those camp, are kept.

Despite the richness of these primary sources, dates were sometimes confusing and files were lost during the time I was there. I also went to the Library of Faith and Encounter Centre, Leopard Hill road, Lusaka Zambia, better known as the archives of the Catholic Church, but could not find any information there.<sup>49</sup>

### **1.4.2. Field work in Mbala**

#### ***1.4.2.1. Camp visit and remains***

In August 2014 in the Northern Province of Zambia, near the town Mbala, I explored the site of the former Polish refugee camp to investigate ruins of some walls – nobody could tell me from which building of the camp they were. I examined the field opposite the former camp where one Polish grave tomb remains and many Polish refugees allegedly are buried. In the storerooms of the small Moto Moto museum I investigated remnants of the camp. Furthermore I did research in the archives of the Moto Moto museum and of the Anglican Church in Mbala.

#### ***1.4.2.2 Interviews with local Zambians***

In August 2014 I had interviews with Victoria Phiri, the director of the Moto Moto museum, who works at the museum since 2004. She nor her family are from the Northern Province. I interviewed Lewis Sinyangwe, the Maintenance Conservation Assistance at the Moto Moto museum, who was born in the area and his grandfather was an important man in one of the villages in the district of

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<sup>48</sup> National Archives of Zambia, Lusaka.

<sup>49</sup> Faith & Encounter Centre Zambia, Lusaka.



Abercorn during the years of the Polish camp. This grandfather used to tell him many stories about those days. I was suspicious about Sinyangwe's stories, because they seemed to be a mix of the oral history of his grandfather, the stories of others and Sinyangwe's own interpretation about the remains that were found at the former premises of the Abercorn camp. This is why I only used the information of Sinyangwe after double checks in the archives or via other interviews.

Sinyangwe and Phiri arranged interviews for me with two native Zambians, Morrison Sichilima and Damson Chizu Simpungwe, who were older than eighty years and lived in Abercorn as a boy. They were probably chosen because there are not many people older than eighty years in the area, but also because both had high ranked public functions and were known in and around Mbala. It might be the case that there were more older people, who are not known by the people of the museum. Sichilima and Simpungwe were interviewed separate and individually. Sinyangwe was present and did not talk during two of the interviews. The third one who was interviewed is an uncle of Lewis Sinyangwe named Joshua Sinyangwe. He was born in 1918 and had not a high ranked position. This interview had to be translated by Lewis, because the interviewee did not speak English. When I asked a question Joshua Sinyangwe often said he just did not know and did not want to lie.

Arnold Victor Keita was born in 1932 and lives on the premises where the Polish camp was situated. I interviewed him and he had a lot of stories, but this was all collective memory, which means that the things he said in the interviews are not from his own memory, but from things he heard from others. I am sure about this, because although he did not live in Abercorn during or just after the Second World War, he claimed to have seen the camp and the Poles, the truck bringing them and so on. I did not use his memories concerning things he said he had seen.

**Table 1: Interviews done in Mbala in August 2014.**

Name	Occupation	Birth date	Around 1943 in	Particularity
Morrison Sichilima	Education Officer in Abercorn and Kasama.	1938	Abercorn village.	His facial expression came across as if he really saw the things he told, happen again.
Damson Chizu Simpungwe	Education Officer in Abercorn.	1939	Ivuna village, 28 km from Abercorn.	Was quite young in 1943. Memory is probably distracted from older brother.
Joshua Sinyangwe	Builder and road constructor.	1918	Sinyangwe, 23 km's from Abercorn.	Worked near Polish camp around 1943. Interview with translator.
Arnold Victor Keita	Missionary of Seventh Adventist Church.	1932	Lives on the premises of the former Polish camp.	Though he pretended to have memories, he was not in or near Abercorn around 1943.
Lewis Sinyangwe	Maintenance conservation Assistance at Moto Moto museum.	Not relevant.	Not relevant.	Knew many stories from grandfather who was a chief near Abercorn around 1943.
Victoria Phiri	Director of Moto Moto Museum.	Not relevant.	Not relevant.	She nor her family is from the area.

### 1.4.3. Testimonials and pictures

At the website of the Canadian Polish Historical Society I found a testimonial of Janina Kusio-Lang, a Polish woman who made the journeys from the Soviet Union to Uzbekistan and Persia and ended up in Abercorn.<sup>50</sup> At the website of the Kresy Siberia Virtual Museum I found pictures of the Polish refugee camp in Abercorn.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Canadian Polish Historical Society <http://www.cphsalberta.ca/lange.html> (March 2015)

<sup>51</sup> Kresy Siberia Virtual Museum. <http://www.kresy-siberia.com> (December 2014).

#### 1.4.4. Polish people

I tried to track down Polish people or their descendants who stayed in the Polish camp in Abercorn. In Zambia I went to the editor of a magazine who published a story about the Polish refugees.<sup>52</sup> I contacted the writer of the article in Cape Town, M. Mbewe and the Polish-American sociologist T. Piotrowski for more sources or information, but they both could not add more information to their article and book.

In this thesis the reasons behind the choice of the location of Abercorn camp in the Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia will be researched. In order to investigate this, I will follow the above mentioned hypotheses about the temporality of the camp, the composition of the refugee group, the remoteness of the location and the political agenda of Northern Rhodesia.

In the literature I have found general information about the Polish refugees in East Africa, the policy of Northern Rhodesia and the policies of colonial states in general. The primary sources, being the National Archives, the interviews in the field and the field visit, will presumably give an impression of the remoteness of Abercorn camp, the lives of the Poles in the camp, the camp regulations, the way the camps were ruled and the way the Poles were treated by native Africans, English colonists and Northern Rhodesian Authorities.

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<sup>52</sup> M. Mbewe, 'Northern Poles', *Lowdown Magazine* 9:7. (2013) 31-34.

## 2. Four deportations: from the Soviet Union until East Africa

The Poles who ended up in East Africa were deported four times: from their homes in Poland to the Soviet Union, from the Soviet Union to Uzbekistan, from Uzbekistan to Persia and from Persia to East Africa. Those journeys were harsh, unorganized and many refugees died. Before the Polish refugees arrived in East Africa the English and Polish authorities settled the organization of the temporary settlements by making appointments about rules, regulations and responsibilities.

### 2.1. The Soviet Union

At the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact, the Molotov-von Ribbentrop pact. The Soviet Union and German agreed not to attack each other.<sup>53</sup> The pact had a secret protocol in which the two countries decided the Soviet Union was taking Finland, Latvia, Estonia and the eastern part of Poland, Germany was taking Lithuania and the western part of Poland.<sup>54</sup>

One week later Germany invaded Poland and within two weeks the Polish army was destroyed.<sup>55</sup> Seven days later the Soviet Union invaded the eastern part of Poland. Between 1940-1941 the Soviet Union started to deport Polish people to remote areas in the Soviet Union, mostly in Siberia, but also in the Urals and Kazakhstan.<sup>56</sup> The Poles were brought to collective farms (kolkhozes), concentration camps and forced labor camps.

Among the deportees were military people, police men, gendarmes, guards, intellectuals, criminals, opponents, prostitutes, prisoners of war or refugees who fled from their occupied homeland Poland or from the Belorussia or Ukrainian Republics, which were also occupied by the Soviet Union.<sup>57</sup> All these groups and their families were seen by Stalin as criminals or opponents and were therefore exiled.

Two of the women who were interviewed in 2008 by Monica Janowski, remembered parts of their lives in the Soviet Union, like Danuta Gradosielska whose sister died of meningitis in the Soviet Union. Danuta, who was born in 1925, described her live in the Soviet Union as a moment

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<sup>53</sup> Polish Government Information Centre information centre  
[http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b532493;view=1up;seq=1](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b532493;view=1up;seq=1) 25 (March 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Roberts, 'The Soviet decision for a pact with Nazi Germany' 67-71.

<sup>55</sup> R. Citino, *The path to Blitzkrieg: Doctrine and training in the German Army, 1920-1939* (London and Colorado 1999) 1.

<sup>56</sup> Grossmann, 'Remapping Relief and Rescue', 61-79.

<sup>57</sup> Lebedeva, 'The deportation of the Polish population to the USSR, 1939-41', 30.

whereas her precious childhood changed into a nightmare. Aniela Polnik, who was also interviewed by Janowski, recalled how she lost her sixteen years old brother who was kicked to death because he stole a dog from a Russian soldier in order to butcher the dog and feed his family. Aniela's sister died due to a lack of food and her mother died, according to Aniela, due to a broken heart, because she lost two children.<sup>58</sup>

There is a lot of discussion about the number of people that was deported. Lebedeva estimates about 283,000 Poles were deported between 1939 and 1941.<sup>59</sup> But Sroka uses the figure 335,000-1,000,000 between 1940-1941<sup>60</sup> and Antolak claims 1,5 million Poles were deported.<sup>61</sup> The margin of Sroka and the differences between the figures of the scholars shows that the number of deportees is very uncertain.

Janina Kuzio Lang, a Polish woman who ended up in Abercorn and was interviewed on a website of the Polish Community in Canada, was nine years old when her family was deported. In the interview she says about the deportation to the Soviet Union: "Our lives changed dramatically when the Soviet troops invaded the eastern Polish territories. Our village and the entire region found itself under Soviet occupation. February 10, 1940 my family was exiled to Siberia. (...) On March 4 we arrived at Krasnoyarsk, where we were loaded on trucks. After a three-day trip, we arrived at Pima of the Mansk region, in Novosibirsk oblast. There were two huge, long buildings with triple bunks, probably this was a prison before. One of them became home to 500 people. (...) The exiles began to get sick and died. Most of the victims were young people between the ages of 14 and 20. It happened that one day we buried 10 people."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> M. Janowski, 'Food in traumatic times: "Women, foodways and Polishness during a wartime odyssey', *Food and Foodways* 20:3-4 (2012) 334-335.

<sup>59</sup> Lebedeva, 'The deportation of the Polish population to the USSR, 1939-41', 1.

<sup>60</sup> M. Sroka, 'War Through Children's Eyes', *Eastern Archive Collection, Slavic & East European Information Resources* 15:1-2 (2014) 80.

<sup>61</sup> Antolak, 'Iran and the Polish Exodus from Russia 1942'.

[http://www.parstimes.com/history/polish\\_refugees/exodus\\_russia.html](http://www.parstimes.com/history/polish_refugees/exodus_russia.html) (March 2015).

<sup>62</sup> Canadian Polish Historical Society <http://www.cphsalberta.ca/lange.html> (March 2015).

## 2.2. Uzbekistan

Two years after the signing of the non-aggression pact Germany infringed the pact and invaded the Soviet Union.<sup>63</sup> Shortly after the invasion the Russian general Sikorsky and the prime minister of Poland Maysky, who lived in exile in England, signed an agreement in London in the presence of Winston Churchill and the British Foreign Office diplomat Anthony Eden.<sup>64</sup> In this so called Maysky-Sikorsky agreement Poland promised to strengthen the Russian Red Army with its own Polish people and the Soviets promised to release all Polish exiles. The released Poles had three choices: 1) they could stay in the Soviet Union, 2) they could go back home or 3) they could leave the Soviet Union under the condition that one of their family members joined the Red Army.

The Poles who choose the last option had to go to Uzbekistan where a special army, formed by the Polish general Wladyslaw Anders, was in charge of bringing former Polish exiles to the British territory Persia. All was set on paper and the plan could be executed.

Due to bad preparations in the Soviet Union an unorganized exodus followed, whereby Polish exiles often heard by accident that they were free and could leave.<sup>65</sup> There was hardly any transportation and many Polish refugees had to find their own way outside the camps, prisons and kolkhozes. Many tried to find the army of Anders. Russians soldiers had little supplies for the Polish refugees and if the Russians did have food or clothes, they often kept them for themselves. In most cases the Polish people had to find their own way; they walked, built rafts, took cattle trains and made stopovers for months at farms to work. Families lost relatives in the chaos of the exodus. Moreover many women and children travelled without men, because men were joining the army.

