

Still, Hollowak reminds us that, apart from the mega-Polonia of Chicago that everybody studies and the smaller Polonian cities and states (like Toledo or Delaware or South Bend) that sometimes get attention, there were small Polonian enclaves in the United States that, in best cases, are lucky even to be remembered, much less studied. That's what makes this book particularly valuable.

*Dr. John M. Grondelski
Falls Church, Virginia, USA
e-mail: grondelski@op.pl*

RICHARD C. LUKAS, *The Torpedo Season: Growing Up During World War II*, Las Vegas, NV, 2021, pp. 216. Pb. ISBN: 979-87210 20223.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18290/sp2344.21>

We might be prone to forget that anybody with military experience of World War II must be at least in his mid-90s, and that the few remaining connections with what Americans call the "Greatest Generation" are those who were children during the Second World War. Those children included the American historian, Richard Conrad (named for the author) Lukas, son of Polish parents.

Lukas's academic career focused on World War II, Poland, and the Western Allies. His 1986 book, *The Forgotten Holocaust* (Polish translation: *Zapomniany Holocaust: Polacy pod okupacją niemiecką*), ignited a firestorm in the United States: Jewish-American writers attacked him for applying the word "Holocaust" to describe the Gentile – largely Catholic – extermination of Polish civilians as part of the systematic wartime German racial plan. Unapologetic and convinced that the story of Polish Christian martyrdom under German occupation must not remain unnamed or untold, Lukas followed up with oral histories of Polish Christian witnesses and survivors as well as a book on Polish Christian and Jewish children (Polish translation: *Dziecięcy Płacz*) at Nazi hands.

Torpedo Season is the octogenarian's memoirs of a childhood in a Polish-American home in wartime Massachusetts. It also perhaps explains something about Lukas's subsequent academic career. He discusses World War II from the vantage point of a four-to-eight year old, then follows up with postwar experiences until he and his family moved to Florida at around age thirteen.

In his book *Polonia w Detroit*, Piotr Taras insists that Polonia must be something *sui generis*: it can neither be just a copy of Poland nor something completely other, but a creative fusion of ancestral heritage with the immigrant experience. The value of *Torpedo Season* is seeing World War II through the eyes of a Polish-American boy in a

Polish-American family, an experience profoundly different both from a peer in Poland as well as from an “average” American child growing up during the Second World War. (For more information on Lukas, see www.richardclukas.com).

Unlike a four-to-eight year old Polish boy of that era, Lukas’s childhood was relatively happy. His immigrant father had left behind relatives in Poland, whose farm was expropriated by the Germans, leaving them to live in their barn. Poles who came to Massachusetts during World War II made clear the barbarism of German (and Russian) occupation. But the front (if not the war effort) was not right outside his door.

But, until the Modern Age, the United States enjoyed the relative isolation that bordering two oceans afforded. That’s not to say that Lukas experienced no threats whatsoever. As a seven-year old living in Swampscott, a Massachusetts town on the Atlantic, he and a friend walking the beach came upon an unknown projectile. They attempted to turn into a see-saw before a local fisherman snatched them off a live German torpedo that had run aground and was subsequently disarmed by military specialists.

While safer than their Polish counterparts, Polish-American children understood the War from a different lens than their American peers. For Americans – borrowing a popular World War I song – the War was “over there.” Individual American families might feel more acutely connected if a relative was serving in the European or Pacific Theaters, but it was still “over there” and their connection temporary. Even though even Americans living on the coast might have a notional awareness of German submarines off American shores, it was often more theoretical than practical.

For Polish-American families, the War was much more existential. Most of them, not long removed from the experience of immigration, still had family in “the old country.” The lens of Polish history, in which most Polonian families steeped their children, tended to broaden their horizons. One must remember that, for Americans, World War II began in late 1941: even Lukas begins his book with his family listening to news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Though he admits that, for his father – whose mother still lived in Poland – that news was simply a replay of September 1939, one can see how the Japanese attack brought the reality of the War home for people living in America in ways Hitler’s Blitzkrieg did not.

The War was also more existential for Polish-Americans, given their high rates of volunteering for American military service. One of Lukas’s earliest memories was his description of the bell of his parish, St. Michael’s in Lynn, Massachusetts, tolling for the funerals of American servicemen, and how the schoolchildren would stop what they were doing when they heard it. Another was his memory of the Mass celebrated to mark V-E Day, when Fr. John Dronzek read the names of all St. Michael’s parishioners killed in wartime service.

For Americans, though removed from the immediate effects of war, the importance of solidarity with the war effort was high. Lukas describes how his mother led efforts in Lynn’s Polish immigrant community to buy war bonds, a U.S. Government scheme to finance the war. He also comments on how rationing affected everyday life, from things

theoretical to little boys (like steel in car bumpers) to things much more practical (like the lack of chocolate because its limited production was earmarked for the troops). He notes how the most commonplace toys for boys his age were soldiers and how their playground games were typically battles, something for which he admits to losing taste for after the torpedo incident on the beach.