Once the refugees reached Uzbekistan the suffering they experienced in the Soviet Union and during their journey to Uzbekistan was not over yet, because in the camps in Uzbekistan many refugees got typhus and there was a lack of food. Tens of thousands of Polish refugees died from illnesses, hunger, cold, heat and exhaustion. Hundreds of thousands Poles who also wanted to leave the Soviet Union, but did not reach the Uzbekistan yet, were forced to accept Russian citizenship.

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<sup>63</sup> P-66020 Report, 'Document D; Soviet deportation of the inhabitants of Eastern Poland in 1939-1941 Confidential report', cited in Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 211-223.

<sup>64</sup> Pavlovich, 'The Anders army' <http://henrypavlovich.com/The-Anders-Army-> (March 2015).

<sup>65</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 77.

Janina Kusio-Lang, who was interviewed on the website for Polish people in Canada, also went to the south. “An Amnesty was declared in the summer of 1941. The commander of our settlement called a meeting and announced that General Sykowski signed an agreement with the Soviet Union and that we have been set free”.

Janina and her family went to a collective farm to work there for a while in order to get money for the journey to Uzbekistan. After some time they left the farm and hitched to the train station where they took a freight train to Novosibirsk. They ended up in Kyrgyzstan and moved into a house with another family. Her father left them and went to the army. In April 1942 she went with her two sisters and mother to Jalal-Abad in Kyrgyzstan and waited there for four months for transport to Persia. “While in Jalal-Abad we were under the care of the Polish authorities and we were not starving as before. Life began to normalize.”<sup>66</sup>

### 2.3. Persia

The Polish General Władysław Anders was imprisoned in the Lubyanka prison in Moscow, released in August and asked by Sikorsky to organise an army. This army started to form on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August in the Central Asian Republics, in the city Totskoye. By the end of 1941 25,000 Polish soldiers had joined the army.<sup>67</sup> Anders army brought the Polish exiles, who had permission to leave the Soviet Union, to Persia, which was British territory. They went in three groups. The first two went from what is now called Turkmenistan (Krasnovodsk) across the Caspian Sea in March and August 1942. The last one was in October 1942 and went from what is today Turkmenistan (Ashkhabad) to Persia. The transports from the central Asian Republics to Persia stopped, because the army of Anders had to go to fight in, amongst others, Iraq and Italy.<sup>68</sup>

In the literature different numbers are presented about the number of people who were deported to Persia. According to Pavlovich there were 74,000 “former Polish citizens”, Piotrowski claims a number of 115,000, Grossmann uses a number of 26,000<sup>69</sup> and Levin claims the total

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<sup>66</sup> Canadian Polish Historical Society. <http://www.cphsalberta.ca/lange.html> (March 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Pavlovich, ‘The Anders army’. <http://henrypavlovich.com/The-Anders-Army-> (March 2015).

<sup>68</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> Grossmann, ‘Remapping Relief and Rescue’, 67 footnote 13.

number was 109,000.<sup>70</sup> The soldiers who arrived in Persia were no longer under control of the Soviet army, but under British control.<sup>71</sup>

In Persia the Polish refugees were accommodated in stables, buildings from the army and tents. The British, Indian and Polish soldiers, Persian citizens, the Polish-American community and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration took care of the former exiles. To get rid of lice and scabies the heads of Poles were shaved and their clothes and blankets were burned. The majority of the refugees had become very weak, so when they were fed soup with lamb many got sick, because they were not accustomed to such a rich meal. Michalina Pluciennik, who was interviewed by Janowski, described Persia as “heaven” because after all the shortages of food in the camps in the Soviet Union and Uzbekistan and during the deportations, she could not imagine there could be a place with such an abundance of food. But it was alien food and people were malnourished, so they either did not want to eat it and died, or they took too much and died.<sup>72</sup> Many refugees also died of typhoid, dysentery and malaria.<sup>73</sup> Janina Kuzio-Lang remembers: “Finally, at the beginning of August, 1942 we were loaded on ships and left from Krasnovodsk a port on the Caspian Sea on a 24 hour journey. Travelling in terrible conditions, we arrived in Pahlavi. Finally we were free (...) We stayed in Pahlavi for 3 weeks, after which we were sent to Teheran to Camp.”<sup>74</sup>

The camps in Persia were temporary and the British and Polish governments tried to find countries where the refugees could stay until the end of World War Two. The USA, Canada and countries in South America were approached, but none of them were willing to host the Polish people. Some of the governments were hostile and others had impracticable demands. The president of the USA, Roosevelt, only offered financial and material help.<sup>75</sup> As the family members of the Polish refugees became part of the British army in Persia, Great Britain felt morally obliged to help the refugees and decided to bring the refugees from their British territory in Persia to other British territories around the world. Moreover, the British looked for destinations with plenty of space, since the group of Poles was large and they might have expected it would extend for many

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<sup>70</sup> N. Levin cited in Grossmann, ‘Remapping Relief and Rescue’, 67 footnote 13.

<sup>71</sup> Pavlovich, ‘The Anders army’. <http://henrypavlovich.com/The-Anders-Army-> (March 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Janowski, ‘Food in traumatic times’, 337.

<sup>73</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 97.

<sup>74</sup> Canadian Polish Historical Society. <http://www.cphsalberta.ca/lange.html> (March 2015).

<sup>75</sup> A. Bhattacharjee, ‘Polish Refugees in India. During and After the Second World War’, *The Sarmatian Review* (2013) 1751.



Poles were still in the Soviet Union. However, in 1943 the Soviet Union announced that the people who lived before 1939 in the Soviet Union, had to be considered as Soviet citizens, so no more Polish were allowed to leave the Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup>

The search for a spacious British destination resulted in the deportation of the majority of Polish refugees to British Territories like India, New Zealand, Tanganyika (present Tanzania), Uganda, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia (present Zimbabwe), the Union of South Africa (present South Africa), Kenya and Nyasaland (present Malawi). The refugees were randomly selected for their new destination, which should not be too far, since the transport for the deportation, the food and manpower was needed for the war. India was nearby and East Africa was relatively nearby. New Zealand was quite far, but this country only received one group of orphans with a few adults to escort them.

#### **2.4. Deportation to East Africa**

The Polish refugees who were going to East Africa were shipped from Persia, or brought from Persia to India and shipped from an Indian port, to different African destinations. The Kenyan port Mombasa, the Tanganyikan ports Tanga and Dar es Salaam and the Mozambican ports Beira and Laurenço Marques, which is today's Maputo, were the first African stops for the Polish refugees. In the interview on website of the Canadian Polish Historical Society Janina Kuzio-Lang said she went from Persia to India and from India to Dar es Salaam in a convoy because of safety: "We sailed by ship through the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. Because the sea voyage was dangerous, we travelled in a convoy of about 100 ships. The security of travelling in a convoy added courage in face of danger when our ship came upon a mine which left a gaping hole in the hull of the ship. The lifeboats were lowered, but somehow the crew managed to take appropriate action and we reached the port of Dar es Salaam".<sup>77</sup>

From the African ports the Poles were distributed to different places in Tanganyika, Uganda, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, Kenya and Nyasaland. Once they arrived, they were sent to one of the nineteen camps or settlements in the above mentioned countries. Those camps were set up by the local British authorities. They were on such huge distances from each other that the British decided to divide the whole area into three regions with a headquarter

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<sup>76</sup> Lebedeva, 'The deportation of the Polish population to the USSR, 1939–41', 44.

<sup>77</sup> Canadian Polish Historical Society <http://www.cphsalberta.ca/lange.html> (March 2015).

for every part, one being in Kampala, one in Dar es Salaam and one in Lusaka.<sup>78</sup> Southern Rhodesia received the first contingent of 1,000 Polish refugees in January 1943<sup>79</sup> and the New York Times in August 1943 wrote that the total Polish refugees population in the four colonies Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Northern Rhodesia was estimated at 20,000. "More than the combined British population there."<sup>80</sup> According Mr. C.L Bruton, the Commissioner of the East African Refugee Administration in Nairobi the Poles were sent to a difficult environment. In November 1943 he stated that: "East Africa was not an ideal place for large numbers of European refugees of whom the majority were women and children who had suffered great hardships".<sup>81</sup>

## 2.5. Organisation of camps in East Africa

At the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1943 the Polish Consul General M. Wierusz-Kowalski and H.L.G. Gurney of the Colonial British Government in Nairobi signed a "Memorandum regarding the respective responsibilities of the East African governments and the Polish authorities in East Africa for the general welfare of Polish refugees in East Africa and describing the manner in which these responsibilities are to be discharged by the governments and Polish Authorities in collaboration."<sup>82</sup> The memorandum was signed in Kampala, Uganda and one of the things it stated was that the East African governments held themselves responsible to the government of the United Kingdom for "the general welfare of the Polish refugees for whom they are providing a domicile during the war". They stated that "the East African Governments will welcome and avail themselves of the advice and assistance of any Polish Delegates whom the Poles has appointed or may wish to appoint for this purpose." The executive authority "to decide all questions" remained with the East African governments, who would follow the directions from the government in the United Kingdom. In the memorandum the responsibilities of the camp were divided between the Poles and the British, whereas welfare services and occupations like religion, culture, health, sports, welfare, education, internal security and work inside the camps were the responsibility of the

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<sup>78</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, 138.

<sup>79</sup> M.R. Rupiah, 'The history of the establishment of internment camps and refugee settlements in Southern Rhodesia, 1938-1952'. *The Zambezia* XXII ii (1995) 150.

<sup>80</sup> '12,000 Poles in Uganda: Refugees in British Colony Aid War Effort by Their Work', *New York Times* (August 1943)

<sup>81</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 222.

<sup>82</sup> SEC 1/1701. Control and administration of evacuees camp Lusaka, Bwana Mkubwa and Abercorn, 1941-46. SEC/MIL/75, Vol II. No 137/1.

Poles. The British were responsible for the maintenance of things to do with lodging, security, health and food and clothing supply. The needs for the things the British were responsible for should be passed on by the Polish delegates or representatives of the camps. About the sharing of responsibilities it was said that: "The East African Governments appreciate that their responsibility does not absolve the Polish Government from its task and duty to alleviate the burden of refugee life and to help the refugees both spiritually and mentally, to educate the children, to re-establish the other refugees morally so that they may form a useful community on their return to Poland, preserving as far as possible their religious sentiments and national habits." The signatories strove for cooperation: "In view of the desirability of lightening the burden of the East African Governments in administering settlements of several thousands of refugees, a Polish administrative machine, framing and applying Polish administration in the settlements, will be set up." The memorandum was meant for all British Territory in East Africa and that is why the execution of the memorandum would be done depending (...) "local condition by mutual agreements between the East African refugee Administration and the Office of the Polish Delegate." It is striking that, although the memorandum was meant for East Africa, and Northern Rhodesia was part of British East African Territory, on top of the memorandum the following was written "the term East Africa includes Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland".

Another important paper was the "scheme for organisation of Polish refugee settlements in Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and North and Southern Rhodesia"<sup>83</sup>, which had roughly the same content, but on top of it emphasized some extra points which were seen as important to consider like "the peculiar economics regulating life of the European community in the various Territories which already feel the effects of war" or the starting point that the settlements should try to have their own internal economy and be self-supporting by working on farms outside the camps and having their own productions inside the camp. The paper emphasised that these activities should not disturb the economies outside the camps. Furthermore it was expected that Poles were assisting the British territories in their war campaigns and grown-ups should be educated in the camps to "counteract demoralisation that has followed the privations and sufferings of recent years."

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<sup>83</sup> ZM 1/20 Organisation of Refugee Settlements 1. 195 June-August. The scheme is the only document in this file. The scheme does not have a date, nor a sender or receiver and there are some parts erased with a pencil, but they are still readable. I did not use the erased parts.

In this scheme the camps were divided into sections and groups. A section had a maximum of 160 persons, a group consisted of 5 to 6 sections with a maximum of 500 people. Every healthy person older than 16 years had to work three hours a day in the camp as a volunteer and if this work was refused, pocket money should be withheld. Daily services in the camp, like at schools and in orphanages, should be paid for. The scheme contained a list of names of refugees who were not entitled to get pocket money if they worked and earned more than 100 shilling per month<sup>84</sup> nor to get free board and lodging. The same applied to schoolteachers, army officers on leave, families of refugees with a salary of 320 shilling per month, families of army officers employed in the camp and army officers who paid for their maintenance. There was also a list of people who should not receive free clothes, like the ones with a certain level of salary. Concerning production work in the settlements there was a lot of expectation. It was stated that plans for production had to be made with the local director of Refugee Administration. The needs of the settlements came first, but if production succeeded it should expand to the market and to military needs, like uniforms. The ideas about production in the camp aimed at laundry, to keep livestock, like poultry and pigs, open a butchery and organise workshops of tailoring, knitting, spinning, weaving, handicraft, making dolls and other toys, embroidering, lace, rugs and home-made products. In the scheme it was decided that "The question of costs should be carefully studied before work is undertaken." Farm products should be sold at cost price in camp canteens and the profits should go to the so-called settlement treasury. All payments in the settlements of Polish workers, whether it was Polish or British funds, had to be done by the Polish settlement leaders, as they called it in the scheme. For women employment outside the camps was not allowed without permission and senior Polish settlement officials were getting passes with which they could travel inside designated territories "without hindrance."<sup>85</sup>

The East African authorities had discussions about taxing the refugees, because some Polish refugees had brought resources, like money or goods to sell, some had money from unknown sources and others worked. In February 1943 it was finally decided by the East African Refugee Administration that no refugee should pay tax.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> I presume this is Kenyan shillings, because, although this document has no location nor a sender or a receiver, I presume this document is made at the East African Refugee Administration in Kenya.

<sup>85</sup> ZM 1/20 Organisation of Refugee Settlements 1. 195 June-August.

<sup>86</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 178.

### Conclusion

The Poles who ended up in refugee camps in East Africa in World War Two, had gone through a very harsh time. When their country was taken over by the Soviet Union, they were deported to camps, kolkhozes and prisons in the Soviet Union. When they were released they went on their own account to Uzbekistan. From there they departed with Anders army to Persia and after some time they were brought to East Africa. They did not have a lot of information about their new destination.

In East Africa the British and Polish authorities tried to make rules and regulations for all Polish camps in the different East African countries. There was quite an expectation towards the self-supporting and entrepreneurial qualities of the refugees.

### 3. Northern Rhodesia

In order to get an impression of Abercorn camp and to find out why this last camp was built in a remote area, it is crucial to compare this camp to other camps in Northern Rhodesia. To provide a picture of the other camps, I will use the research in the National Archives in Lusaka, Zambia, where official letters and telegrams of Northern Rhodesian, Polish and British authorities and receipts and letters from the Polish camp commanders as well as from the Polish refugees and other paperwork is kept (see chapter 3.2.)

Before I elaborate on the archives of the camp, I want to investigate in what kind of political environment the camps were based. Therefore I will first do a literature research to the political agenda of the British colony Northern Rhodesia.

#### 3.1. The British empire and Northern Rhodesia

To understand the policy of Northern Rhodesia some background information is needed: between 1853-1863 the British explorer David Livingstone was the first one who stimulated the policy of expanding British trade to the north of the Zambezi, the area which is now called Zambia. His aim was to spread Christianity and the Industrial Revolution, because he was convinced material progress on the earth as well as salvation were the keywords for the future of mankind.<sup>87</sup>

The English millionaire Cecil Rhodes was a supporter of this expansionism. With his slogan “I would annex the planets if I could”<sup>88</sup> his aim was to expand the English Empire. He started his expansionism in Southern Africa where he first controlled the Kimberly diamond mines and later the goldfields north of Limpopo. Rhodes wanted to set up a company with the British government, so he could have the freedom to use their authority against other colonial powers. In 1889 the British government and Rhodes founded a company, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) with a main office in Southern Rhodesia, present Zimbabwe.<sup>89</sup> BSAC gradually tried to take control over areas like North Western Rhodesia (present west Zambia) and East Western Rhodesia (present east Zambia) and in 1911 this succeeded; the two areas were brought together under the name Northern Rhodesia, which was going to be administered by the BSAC.<sup>90</sup> In those days Northern Rhodesia was not of many interest to the BSAC and it was ruled by a small amount of white civil

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<sup>87</sup> Roberts, A history of Zambia, 151.

<sup>88</sup> H.L. Wesseling, *Verdeel en Heers. De deling van Afrika 1880-1914* (Amsterdam 1991) 1.

<sup>89</sup> Roberts, A history of Zambia, 156.

<sup>90</sup> R.I. Rotberg, *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa* (Lexington 1983) 90-91.

servants, who first came from Southern Africa and Southern Rhodesia and later from Great Britain. The latter were university graduates.<sup>91</sup> The English administrators who worked for the BSAC had a preference for graduates, who came from higher classes. They did not like to work with South African people. The administrators even asked the British Foreign Office to recruit sons of diplomats and consular officials in Great Britain.<sup>92</sup> The policy of recruiting graduated British men for jobs in Northern Rhodesia, happened especially before the Second World War.<sup>93</sup> Many of those recruited men came from the English universities Oxford and Cambridge.

In the twenties the administration of both Southern and Northern Rhodesia was handed over by the BSAC to the new rulers in the two Rhodesia's; Southern Rhodesia became self-governed in 1923, Northern Rhodesia became in 1924 a Crown Colony with a legislative council. The settlers in Northern Rhodesia wanted this form of governance, since they thought it would give them more power than the alternative, being one state with Southern Rhodesia. They were afraid that being one Rhodesia would have negative effects, like the loss of labour and wealth to Southern Rhodesia.<sup>94</sup>

The first Governor in Northern Rhodesia in 1924, Herbert Stanley, firmly believed the new country should develop as a white man's country.<sup>95</sup> He strived to turn the culture of the whites in Northern Rhodesia from the "soulless capitalism" of the BSAC into "imperial paternalism".<sup>96</sup> He had sympathies for white settlers, at least when they were British, and expected them to be loyal to the British Crown. Stanley strived to bring and implement the British standards and culture of the upper classes to Northern Rhodesia. He disliked Afrikaner families who did not know the lyrics of 'God Save the King' and was not amused when he found out some white inhabitants celebrated the so called Rhodesian Feast Day and not the British Empire Day. When the Prince of Wales came to Northern Rhodesia for an official visit, Stanley worried about the lack of proper evening clothes among the settlers. In his opinion they needed these special clothes in order to attend a formal meeting with the Prince of Wales. The Daily Mail wrote "(...) It is manifestly a most difficult matter to find a common tie between such a diversity of races, religious interests and ideas as comprise the British Empire. The Crown is the only symbol common to all and the House of Windsor the only

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<sup>91</sup> Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 175-179.

<sup>92</sup> Gann, *A history of Northern Rhodesia*, 95-96.

<sup>93</sup> Gewald, 'Researching and writing in the twilight of an imagined conquest', 35.

<sup>94</sup> Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 182.

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem, 183.

<sup>96</sup> Ranger, 'Making Northern Rhodesia Imperial: Variations on a Royal Theme, 1924-1938', 350-351.

family that would for a moment be tolerated in this most honourable station [...] The King is the bond of Union, the President of the Commonwealth of Nations, and for reasons widely appreciated it is the interest of all the Nations to maintain the supremacy of the Royal Family."<sup>97</sup>

### **3.1. The first contingents of Polish refugees in World War Two**

In October 1942 the Director of War Evacuees and Camps of Northern Rhodesia, Gore Browne, expected only around 500 Polish refugees on his territory.<sup>98</sup> They were coming from the Middle East. In August 1945 the number of Polish refugees in Northern Rhodesia was 3,419 of which 1,227 stayed in camps in the capital Lusaka, 1,431 in Bwana Mkubwa at the Copperbelt, 164 in Fort Jameson at the border with Nyasaland and 597 in Abercorn in the Northern Province.<sup>99</sup> The Polish evacuees who stayed in Northern Rhodesia came via the South African port Durban, the Mozambican port of Beira and the Tanganyikan port of Dar es Salaam. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1941 in a letter from Jerusalem to the authorities of Northern Rhodesia, it was said that 350 refugees were coming.<sup>100</sup> Six days later Browne received a letter from London in which they assumed 500 Poles were going to be evacuated to his territory.<sup>101</sup> One month later, the 27<sup>th</sup> of August, the Acting Governor wrote that 101 men, 74 women and 14 children were leaving from the Middle East. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September the Governor of Lusaka received a letter stating "party has arrived (...) another 93 are expected on sept 11<sup>th</sup>."<sup>102</sup> At the end of September 1941 the Polish refugees were almost in East Africa and the British authorities in Pretoria urged the Governor of Lusaka he should send an official person to welcome them.<sup>103</sup> From a letter saying 55 evacuees were leaving Durban by mail train to Lusaka, it seems they arrived by boat in Durban and were taken by South African Railways to Northern Rhodesia.<sup>104</sup>

In a memorandum Browne described how the Poles were welcomed. When they took the train in Durban representatives of the Provincial Administration and fellow Polish evacuees who were already there, greeted the refugees at all stations they passed. When the newcomers arrived

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<sup>97</sup> Livingstone Mail 23 July 1925, cited in Ranger, 'Making Northern Rhodesia Imperial, 358.

<sup>98</sup> SEC 1/1701. Control and administration of evacuees camp Lusaka, Bwana Mkubwa and Abercorn, 1941-46. Vol I, SEC/MIL/75. No 46

<sup>99</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 293 6A

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem, no 107.

<sup>101</sup> Ibidem, no 95.

<sup>102</sup> Ibidem, no 149.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem, no 189.

<sup>104</sup> Ibidem, no 88, point 37.



at the station in Bulawayo, in Southern Rhodesia, they were welcomed by the Polish Consul General and the Northern Rhodesian Officer in Charge of the department of War Evacuees and Refugees. At this station the Poles had lunch. When they arrived in Lusaka they stayed for a short time in railway coaches which were offered by the railway company. The Lusaka board management provided sanitation and the Grand Hotel in Lusaka and the Lusaka Hotel served breakfast. The Poles initially had some ideas of their own about where they should stay, but they had to obey the orders of the authorities. They were brought to the towns Monze and Mazabuka, both southwest of Lusaka, and Fort Jameson where they stayed in hotels and at private people's homes, while a few stayed in Kafue and Livingstone. The Poles were transported to their destination by five military lorries from the Northern Rhodesian Infantry. Every lorry had a Polish and an English translator, food rations for three days and crockery and cutlery, lent by the Agricultural Society Ltd. The lorries stopped every two hours for ten minutes and there was a lunch break of thirty minutes. In Fort Jameson they were welcomed by the Provincial Commissioner and representatives of the Women's Institute who offered them lunch.<sup>105</sup>

According to the book 'Black Heart' by Rotberg, those first refugees were middle class people from the cities who had a lot of demands concerning better shelter and better schooling. Rotberg claims that Browne had to mediate between the white inhabitants and he quotes a personal letter of Browne to his aunt in which he tells her that the Poles were on hunger strike, because they only got one egg for breakfast. Although he felt morally obliged to take more Poles, he was not happy when they came.<sup>106</sup>

In June 1942 Gore Browne said that setting up camps for the refugees was the best thing to do, because the houses in Northern Rhodesia were too small.<sup>107</sup> For the Polish refugees Fort Jameson in the Eastern Province was the first place where a camp would be built and the Provincial Commissioner of this province did not foresee any problems in having the Polish evacuees in his province. He stated in a letter that the cost of building at Fort Jameson was "lower than any other place in Africa" and he said there would be no problems concerning food as "we are fortunate to be in cattle country. Vegetables and fruit can be obtained in quantities if properly organised and we could produce our own flour. I see no difficulties that cannot be overcome."<sup>108</sup> The other camps

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<sup>105</sup> SEC1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees, 1941-1946, SEC/MIL/74, Vol I. No 73.

<sup>106</sup> Rotberg, *Black Heart, Gore Browne and the Politics of Multiracial Zambia*. 236-237.

<sup>107</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 146, Point II and III.