He also points out the sociological impact of the War on American life. His female relatives got jobs in local factories to bolster war production. His mother volunteered in the local Red Cross. His bachelor uncle, deferred from service because of his age, fought the battle of the home front in a local factory. His effort to keep the children out of his bedroom only tempted Lukas the more. When he finally made his surreptitious entry, the boy discovered that among his uncle's great "secrets" were two wartime wall posters exhorting production as a way to crush the enemy.

As a Polish-American family, the Lukases paid special attention to Polish news. They hosted five Polish RAF airmen sent to the Boston area to give speeches promoting Poland's cause. His mother was among American visitors to Poland in the immediate postwar period, returning with lists of desperate families to whom packages were sent for years afterwards.

Apart from the war effort, Lukas also gives us insight into the challenges of growing up a Polish-American boy in the United States. Prejudice was one challenge. Lynn was a manufacturing town with plenty of immigrants, but also an older, nativist Protestant stratum. Lukas recalls being called a "papist" by Protestant boys who admitted they didn't know what that meant. Later, when the family moved to neighboring Swampscott, a much more white Anglo-Saxon Protestant enclave, Lukas remembers various neighbors ignoring his family because of their Slavic roots. On the other hand, Lukas notes how his family transcended American prejudices: during a trip to relatives in Florida, they stopped at a train station in Georgia and went to drink at a water fountain, to the astonishment of a group of locals surrounding them, because they had not noticed they were drinking from the "colored only" fountain. "I never forgot the incident and years later, as an adult, I used to say to my friends that my father and I defied the color barrier long before it was fashionable to do so" (p. 175).

Other challenges growing up in a Polish American environment were more routine. Although Lukas loved Polish history (obvious by his career choice), Polish language and grammar were another matter. Lukas attended school when Polish parochial schools still included Polish language as a mandatory subject. His summary of Polish: "When you realize there are seventeen ways to say the number two in Polish, you know you're about to learn a language on steroids" (p. 53).

Other anecdotes in his memoirs are, of course, those of any child growing up, learning and becoming confident about his place in the world. While some might pay less attention to a personal work like this, discounting it as a kind of tribute to a retiring colleague, that would be wrong. As the World War II generation passes from the scene, their personal experiences of living through those times – including the experiences of

children – become increasingly valuable. If, as Father Taras insists, the Polonian experience should be *sui generis*, so, too, was their experience of those times: far easier than their Polish counterparts, but different from their American ones. To understand American Polonia is also to understand those unique experiences that made it tick, made it what it was. Richard Lukas gives us an insight in his “Polish-American Childhood in Wartime Massachusetts.”

Dr. John M. Grondelski
Washington, DC, USA
e-mail: grondelski@op.pl

DANUTA PIĄTKOWSKA, WIESŁAWA PIĄTKOWSKA-STEPANIAK, *Polski akcent w American Expeditionary Forces. Historie prawdziwe, fascynujące i prawie zapomniane*, Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego 2022, ss. 418 [262 il.]. ISBN: 978-83-7395-984-2.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18290/sp2344.22>

Praca Danuty i Wiesławy Piątkowskich to przypomnienie o Polakach i obywatelach amerykańskich polskiego pochodzenia, którzy ochotniczo zgłosili się do armii Stanów Zjednoczonych i wzięli udział w operacjach wojennych w Europie w czasie I wojny światowej. Stanowić mogli aż 10% składu amerykańskich sił zbrojnych, choć dane mówią, że liczba emigrantów z ziem polskich przed I wojną światową opiewa na około 3% społeczeństwa amerykańskiego. Jak podają Autorki, publikacja nie aspiruje do całościowego, kompletnego przedstawienia czynu zbrojnego Polaków, ale raczej wskazuje na jego skalę oraz motywy tak liczego napływu do armii na wezwanie prezydenta USA i rezolucji Kongresu o przystąpieniu do wojny.

Amerykańskie społeczeństwo przywiązane było do doktryny izolacjonizmu i neutralności przyjętej jeszcze w 1823 r. Jak więc była możliwa tak powszechna mobilizacja chętnych? Autorki analizują zarówno sytuację polityczną i gospodarczą, jak i nastroje społeczne i przyczyny ich zmiany. W literaturze przywoływany jest wśród innych powodów incydent z zatopieniem w 1915 r. przez U-Boota brytyjskiego statku pasażerskiego Lusitania z 1198 podróżnymi, wśród których było 128 obywateli USA. Uzupełniły ten fakt mało znanymi, np. zatopieniem amerykańskiego frachtowca Vigilancia – cywilnej jednostki przepływającej przez Atlantyk, czy kilku brytyjskich statków handlowych. Społeczeństwo emigrantów europejskich dojrzywało do decyzji o konieczności przystąpienia do wojny od 1915 r. i wierzyło w słuszne działania szanowanego prezydenta Woodrowa Wilsona.