<sup>108</sup> SEC1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees, 1941-1946, SEC/MIL/74, Vol I. No 17.

in Northern Rhodesia followed; in Lusaka, Bwana Mkubwa and Abercorn. The camps in Fort Jameson, Bwana Mkubwa and Lusaka were in the southern part of Northern Rhodesia, whereas Abercorn was the only one in the Northern Province.<sup>109</sup> In September 1942 Browne seemed to be worried about the support for the refugees since he asked in a letter to the Salvation Army headquarter in Salisbury (today's Harare) in Southern Rhodesia for help: "As you have no doubt seen announced in the Press Northern Rhodesia is likely to have to establish Camps for anything up to 1.000 Poles at Lusaka, Bwana Mkubwa and most likely Abercorn. This will involve, as you will appreciate, a lot of welfare work and I wondered if your organisation would be in a position to give us any assistance in this direction."<sup>110</sup> Strangely enough he does not mention Fort Jameson which was already built.

### **3.2. Expectations and the execution of rules concerning the refugees**

In a meeting in February 1943 Gore Browne made it very clear to Mister Kopec, the delegate of the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, that Northern Rhodesia was a self-governing territory. The meeting was about "The scheme of organisation of the Polish camps which had been submitted by the Polish Authorities in Nairobi to the Commissioner, A.E.<sup>111</sup> Refugee Administration." In the minutes of this meeting Gore Browne "commenced by explaining that the government of this Territory was in no way under the orders of Nairobi, though naturally we always wish to keep in line with their policy." At this meeting the responsibilities and regulations at the camps were discussed. Kopec said that the British Commander was responsible for the things the British paid for, like fire precautions, maintenance of the camp, catering and health. In his view the Polish leader in the camp should be responsible for things of the Polish Authorities, like settlement, education and administration. Browne did not agree. He said "it was absolutely necessary to have one final Authority in the camps and that this power should be in the hands of the British Commandant, as the British Authorities were responsible for the wellbeing of the refugees in this Territory, and would be held responsible in the event of any disaster."<sup>112</sup>

In the memorandum and the scheme which were agreed upon by all East African Territories and the Polish Government it was stated that working should be allowed, but, according to a letter

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<sup>109</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol I. No 24A.

<sup>110</sup> Evacuees second group, 1942 July-1943 February, ZM 1/13/1-2. No 47.

<sup>111</sup> AE is African Eastern or African East.

<sup>112</sup> ZM 1/13/1 Evacuees second group 1. 1942 July – 1943 Feb. No 87.

of Browne to the authorities in Lusaka this was not easy to achieve.<sup>113</sup> Browne wrote in this letter that indeed some were working on farms and some were farming themselves, but there was also a lot of “lethargy, due to idleness.” Language was a problem and this was one of the reasons why the trade unions of the mines in the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt did not want to work with the Poles. Browne added that a representative of the farmers “said to me that Poles would be worse than useless to them.”

The Northern Rhodesian authorities were involved in the savings of the evacuees and tried to help them with changing their foreign currencies. Because not all the places where the refugees stayed had banks, special appointed refugees collected the money and returned it to the owners in local currency. The authorities also tried to persuade the evacuees to invest their money in the Post Office Saving Banks. Many deportees did not want to do this, since they were afraid to lose the money they still had.<sup>114</sup>

Although it was agreed within the East African Territories that the British were responsible for the clothing, in Northern Rhodesia the distribution was given to the Poles, together with other “future requirements.” But goods from the American Red Cross were not to be handed out by the British. According to a letter in August 1944 it went wrong: the Director of Medical Services stated in a letter that medical store supplies which were sent by the American Red Cross via Nairobi, ended up in the camps whilst they had to be sent to him.<sup>115</sup> He said in this letter: “If my memory is correct, an instruction was given to all stores of the kind referred to above, should be sent direct to the Medical Storekeeper, Lusaka. It appears that that instruction was ignored and medical stores have in fact been sent to some camps, if not all. (...) I believe that at camps where such stores have arrived they have been placed in the custody of the Camp Leader, which I think quite unsuitable. (...) The American Red Cross have given specific instruction that medical stores supplied from that source are to be under the care and control of the British Authorities. (...) all medical stores of the kind referred to are to be sent forthwith to the Medical Storekeeper, Lusaka, who will give receipts for what he receives. The stores will then be distributed under my control as may be required.” In the same letter he wrote that one of the medical cases from the Red Cross that was sent to the camp in Bwana Mkubwa was missing and he emphasized that it must have been stolen inside the

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<sup>113</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 146, Point III.

<sup>114</sup> SEC 1/1701. Control and administration of evacuees camp Lusaka, Bwana Mkubwa and Abercorn, 1941-46. SEC/MIL/75, Vol II. No 1/1, point 21.

<sup>115</sup> ZM 1/27/1 Stores. No 113.

camp. "I suggest that the police at Ndola should be asked to investigate the loss of a case of materials at Bwana Mkubwa which was seen there by Dr. Bincer at the time of visit, but which was missing at the time Mr. Neubort handed over to Dr. Kastelan."

The correspondence between the different authorities shows there was a lot of red tape concerning the transport of goods for the camps. In June the Commissioner of the East African Refugee Administration wrote to Browne: "The Polish Delegate informs me that their representative at Lusaka has paid an account of 429,13 pounds for stores end up from Beira to Lusaka. (...) They ask if there is any possibility of a portion of this sum being refunded."<sup>116</sup>

The behaviour of the Polish evacuees sometimes lead to discussion, like in April 1943 when the Clerk of the British Executive Council wrote a letter to the Executive Council. He said: "certain inmates of the new camp at Lusaka had been spending sums of money in the purchase of luxury articles in shops in the town.(...) This might lead to bitter feelings amongst the general public as an appeal has been made for clothing and other comforts for those evacuees who were supposed to be destitute." In the letter it is said that a list will be made of the sums of money of each individual in the camp and the government was going to check how much was spent in local shops. "It would then be for consideration whether government should have the camp searched and whether arrangements should be made with the banks to refuse to exchange any foreign currencies tendered by the camp evacuees."<sup>117</sup>

In the book *Black Heart of Rotberg* it is expressed that Gore Browne was very irritated towards the Polish refugees in general. Rotberg claims that after the first contingent of middle class urban Poles, the refugees that followed were (...) "from rural peasant stock" (...) He states that Gore Browne was irritated about their behaviour. "They get free issues of clothing from Red X and if they think their neighbours issue is better than their own, they will tear up their own clothes or throw them at the donors head." At one occasion somebody was killed in a riot and Browne sent some of the rabble-rousers to camps in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 63

<sup>117</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol I. No 176A.

<sup>118</sup> Rotberg, *Black Heart, Gore Browne and the Politics of Multiracial Zambia*, 237.

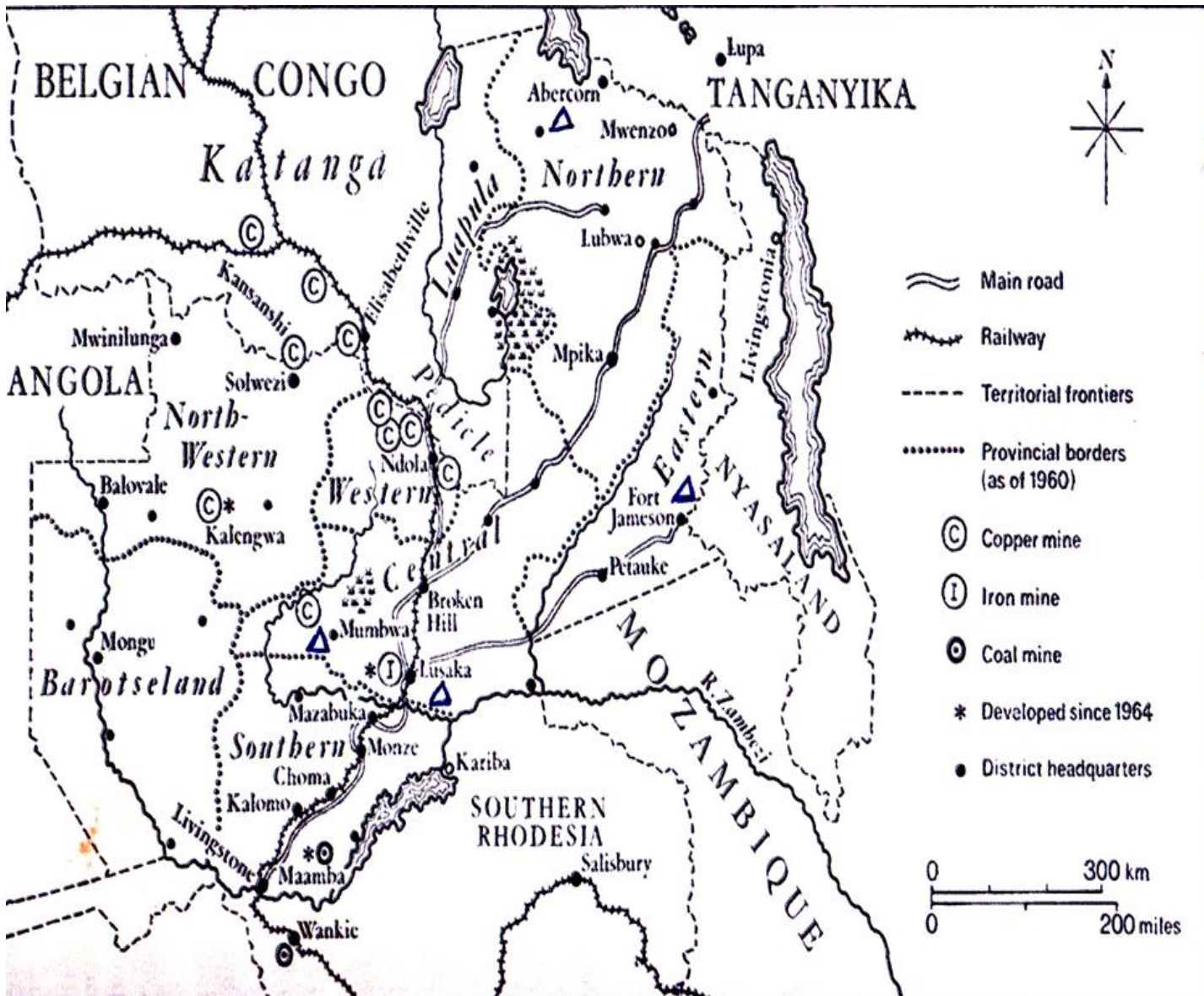
### Conclusion

When Northern Rhodesia was part of the British South Africa Company (BSAC), the British administrators preferred to hire sons of diplomats and consular officials and when the country became a Crown Colony, the first administrator strived to implement the upper class standards of the metropolis in Great Britain.

For the many authorities who were involved in the shipment and arrival of the Polish refugees, it was not easy to know when and where the contingents were arriving. When the first Poles came the Northern Rhodesian authorities were quite well prepared and welcoming, but throughout the years their welcoming attitude changed as well as the accommodation for the Poles. The Polish and British authorities tried to implement and execute the responsibilities, rules and regulations they agreed upon before the Poles arrived, but in practice this implementation was much more difficult than was expected.

Map 2

Map of Northern Rhodesia emphasising infrastructure, mines and borders



△ Towns where the Polish refugee camps were situated. The remoteness of Abercorn is apparent from the lack of infrastructure.

Source: Roberts, *A History of Zambia*, 176. I added the triangles myself.

#### 4. Abercorn camp

The research presented here about the Abercorn camp itself is exclusively based on primary sources. First of all, material in the National Archives in Lusaka provides information about the location, the implementation of the plan, the building of the camp, the political agenda of Northern Rhodesian Authorities, the arrival of the refugees, the daily life in the camp, the rules, the inhabitants, the problems and the treatment of the refugees by the people who lived in the surrounding, and the closure.

My interviews in 2014 with native men who were living in Abercorn when the Polish refugees arrived, give an impression of the contact between them and the Poles and the arrival of the refugees. My visit to the location where the camp was based and to the city of Abercorn (present Mbala) draws a picture of the location of the camp. Stored goods of the camp, which are kept in the Moto Moto museum in Mbala, give an idea of the tools that were used by the Poles.

##### 4.1. History and implementation

In 1941 the authorities of Northern Rhodesia for the first time looked at Abercorn as a place to accommodate refugees. However these were not Polish refugees who had to come from Persia, but interned war and civilian residents and prisoners from Somalia, where the Italians were defeated, and from the liberated country Ethiopia. Browne choose Abercorn because, under the condition that ships on Lake Tanganyika would be available, this place was fairly easy to reach from Somalia and Ethiopia. Although some preparations, like getting blankets and medication, were made, those refugees did not come to Northern Rhodesia.<sup>119</sup>

The Abercorn camp for the Polish refugees was built in October 1942 and it was the last camp for Polish refugees in Northern Rhodesia. It was situated near the small town Abercorn in the Northern Province. In 1941 the decision of building a camp in the Northern Province, was not made yet, since the Province Commissioner of the Northern Province wrote a letter to the authorities in Lusaka about the possibilities to shelter Polish refugees in the districts of his province. In his letter he said that he asked all nine districts.<sup>120</sup> Three districts did not respond: Kswambwa, Mporokos and Chinsali. The other six of the nine districts gave quotes; the district of Kasama said it could have 58 Polish refugees, Mpika 4, Isoka 12, Luwingu 4, Fort Rosebery 15 and Abercorn 78.

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<sup>119</sup> Rotberg, *Black Heart, Gore Browne and the Politics of Multiracial Zambia*. 235-236.

<sup>120</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol I. No 29.

Abercorn offered to shelter the evacuees in missions, on unoccupied farms, in two hotels, the Golf club and in private houses of government employees. The Province Commissioner emphasised in his letter that it would not be easy to have people in the Northern Province because the local supply of dairy products and meat was inadequate, vegetables were scarce and cabbage and potatoes had to be imported from Mbeya in Tanganyika. He said the province never had an abundant supply of food and now it was even worse since many farms were closed, because their owners went to join the army. He was worried that the province could not offer the refugees proper food: "People who are new to the tropics should have good food or they become debilitated." He strived that only in an emergency and if all other possibilities were looked at, should evacuees be sent to the Northern Province: "The more one considers the problem of housing evacuees in this isolated native reserve, the more obvious it becomes that only in an emergency and as a very last expedient should evacuees be sent to the Northern Province. (...) The class contemplated are unused to vast unoccupied spaces, which take a resident a long time to get himself accustomed to, (...) entertainment does not exist." He said it is "Better to keep them nearer civilisation where living would be easier, cheaper and more congenial." And from the – white – inhabitants of the province the Poles could not expect a lot, they "are all fully occupied and there for could not spend time in making life bearable for an evacuee however keen they were on the movement and anxious to help."

When the authorities in Lusaka got the letter about the possibilities of sheltering Polish evacuees in the Northern Province, they were disappointed about the offers of the colonial inhabitants in the Northern Province to receive Poles in their own houses. They wrote to Browne: "There would be little objection if they were British."<sup>121</sup>

Despite the warning of the Province Commissioner of the remoteness of the Northern Province and the lack of food, it was decided to deport Polish refugees to the north to a camp that had to be built for 500 deportees. From the moment the first discussion about this camp started, authorities again emphasized their worries of food supplies. In September 1942 the authorities in Abercorn asked Browne for permission to contact farms in Ufipa, in Chikoma and Mwayze for butter and ghee and if he was allowed to slaughter Ufipa cattle at the Tanganyika border in order to bring them by lorry to Abercorn.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibidem, no 69.

<sup>122</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol I. No 20.



In a note in 1942 about the position of Abercorn camp, the District Commissioner of Abercorn elaborated on all aspects of the camp.<sup>123</sup> First he explained the search for the right location. He liked the site on a hilltop, which “provide good building ground for the purpose and should be healthy if not more healthy than Abercorn itself. The alternative site five miles out has the objection of being on the fringe of “fly” country and the objection and advantage of being close to running water. A third site in the town closer to a running stream does not meet with the local doctor’s approval.” This remark about the local doctor is noteworthy, because the local doctor was a native African, since he calls him literally a local doctor and the British whites in Northern Rhodesia would not call a white doctor a local doctor. It seems from this note about the position of the Abercorn camp that 1,500 Polish refugees were expected: “A type lay out similar to Lusaka but amended as suggested on a sketch (...) should be satisfactory and permit the construction of three self-contained units of 500 each; additional ground is available all round the proposed site. The District Commissioner is arranging to clear the grass and scrub, retaining all trees. The District Commissioner has collected large quantities of grass and poles much of which is already stacked at Abercorn but a considerable quantity still requires to be collected within a fifty miles radius. (...) Staff employed are Mathis, a lay brother, Mrs. Rushworth and Miss Venning. A Seychellois, Tom Arnold, a good all round man, will be available next week. Little other local assistance can be obtained but lay brother Landry will be transferred (...) and will proceed to Abercorn to look after the motor lorries.” The note also contained a list of things which were available for the camp: 150 burnt bricks were to be processed, local timber was going to be cut at Kasama and Abercorn and Kigoma offered supplies. There was a water pump and some piping and two new motor lorries. It was said that “the close proximity of the rains and the available materials necessitate construction in wattle and daub.” The burnt bricks were meant for the kitchen, bathhouse, laundry, and latrines. Clean timber for dining room tables and benches had to come from Kigoma. In the note the remoteness of Abercorn was again emphasised: “Abercorn is quite without local resources for building even in a very small way. (...) Even the smallest thing will be required to be forwarded there and while local resources should be used to the uttermost, the building organisation will require to be almost completely self-contained.” The note concluded with the remark that only one unit could be built: “In view of these conditions it is proposed to build one unit complete now,

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<sup>123</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol 1. No.24A.

which it is hoped will be ready at the end of November and to continue with the second and third units so far as materials permit”.

It seems these other units were never built, although British authorities tried to send more refugees. In March 1943 the controller of customs of Livingstone received correspondence about the arrangements for 1100 refugees for Abercorn, but the Secretary of Lusaka wrote to the authorities in Nairobi that only 600 were wanted and not 1100. He said: “It would be recollected that this camp was only agreed to on understanding that necessary supplies would be arranged by you and transferred via Lake Tanganyika.”<sup>124</sup> One month later, July 1943, Gore Browne wrote to the authorities in Lusaka that in Abercorn everything was ready for the arrival of 500 refugees and sufficient food has been accumulated for the first 6 months, based on the assumption that from Tanganyika monthly supplies would come. He said for a second contingent there was no food and none of ancillary buildings were ready and only 1 of the 6 staff houses was finished.<sup>125</sup>

A man, whose name is not mentioned, who lived in Abercorn around 1943, said in an interview in 1965 he helped to build a camp early in the war for 600 refugees and in one year 104 two roomed houses, a church and a recreation room were finished.<sup>126</sup>

#### 4.2. The arrival of the Poles

The dates of the arrival of the refugees are confusing. A letter dated March 1943 mentioned that in April 500 refugees were coming via Dar es Salaam for Abercorn and at the end of April 600 via Dar es Salaam to Abercorn could be expected.<sup>127</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Northern Rhodesia said Abercorn had 597 people.<sup>128</sup> Another source is the memory of the Polish Wanda Nowoisiad-Ostrowska, who was brought to Abercorn when she was nine years old and was interviewed in 2004 in Piotrowski’s book.<sup>129</sup> She claimed the first refugee transport came in August 1943, consisting of 355 persons and the second transport was in September 1943 with 229 evacuees. She said in total 561 people lived in the camp. However, summing up 355 and 229, is not 561, but 584. Furthermore she remembered that 82 were men, 242 women, 261 children and 21 teenagers and adding this up, leads to 606. Piotrowski who

<sup>124</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol I, No 233.

<sup>125</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol 1. No 239.

<sup>126</sup> A. Landry, ‘The town with a twinkle in its eyes’, *Horizon*, March (1965) 25-27 25

<sup>127</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol I. No 169/1.

<sup>128</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No number.

<sup>129</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*. 172.

interviewed Wanda Nowoisiad-Ostrowska could not give an answer to the question about this difference in numbers.<sup>130</sup>

The Polish Janina Kuzio-Lang who was interviewed on the Canadian website of the Canadian Polish Historical Society did not remember the trip from India to Dar es Salaam, but she did recall parts of the journey, although parts of it do not match reality. She said she went from Dar es Salaam by train to the port of Juba (present South Sudan) and from there she sailed Lake Tanganyika to Mpulungu. She could not have sailed from Juba since it is not situated at Lake Tanganyika. She probably went via Dar es Salaam by train to Kigoma and from there by boat to Mpulungu.<sup>131</sup> Damson Chizu Simpungwe who was born in 1939 and lived in a small community 28 kilometres from Abercorn when he was a boy, is sure the evacuees came via Kigoma to Mpulungu, because this was the common route of the mail boat in those days.<sup>132</sup> In an official document of March 1943 the ports of arrival of evacuees for Northern Rhodesia were clearly divided: evacuees for Northern Rhodesia were going via the port of Beira and evacuees for Abercorn via Dar es Salaam.<sup>133</sup>

Joshua Sinyangwe was born in 1918 and around the period the Poles arrived he was constructing a building near Abercorn camp. He remembered that the District Commissioner asked local people to bring grasses for roofs and nobody really knew why. Only later, when he saw the camp being built, he understood a lot of people were coming to Abercorn, but he did not know who or why. At a certain night he heard vehicles arriving at the office of the district officer and the next morning he saw Polish people walking to the camp. He recalls they did not come all at once, but in smaller groups on different days.<sup>134</sup>

Probably 600 Polish refugees were brought by ship to Dar es Salaam and via Kigoma to Mpulungu on Lake Tanganyika and subsequently they went in groups to Abercorn, since there were not enough lorries to take all the Poles at once.

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<sup>130</sup> I contacted Piotrowski and asked him. (September 2014).

<sup>131</sup> Canadian Polish Historical Society. <http://www.cphsalberta.ca/lange.html> (March 2015).

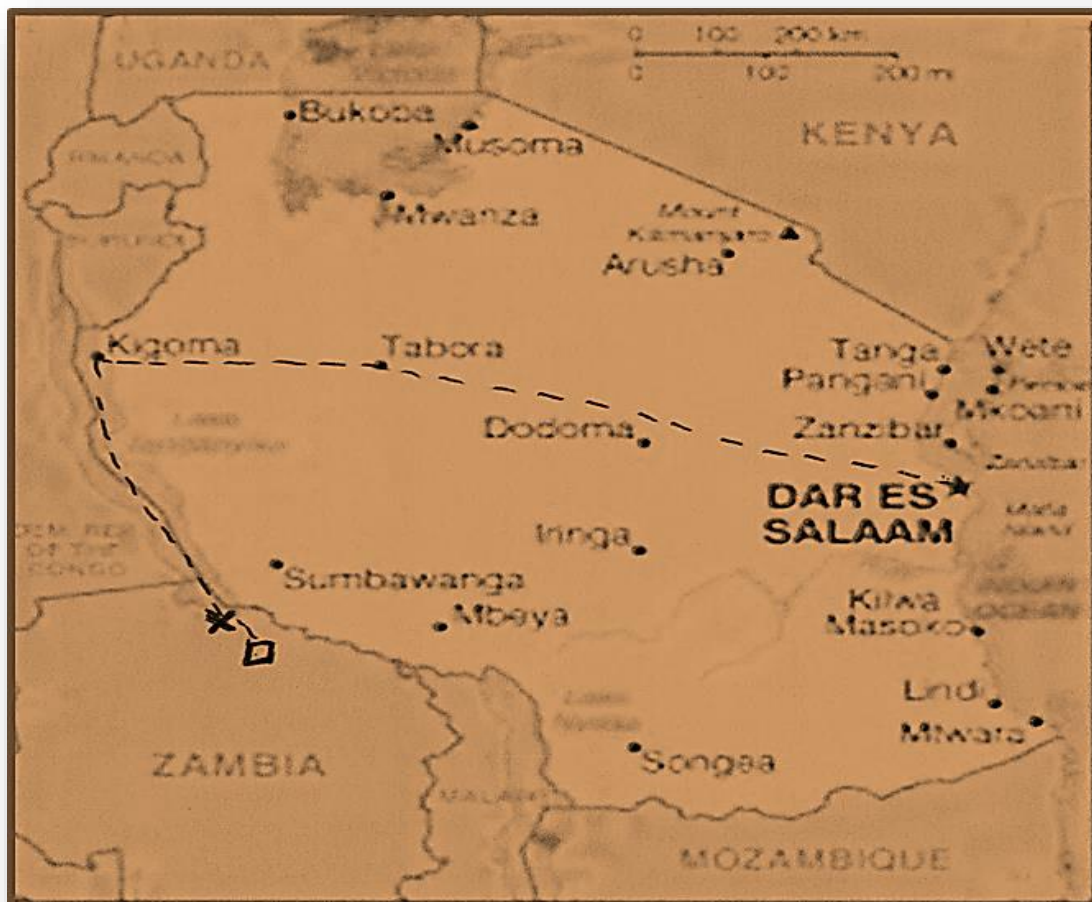
<sup>132</sup> Interviews with Damson Chizu Simpungwe in Mbala. (August 2014).

<sup>133</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol I. No 169/1.

<sup>134</sup> Interviews with Joshua Sinyangwe in Mbala. (August 2014).

In 1945 the British authorities tried to send another contingent, but the authorities in Lusaka told the authorities in Nairobi in a letter dated September 1945 this was impossible: "It would be a great relief if this 500 did not come, as a large rebuilding programme will be necessary at Abercorn as the living quarters for 400 people will require building."<sup>135</sup>

**Map 3**  
**(Roughly) the route of the Polish refugees to Abercorn**



---- The route Dar es Salaam-Tabora-Kigoma-Mpulungu-Abercorn

X Mpulungu  
□ Abercorn

Source: The map is from <http://goafrica.about.com/library/bl.mapfacts.tanzania.htm> I added the route and Mpulungu and Abercorn myself.

<sup>135</sup> ZM 1/13/2 Evacuees second group, 1942 July-1943 February. No 199

### 4.3. Daily life

Janina Kuzio Lang remembered in the interview of the Canadian Polish Historical Society how the camp was, although she strangely enough talked about Abercorn in Zimbabwe and it should be Zambia. She said in Abercorn: “550 people were placed in brick houses covered with elephant grass. (...) The camp was well prepared, having all possible amenities. We had a public school, hospital, church, and a community center.”<sup>136</sup>

Wanda Nowoisiad-Ostrowska remembered in the book of Piotrowski that the camp was divided into six sections of single room houses, a washing area, a laundry, a church and four school buildings with seven classes. The cooking was done in a large kitchen, situated in the middle. One of the administrators lived in a building that also had a community centre where films were shown. She depicted quite a sociable image with singing songs in the evening, listening together to the radio in order to be informed about the war in Europe and doing craft work with other women in the evenings.<sup>137</sup>

Four pictures of the camp show elongated buildings with white washed walls, grass roofs and small windows without glass.<sup>138</sup> Morrison Sichilima recalled there was a fence around the camp and behind it he saw a big kitchen, houses and tents. As a boy he was not allowed to enter the camp but sometimes he did go there to see if he could do a small job for the Poles and get something in return, like clothes.<sup>139</sup>

Damson Chizu Simpungwe used to go to the camp when he was a small child. He begged his parents for things to bring to the camp, like groundnuts. “We used to organize a big group and have our mothers arrange for us something to give to them. My brother was 15 years old and he escorted me.” Simpungwe said it was officially not allowed for local people to go into the camp, but sometimes he slipped in. On one of those occasions he saw a machine to grind millet. He stated: “They were milling when we entered and we took a bit of the flour, which was much smoother than ours. Probably because we used stones to grind. “Adults every now and then came inside the camp according to Simpungwe. They were asked inside to teach the Poles how to make handles for shovels, hoe’s, picks and axes. Moreover the local Africans taught the Poles to eat

<sup>136</sup> Canadian Polish Historical Society (version 2012) <http://www.cphsalberta.ca/lange.html> (March 2015).

<sup>137</sup> Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II*. 172.

<sup>138</sup> Stationary Nomads <https://www.flickr.com/photos/stationarynomads/3790416864/in/set-72157621822524699/> (March 2015).

<sup>139</sup> Interviews with Morrison Sichilima in Mbala. (August 2014).

grasshoppers and how to catch birds with a sling. In November, which is the season for wild fruits, the local African boys taught them which fruits to eat and helped them to pick those fruits. When the Poles were outside the camp they were escorted by camp guards.<sup>140</sup>

In July 1943 Browne complained in a letter to authorities in Lusaka about food supplies and emphasized that "Our own resources are, as you know, almost negligible insofar as European food is concerned and the experience of Abercorn shows that we can not rely at any ratio of any of the Northern Territories to help us out."<sup>141</sup> Besides, the European food that could come from Tanganyika, like potatoes, sometimes were not available.<sup>142</sup> According to Damson Chizu Simpungwe and Morrison Sichilima the Abercorn camp got food from the villages in the districts. They said the District Commissioner used to come to the villages to ask people to offer chicken and eggs for the Polish refugees and Poles who had bicycles went to the villages themselves to ask for food.<sup>143</sup> British authorities in January 1943 made appointments about the prohibition of buying food from outside.<sup>144</sup>

Sichilima remembered one occasion when food was brought from outside. He recalled lorries with wooden trailers coming to town and parking in front of the office of the District Commissioner. The lorries were loaded with cartons and brown/kaki bags and Sichilima presumed there was food inside. He also claimed to have seen the Polish people eating out of tins which had to come from elsewhere, because according to Sichilima Abercorn had no tins for sale.<sup>145</sup>

Lewis Sinyangwe claimed his grandfather told him about a silo in Abercorn. Local people had to bring food to this silo, which was meant for the hospital in the camp and for the prison outside the camp.<sup>146</sup>

The complicity of logistics in the Northern Province becomes clear in the case of thirty tons of goods which were brought in September 1945 to Mpulungu. These goods were for all camps, including camps in Southern Rhodesia and Southern Africa and most of it was food. Browne was not happy at all when he wrote to the Account Internees and Refugees in Nairobi. He said: "As far as I know the arrangement was that stores for Abercorn should be sent to Mpulungu and that for

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<sup>140</sup> Interviews with Damson Chizu Simpungwe. (August 2014).

<sup>141</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol , No.237 point 2.

<sup>142</sup> Abercorn monthly reports, 1931-1946, MAG 2/5 location 130, REF 1, no 78.

<sup>143</sup> Interviews with Damson Chizu Simpungwe and Morrison Sichilima. (August 2014).

<sup>144</sup> SEC 1/1701. Control and administration of evacuees camp Lusaka, Bwana Mkubwa and Abercorn, 1941-46. SEC/MIL/75. Vol II. No 1/1, point 23.

<sup>145</sup> Interviews with Morrison Sichilima (August 2014).

<sup>146</sup> Interviews with Lewis Sinyangwe. (August 2014).

other camps in Northern Rhodesia (Lusaka, Bwana Mkubwa and Fort Jameson) should be sent via Beira.”<sup>147</sup> At the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September a Polish delegate in Lusaka answered him that the goods came from the former Polish Delegation in America. He wrote that originally the goods for Abercorn had to go via Dar es Salaam and the rest via Beira. He said in his letter: “It is quite possible that owing to war conditions the destination port were being changed and it causes double costs. Previously all the transport was paid by us without any difference.”<sup>148</sup> Gore Browne answered in January 1946 when he sent the Commissioner of East African Refugee Administration in Nairobi the bill for the transport costs of the goods – via motors and lorries - it was a waste of money to send all the goods to Mpulungu and wrote in his letter: “Had they been sent via Beira the above amount would have been saved as the Rhodesian Railways carry goods free from Beira as free gifts.”<sup>149</sup>

The white community in and around Abercorn had complaints about the Poles, like in December 1946 when the District Commissioner of Abercorn wrote a letter to the Polish Camp Commander.<sup>150</sup> He said: “Complaints are still being made about the Polish Evacuees from your camp trespassing in areas out of bound.” He referred to the latest complaints, being youth at Lake Chilla, which is a small lake just outside Abercorn: “The African watchman employed by the Lake Chilla Angling Society (to keep Polish trespassers away) has reported to me that Polish youth are fishing, swimming and causing nuisance at the lake fishing area (which is out of bounds area) and today youths started fighting this old African after he had repeatedly ordered them away from the said area.” The District Commissioner believed the Polish Camp Commander did not take any disciplinary measures to keep his people away. “I have never seen a Polish policemen on duty at the lake and practically every time I have been down to the lake I have found persons trespassing who have at once run away with all speed on seeing me approaching. (...) we still await the additional notice boards you said you would have made in October this year. (...) Residents of this District are justifiably complaining about the freehandedness of these Polish people.” One week later the Camp Commander replied and said that the previous District Commissioner of Abercorn did allow the Poles access to the lake. “(...) it is only during the past year or so that it has been sought to restrict them to certain of the least approachable and swampy parts of the lake.”<sup>151</sup> He emphasised in his reply that placing 500 “alien” people in a small community will have influence on

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<sup>147</sup> ZM 1/27/1 Stores. No 271.

<sup>148</sup> Ibidem, no 268.

<sup>149</sup> Ibidem, no 307.

<sup>150</sup> ZM 1/1/5 Administration. 1946 September-1949 July. No 536

<sup>151</sup> Ibidem, no 538.

a society. He stated that the Poles are blamed for things which are trivial or not to blame on them. He gave examples, point wise: 1.) "Creating a shortage of native chickens and eggs in the district. 2.) Buying up new stocks at the European stores before the Resident requirements have been met, though this is not the fault of the Poles, but due to the management of the store during the past six months or so. 3.) Passage through the District Commissioner's grounds on their way to or from the lake which was allowed by the previous Commissioner. 4.) Take out boats without permission and not bringing them back. This has been done occasionally, mostly by children, the boats not being securely fastened. 5.) Bathing in the Resident's bathing place. (...) 6.) Fishing in the lake. Orders have been given that no fishing is permissible though the primitive methods of children's' fishing could not do any appreciable harm. (...)" The Polish Camp Commander continued that the offences are trivial and he emphasised the situation of the Poles: "Many of the Evacuees here are dependents of Polish soldiers, and in view of the part played by the Poles during the war, it seems ungenerous to say the least to stress their vary minor breaches of good behaviour and to seek to deprive them of one of the few amenities there are in Abercorn and to make them feel that they are unwelcome guests." In his letter he added a list of patrols of the Polish Police and wrote he did place notice boards in the camp about the restricted areas for Poles and said he even sent them to the District Commissioner - in Polish. The Director of War Evacuees and Camps also interfered in the matter and wrote to the Polish Camp Commander that the patrols are not enough and although he realised "the Camp Police are to maintain order inside the Camps it is necessary to assist by sending them outside and this has been done in both Lusaka and Bwana Mkubwa with good results."<sup>152</sup> He said in his letter that he did understand the fact that the Poles should not stay at private property, but emphasizes: "I do not see a reason why the whole of Lake Chilla should be placed out of bounds for swimming unless there is a danger for bilharzia." About the alleged fighting with the guard he said: "If the Polish youth did assault the African guard the remedy surely is to charge them in the Civil Court." According to him this has more effect then that punishment by parents since "the latter are just incapable of doing anything.(...) It is realised that the Evacuees are unpopular, but this is their own fault, chiefly due to the conduct of a few persons which reflects on the whole Polish Community and you should point this out to them all."

In November 1944 the English Commandant of Abercorn camp wrote about problems concerning certificates of goods for the camps which the Polish Camp Commander allegedly had

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<sup>152</sup> Ibidem, no 540.



been given out illegally:<sup>153</sup> “Because the Camp Leader<sup>154</sup>, in the absence of any definite instruction, has given some erroneous certificates in respect of the import of Polish stores, consigned by the Polish Authorities, Nairobi, for use in his and other Polish camps, it is now sought to place the responsibility for these certificates on the British staff for future consignments. I am willing to assist the Camp Leader with advise as to what stores I consider might justifiably be classified as Government stores (...) but I do not want this office to be drawn into any subsequent disputes and correspondence as is now happening. I maintain that the local Customs Officer is the proper person to decide what stores are dutiable. (...) all Polish stores sent to Abercorn may be sent via the Lake Steamer to Mpulungu, where there is a Customs shed in which the stores can be safeguarded until cleared.”

In October 1945 there is a scandal in Abercorn about the distribution of clothes in the camp, which got a lot of critique, probably at the moment the distribution of clothing was taken over by the British. The English Commandant of the camp wrote to authorities in Lusaka about unreliable records.<sup>155</sup> “I have endeavoured to make a careful investigation regarding previous issues of clothing to the evacuees in this Camp, and have come to the conclusion that, in view of the complete unreliability of existing records, the only solution is to start new cards, disregarding past issues.” He said that he went through clothing books, signed lists and other documents. He found that “in some cases person had been denied clothing for no apparent reason, others have clothing marked down to them which it was decisively proved they had never had, and so on.”

A letter dated July 1946 shows the hierarchy between the English and the Poles. The Director of War Evacuees and Camps wrote to the Polish Camp Commandant a letter about a grant: “A grant of 1.000 pounds of canteens profits is allotted to you for Welfare of the Polish Evacuees.(...) Expenditure under this will be charged to advances ‘Polish Canteens’ and will return in your canteen returns each month. In addition a separate account will be kept showing how the money has been spent. I attach a specimen copy of what is required by this Office. Two Copies of this account will be sent to this Office each month. Every payment will be supported by a certified invoice.”<sup>156</sup> Invoices were always important to the English, like in February 1947 when Abercorn received a letter in which the Director of War Evacuees and Camps mentioned that the United

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<sup>153</sup> ZM 1/27/1. No 161.

<sup>154</sup> Camp leader means Polish Camp Commander.

<sup>155</sup> Ibidem, no 281.

<sup>156</sup> ZM 1/29/2 Welfare, 1941 August-1944 November. No 549.

Nations Funds for Relief and Rehabilitation sent money for Northern Rhodesia for Christmas. He stated: "The money did not arrive until after Christmas." Nevertheless he gave twelve pounds for welfare purposes for Abercorn. He wrote: "The voucher should in addition to Advance Evacuees be marked (UNRRA grant) and expenditure must be supported by invoices."<sup>157</sup>

In April 1945 there were discussions between the authorities about Polish refugees in the camp who had salaries exceeding 120 pounds from Polish funds and amounts of private income. Almost all this money was in the form of allotments sent to them by relatives in Polish armed forces.<sup>158</sup> Inequality amongst the Poles was more often seen as a problem by the English, who were worried in 1946 about a number of evacuees who worked for local firms and had good salaries, but were at the same time getting free board in the camps. The British authorities proposed that those evacuees should pay for some services in the camp.<sup>159</sup>

In May 1945 the Polish Camp Commander caused problems. That month the police in Abercorn sent a report to the Commissioner of the Northern Rhodesian Police headquarters about accusations against the camp leader who allegedly sold supplies from the Red Cross and other welfare sources. Moreover the police had allegations against a couple called Landry. Mister Landry, who was in charge of the camp vehicles, was accused of stealing petrol. His wife Mrs Landry, who worked in the hospital, had a lot of extras in the house, like cakes and milk tins, which allegedly came from the hospital. Anna Khorytkowska, a camp inhabitant told the police she was sick and was advised by the doctor to go to the hospital every day to get extra food in order to gain strength. She stated she never saw the extra food which should be in the hospital, like tinned fruit or fish.<sup>160</sup> This hospital where Mrs Landry allegedly stole food and Anna Khorytkowska stayed, was in the camp. According to a list of 1945 of workers from the camp who are paid by the British, 18 people worked in the hospital. Table 3 will show other jobs which were paid by the British authorities.

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<sup>157</sup> ZM 1/29/3 Welfare, 1941 August-1944 November. No 730.

<sup>158</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 249, point 3.

<sup>159</sup> SEC1/1699 Polish Evacuees general, 1946-50, SEC/MIL/79. No 411, point 4.

<sup>160</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol II. No 461/62. No 461/4.

**Table 3: Jobs in the camp, paid by the British authorities.**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Jobs</b>
<b>Administration (10)</b>	1 Camp leader, 3 Typists, 2 bookkeepers and 4 messengers.
<b>Bakery (34)</b>	6 Bakers, 9 woodcutters, 9 head bakers, 10 stokers.
<b>Church (1)</b>	1 Chaplain.
<b>Clothing store (1)</b>	1 Manager.
<b>Kitchen (27)</b>	Waitresses, cooks, dishwashers, stokers, boiler attendants.
<b>Police (8)</b>	1 Head, guards of free store, policemen.
<b>Sanitation (7)</b>	Cleaners.
<b>School (unknown number)</b>	Head, 5 teachers, 1 teacher of kindergarten, cleaners.
<b>Welfare/recreation (1)</b>	1 Attendant.
<b>Section leaders (3)</b>	3 Section leaders.

Source: SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No. 243/5.

The inhabitants of the camp tried to earn extra by home making products and sent them to Lusaka where they were distributed to shops. In December 1945 handmade toys were received in Lusaka and, according to a letter about it, the authorities in Lusaka were not pleased: "have received your toys which I have handed to the Territorial Polish Advisor for disposal. It is a pity you did not quote any prices. The general remarks made on them were that they were unfinished and little more work put into them would, I am sure, yield higher profits. I am afraid it is too late to sell any quantity for Christmas, as most Stores already have their Christmas goods on display."

Accompanying this letter was a package of Christmas sweets for the kids in Abercorn camp.<sup>161</sup>

Concerning Christmas more extras were done; in 1947 the Polish Camp Commander told the British authorities camp pigs were fattened and he asked him for bags of flour and sugar for baking.<sup>162</sup>

Sometimes the Polish evacuees tried to sell clothes to the local people or swapped them for items like food. In September 1945 a Representative of the Polish delegate sent the Customs Officer a list of goods for Abercorn camp and wrote in his letter that the goods are for free distribution for the refugees. "This is to certify that none of them will be sold." Table four will show what the list for Abercorn camp contained.

<sup>161</sup> ZM 1/29/2 Welfare 1941 August-1944 November. No 404.

<sup>162</sup> ZM 1/29/3 1941 August-1944 November. No 793.

**Table 4: Goods for Abercorn camp in September 1945.**

Linen white and grey	170 yards
Cotton material for dresses	60 "
Heshing <sup>163</sup>	102 "
Dresses ready made	6
Embroidery thread	18 doz
Khaki cotton thread	2 "
Footballs- complete	4
Torch	1
Gramophone needles	11 pkt
Stationary apparel, including:	
Envelopes	1500
Files	25
Glue	14 bottles
Carbon paper	30
Pencils	3 doz.
Rulers	10
Paper clips	9 boxes
Pins	1 "
Analysis books	23
Automatic files	6
Writing pads	2 doz.
Coloured paper	7 rolls
Files	24

Source: ZM 1/27 Stores. No 209.

Despite warnings, it seems goods that were given to the camp, were sold. In October 1945 for instance the Polish Camp Commander wrote to the authorities in Lusaka about the selling of clothes by evacuees. He wrote: "on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October a considerable quantity of new clothing was issued to the Evacuees. The next day it was being sold to the natives. Would you please let me know if this is permissible, and, if not, whether it is possible to make a charge at the District Commissioner's Office at irrefutable evidence." The Camp Commander has a second point: "Is clothing to be issued free to persons earning 10 pounds or more and to the families of persons of

<sup>163</sup> I do not know what this means and cannot find it in dictionaries or on internet. It is probably a woven fabric, since 'hessian' is a woven fabric and 'heshin' could be derivative from hessian.

<http://fyldehessian.co.uk/what-is-hessian>

16 pounds onwards?”<sup>164</sup> The authorities in Lusaka answered: “Clothing is imported duty free and on each importation the relative customs forms bear a declaration signed by a responsible of this Department that the goods will not be sold but issued free to the Evacuees. I suggest that you discuss the matter with Custom Officer and the District Commissioner, Abercorn, and if you can not lay a successful charge you stop the Pocket money of the Evacuees responsible until the value of the clothing is repaid. I also consider that the African involved should be warned about purchasing anything from the Evacuees.” He furthermore said that it was under discussion whether people who received or earned ten pounds should get free clothes.”<sup>165</sup> On the other hand were old tyres, that lay in the Abercorn camp, stimulated to be sold. In June the authorities in Lusaka were asked if the Polish Camp Commander was allowed to sell these tyres for 1 pound each to the local Africans, who would make sandals out of them and use them for fishing nets.<sup>166</sup>

#### 4.4. Closure

In January 1944 the Polish staff in the East African camps had been reduced. In a letter it was said that: “It has been agreed that the welfare work in the Polish settlements must continue and the minimum staff stays to ensure this must be retained.”<sup>167</sup> That month four refugees from Northern Rhodesia left for Makindu, the transit camp in Kenya.<sup>168</sup> In January 1948 the Commissioner of the East African Refugee Administration wrote a letter about the deportation of the Polish refugees in Abercorn to Kigoma, Dar es Salaam and from there by ship to the United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom their next of kin – often husbands and sons who had been fighting in the war - were getting courses and trainings for civilian jobs. The deportation from Abercorn was called Operation Polejump. The Commissioner explained in his letter that Tanganyika promised to provide food for the journey on Tanganyikan territory, from Kigoma to Dar es Salaam. He said that the Director of Refugees in Dar es Salaam “will, however, be grateful for any help you can give him from stores already in Abercorn that may become surplus and available due to the large reduction in the number of inhabitants.” He was expecting the refugees in March and stated in his letter it was important to arrive in Dar es Salaam as close as possible to the date of the departure of the ship to

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<sup>164</sup> ZM 1/4/4/ No 1 Native trades. No 362.

<sup>165</sup> Ibidem, no 366.

<sup>166</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugee Camps General, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol II. No 404.

<sup>167</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 278, point 4.

<sup>168</sup> Ibidem, no 2031, point 10.

Europe, because the transit camp was full. He wrote: "I would stress the necessity of reducing their stay here to the minimum period possible, as the small part of our Transit Camp which we still retain is fairly full now and we shall have to put up tents or other temporary accommodation for the bulk of Abercorn Poles."<sup>169</sup>

In May 1948 five cottages in Abercorn camp were handed over to the District Commissioner of Abercorn, the camp furniture and equipment was stored and a quartermaster, together with African camp guards, had to keep an eye on it. There were discussions about the demolition of the buildings and the costs to do it. In September 1948 the Governor of Northern Rhodesia wrote London that all the evacuees from the camps Abercorn and Bwana Mkubwa were removed. He said Abercorn did not have a lot of equipment and most was transported with the evacuees. All that was left would be "disposed" to the public and the rest demolished.<sup>170</sup>

In September 1950 all camps were disbanded and the Office of the Director of War Evacuees and Camp was closed. In a note it was said "The Polish who remain in this Territory granted permanent residence."<sup>171</sup>

When it was decided that Polish refugees should be brought to East Africa, the British never had the intention to keep them there. Before the deportations, in 1941, it was already agreed that the evacuees were going to East Africa for "a special or temporary purpose."<sup>172</sup> In October 1946 the Secretary of State in London said refugees who could get a job in the territory for at least 6 months or had a sum of money sufficient to sustain themselves, could stay.<sup>173</sup>

In the end 245 evacuees were accepted for permanent residence in Northern Rhodesia. From Abercorn a woman and two children whose husband and father went missing in the war, and one male were allowed to stay. In table 5 the names of those people can be found.

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<sup>169</sup> ZM 1/25/2 Resettlement, 1946 December -1948, May. No 579 and 579/1.

<sup>170</sup> SEC1/1699 Polish Evacuees general, 1946-50, SEC/MIL/79. No 403.

<sup>171</sup> SEC 1/1703, Refugees Camps general, 1942-1945, SEC/MIL/77, Vol II. No. 592.

<sup>172</sup> SEC 1/1700, Refugees from Cyprus, Polish evacuees general, 1941-46. SEC/MIL 74, Vol II. No 48.

<sup>173</sup> SEC1/1699 Polish Evacuees general, 1946-50, SEC/MIL/79. No 406.

**Table 5: The family and single man from Abercorn camp who got residency in Northern Rhodesia.**

Name	Age	Gender	Status
Josefa Bieronska	41	Female	One family: mother, daughter, son.
Wanda Bieronska	17	Female	
Olgierd Bieronski <sup>174</sup>	18	Male	
Czeslaw Mecner	20	Male	Single

Source: SEC1/1699 Polish Evacuees general, 1946-50, SEC/MIL/79. No 126.

#### 4. 5. Remains

Going to Mbala anno 2014, one can imagine the Abercorn camp was in a very remote place. There was - and is - no railway line and even today it takes 22 hours by bus to get from Lusaka to Mbala. The town of Mbala is small, has few shops and on Fridays there is never electricity. The former director of the Moto Moto museum, Flexon Mizinga, used to call Mbala “a sleeping beauty.”<sup>175</sup>

On my two hour drive from Mbala town to one of the interviewees, Joshua Sinyangwe, the landscape is vast, the few houses are made out of clay and the chamba’s <sup>176</sup> are full of remains of maize, that just had been harvested. On open spaces people are busy bagging the harvest, being maize flour coming from the grinding machines which grind the maize grains. The journey to the location where the Abercorn camp was situated, takes 15 minutes by car from the town of Mbala. The roads are sandy, the landscape is vast and grassy, there are a few chamba’s and few houses, some made of clay, some made of bricks.

Alfred Keita’s house is built on the location of the camp and he proudly shows the remains of two walls where presumably two buildings had been. He did not want to build on top of it because he wants “to remember the history of the people who came to Africa.” When he was building his house and started to dig in order to make a foundation, he found remains of the camp, which were brought to the Moto Moto museum.

<sup>174</sup> In Polish, because this is a man he gets an ‘l’ at the end of his name instead of an ‘a’.

<sup>175</sup> Cited in <http://www.worldlakes.org/shownews.asp?newsid=1347> (March 2015).

<sup>176</sup> A chamba is a field in Zambia, used for subsistence farming.

In 2010 an official excavation was done under the supervision of the archaeologist Liwiyali Mushokabanji who brought all artefacts he found to the Moto Moto museum, where they are stored. The archaeologist found boots, shovels without a handle, shovels with iron handles, spades, axes, picks, shoes and bowls.

Apart from the remnants of the walls, the only other tangible memory of the Polish camp is a tomb stone which is located on a small hill in a field opposite Keita's house. When Keita, Lewis Sinyangwe and I walked on the sandy road that leads to the tomb, Keita and Sinyangwe said that under that same road a lot of Polish people who died of illnesses are still buried. According to both men the field with the grave tomb is also full of remains of buried Polish bodies. They said nobody was allowed to build on this land or have a chamba, although I did see some remains of maize that had been harvested on this section of land.<sup>177</sup>

Apart from the remains of walls and the grave tomb, there are no other traces of the Polish camp; this surrounding is just a rural area. However, in Mbala town one street remembers of the past of the Polish refugees, being the Little Poland street. It is called like that because in general the local people used to call the Polish camp "Little Poland."<sup>178</sup>

### Conclusion

Abercorn camp was built in a remote area and not all authorities were supporting the idea of accommodating people in the Northern Province, because the transport from the main cities in the south, like Lusaka, was costly. With respect to this, especially food was a problem, since in the surrounding there was not a lot of stock and bordering Tanganyika did not deliver the food they promised.

The refugees came by boat via Dar es Salaam, went to Kigoma by train, took the mail boat to Mpulungu and were transported by trucks to Abercorn. The natives in Abercorn did not know they were coming.

The houses in the camp were made from local material and the camp was enclosed and had strict rules. Despite those rules, there was contact between the Poles and the natives; they traded things and the Poles learned from the natives what was edible in the surrounding. There was

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<sup>177</sup> Field visit with Lewis Sinyangwe and Arnold Victor Keita. (August 2014).

<sup>178</sup> Arnold Keita, Morrison Sichilima, Damson Chizu Simpungwe, Victoria Phiri and Lewis Sinyangwe all mentioned this.



hardly any work near the camp, but the Poles tried to make some home made products, although it was difficult to find a market for it. The Poles spent time at communal places, like a school, community centre and church in the camp. They sometimes caused problems, especially concerning the distribution of goods for the camp. There were also problems with the white community of Abercorn.

The camp was gradually dismantled and goods were handed over to authorities or native guards. The only thing that is left today are few remains of tools, shoes and bowls and one grave.



Remains of walls of the Polish camp.



The field opposite the Polish camp. In this field allegedly many Poles are buried.



Keita near the Polish grave.



Tools from the Polish camp, kept in the storage room of the Moto Moto museum, Mbala.



Bowls from the Polish camp, kept in the storage room of the Moto Moto museum, Mbala.<sup>179</sup>



Boots from the Polish camp, kept in the storage room of the Moto Moto museum, Mbala.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Lewis and Victoria of the Moto Moto museum said that the biggest part of the bowls are from the hospital and their sources were people who had told them.

<sup>180</sup> All pictures: Mary-Ann Sandifort. (August 2014)

## 5. Conclusion

Despite warnings about food and transport problems in the north, the last Polish refugee camp in Northern Rhodesia was built near the small city of Abercorn in the Northern Province. The camp was built in 1942 and the first refugees came around one year later. The approximately six hundred Polish refugees who stayed in Abercorn camp were part of groups of refugees who had first been deported from the Soviet Union, then to Uzbekistan and Persia and from there to Dar es Salaam in Tanganyika. Via Dar es Salaam they went by train to Kigoma, by boat to Mpulungu and by truck to Abercorn.

In Abercorn they lived in small houses made from local material. The camp was enclosed and they were not allowed to have regularly contact with the natives and were not free to move in and out. There was hardly any work outside the camp and the refugees tried to make home made products for which there was hardly any market around. Furthermore they went in the camp to a school and community and church gatherings. In 1948 the camp closed and, with the exception of one family and a single man, all Poles left since they were not welcome to stay as residents.

Based on literature and primary sources the answer to the question why the Northern Rhodesian authorities choose to build the last camp for Polish refugees in the remote Northern Province, is that these authorities wanted to accommodate the Poles in an area where they could not be a threat: the Northern Rhodesian authorities had negative experiences with other camps in the country, because the Poles in these camps allegedly bought luxury items in shops and held a hunger strike. Due to those events the Northern Rhodesian authorities saw the Polish refugees as a threat to the power of the colony, because the Poles were white paupers.

Northern Rhodesian politicians were very sensitive about the threat of the white paupers, since they aimed for Northern Rhodesia to be a colony of white European role models, the so-called *Homo europeus*. The first Governor Stanley for instance set high standards for people who wanted to work for the Northern Rhodesian authorities and strove to carry out a patriotically culture, based on the characteristics of the English upper class. There was no space for white paupers in the white Northern Rhodesian society.

This policy and the experiences with the other camps, were the reason for the remote location of Abercorn camp as well as for the strict rules for its inhabitants; whereas the Polish refugees in the other camps in Northern Rhodesia were allowed to go out of the camps and use the facilities in the cities, in Abercorn camp the Poles were restricted in their contacts with native people as well as with the English. The Lake Chilla case clearly shows how the British colonists tried to keep the Poles far from their leisure places. This case is an example of the superiority of the British Homo europeaus and the fate of the Polish white pauper. Table 6 shows the differences between the Homo europeaus and the Polish refugees in Abercorn camp.

**Table 6: Differences between the Homo europeaus and the Polish refugees in Abercorn camp.**

The Homo europeaus	The Polish refugees in Abercorn camp
The Homo europeaus is a male.	Majority is women and children.
He is healthy.	They are in a bad physical condition.
He is wealthy.	They are poor.
He is intelligent.	They are not educated.
He is a role model.	They are insubordinate.
His wife and family act in accordance with the role model.	They are not a family with a man, wife and children.

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**Primary sources: National Archives of Zambia, Lusaka.**

**File District notebook Abercorn Division (1893-1962)<sup>181</sup>**

**File Secretariat Series numbers 1,2,3:<sup>182</sup>**

- SEC 1/1699, 'Polish Evacuees general, 1946-50' SEC/MIL/74.
- SEC 1/1700, 'Refugees from Cyprus, Polish Evacuees general, 1941-1946' SEC/MIL/74, VOL I-III.
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- SEC 3/484, 'Surplus war stores (disposals) Committee, 1946' SEC/SU/2.
- SEC 3/576, 'Shortage of cattle in Northern Province, 1941-1943' SEC/VET/50.

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<sup>181</sup> The District notebook is not kept and the oldest writing I could find was 1893, the youngest 1962.

<sup>182</sup> The files of SEC are not always chronological.

### File Luapula Province Northern Province

- 'Native crops and food supplies. Mporokoso-tour reports, 1934-1938' NP 1/1, location 4779, reference 9.
- 'Abercorn Township Advisory Board, 1934-1954' NP 1/2 location 4808, reference 1.
- 'District Commissioners Conference, 1943-1945' NP 1/5, location 4822, reference 2.

### File Ministry of Agriculture<sup>183</sup>

- 'Conference East African Directors of Agriculture, 1939-1946' MAG 2/1, location 121, reference 4.
- 'Post war settlement, 1941-1946' MAG 2/7, location 59, reference 7.
- 'Abercorn monthly reports, 1931-1946' MAG 2/5 location 130, reference 1.
- 'Abercorn seeds and plants, 1928-1946' MAG/2/17.location 186, reference 3.

### Inventory Vol III L-Z<sup>184</sup>

- 'Stores, 1944 February-1947 November' ZM 1/27/1-4.<sup>185</sup>
- 'Organisation of refugee settlements, 1945 June-August' ZM 1/20.
- 'Handicrafts, 1943 April-1945 November' ZM 1/14.
- 'Resettlement, 1946 December – 1948, May' ZM 1/25/ 1-3.
- 'Employment, 1941 August- 1942' ZM1/12/1-6.
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- 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 1946 Sept-1948 Nov.' ZM 1/28.
- 'Welfare, 1941 August-1944 November' ZM 1/29/ 1-4.
- 'Staff, Abercorn and Bwana Mkubwa, 1945 August - 1948, August' ZM/1/26/1.
- 'Camp organisation, 1945 July – 1948 October' ZM 1/4/4-6.<sup>186</sup>
- 'Administration, 1946 September-1949 July' ZM 1/1/5.<sup>187</sup>
- Medical, ZM1/18.

<sup>183</sup> Although mentioned in the file '*Ministry of Agriculture*', the map 'Abercorn general, 1938-1945' MAG 2/21. Location 216, reference 14 could not be found by the staff of the archives.

<sup>184</sup> Under 'Camps', ZM 1/5, the map Abercorn could not be found by the staff of the archives.

<sup>185</sup> Number 4 could not be found by the staff of the archives.

<sup>186</sup> I skipped number 1-3, because they cover the period before the opening of the Abercorn camp

<sup>187</sup> Number 1-3 could not be found by the staff of the archives.

### Library of Faith and Encounter Centre, Lusaka Zambia

- Annual reports of Kasama-Abercorn, Fort Rosebery, Fort Jameson, Lubushi seminary.
- 'Extracts on Northern Rhodesia and Zambia, year 1912 to 1967' Petit Echo No 1 to 577.

### Field visit August 2014

- Store room of Moto Moto Museum in Mbala where remains of Little Poland are kept.
- Visit to the area where the Polish camp was based in Mbala.
- Library of the Anglican church in Mbala. *(see picture)*



### Interviews in field August 2014

- Morrison Sichilima Education Officer in Abercorn and Kasama. Born 1938. Lived in Abercorn village.
- Damson Chizu Simpungwe. Education Officer in Abercorn. Born 1939. Lived 28 km from Abercorn, in Ivuna village.
- Joshua Sinyangwe. Builder. Road contractor. Born 1918. Lived and lives in Sinyangwe, 23 km's from Mbala. In the time of the Polish camp, he constructed a building near the Polish camp.
- Arnold Victor Keita, missionary of Seventh Adventist Church. Born 1932. Built his house in 1980 on part of Polish camp.
- Lewis Sinyangwe, Maintenance Conservation Assistance at Moto Moto museum, born in Mbala.
- Victoria Phiri, Director Moto Moto Museum.