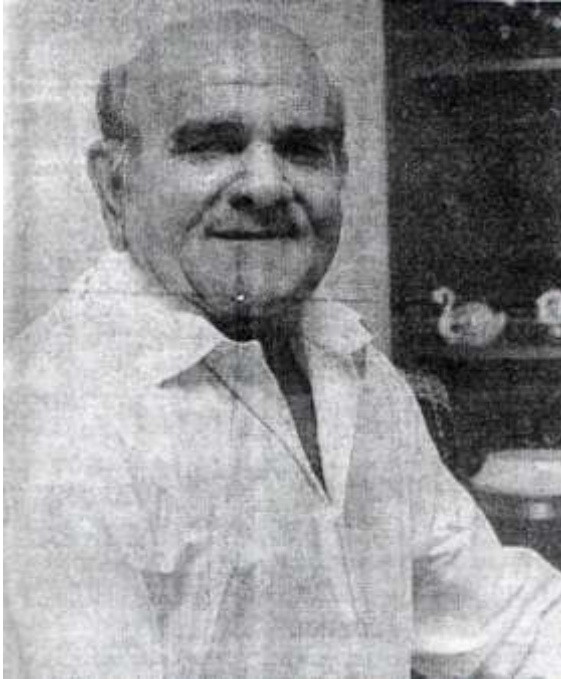


THE MAN WHO TAUGHT JESSE OWEN TO JUMP

A WAR VETERAN who taught the great Olympic champion Jesse Owen a new technique for long jumping is now living a quiet secluded life in Pembrokeshire.



Herbert Uka

Herbert Uka, aged 62 of Pembroke competed in what he describes as the best Olympic Games ever held as Hitler really went to town in Berlin in 1936 to show his new Germany to the rest of the world.

It was in the ill-famed Berlin Olympics that "Herbie" Uka represented Poland in the 100 metres, 200 metres, the long jump, middleweight boxing and handball competitions. Besides competing for Poland in the Olympics, he also represented his country 28 times on the football field, playing in goal.

It was at a training session during the Olympics that Carl Ludwig "Lutz" Long, a German athlete, taught Herbie Uka a triple scissors which enables an athlete to walk three paces in mid-air instead of two, thus extending the jump.

All good friends

Jesse Owen, who was one of the first coloured men Herbie ever met, asked Lutz to show him how to do this new jump and as all the athletes on the circuit were all good friends, he did so willingly. In the final/Herbie was lying in 3rd place and Jesse Owen had faulted every jump. With one jump each left, the "Black Panther" got the new technique right and won the Olympic Gold Medal, squeezing Mr. Uka out of the Bronze Medal position.

When asked what he thought of the "great man," Herbie said that he was always so friendly and grateful it was a pleasure to know him, and none of the athletes showed any friction towards him.

He also competed against Jesse Owen in the sprint events and modestly admits to being beaten out of sight in the 200 metres final and he only managed to reach the semi-finals of the 100 metres.

Great stars

While in Berlin, Herbie met many of the great stars, including the original "Tarzan," Johnny Weismuller, whom he became friendly with. They kept in touch for many years.

Poland's handball team came fourth and Herbie missed out again on a priceless medal! While in Berlin, Herbie met Hitler and Goering. He described Hitler as a man with hypnotic eyes who "could send shivers right through your body." The conversation was about the fact that as Herbie

came from Silesia in the south of Poland, which was disputed territory at the time, he should really be competing for Germany.

However, Herbie, who was one of Poland's - coaches in the Games, showed the love for his country when one of the boxers he had helped to coach fell ill and could not participate in the competition. Herbie, who had done some boxing, stepped in and with what little practice he had had won his first two bouts. However, his third contest saw him knocked out by Puskas, the great Hungarian footballer's brother.

When asked what he thought of those ill-famed Games, he replied, "All I had time for was to think what was the next event, and where."

While in Poland Herbie gained 28 Caps playing as goalkeeper for his country, and fondly remembers the matches against Germany and Hungary.

Penalty save

One of his greatest footballing memories, though, is when he came to England with his club side, AKS Chorzow, to play Wolverhampton Wanderers. During this game. Wolves were awarded a penalty which was taken by Billy Wright. Herbie saved it!

In the early sixties Herbie took his wife Shirley to Cardiff to see Wales play Poland and during the game Billy Wright, who was also a spectator at the game, recognised Herbie and his wife and took them to dinner to talk of old times.

Just after the Olympics, Herbie applied to go on a course in Berlin to train as a sports instructor. Out of 3,000 applications only 148 places were available — and Herbie won one of them. After qualifying as a sports instructor he enlisted - for National Service in the Polish Army, but as he was due to be released from the Army, war broke out.

At the beginning of the war Germany quickly conquered Poland, with the unofficial help of the Russians who had a Treaty with the Germans, and Herbie was taken prisoner by the Russians. It was soon after he was captured that Herbert Uka faced what can only be considered as the greatest test in all his life.

After being transported to Kiev, he met up with other soldiers of his country. In all nearly 27,000 of his comrades were lined up and forced to march day and night for four and a half months to a P.o.W Camp in Siberia called Cahawka.

Horrific

If they stopped while they walked, the Russians shot them, so a system was adopted by the prisoners which meant that while one prisoner slept, two others would carry him. The whole march was horrific, with extreme temperatures and the violent attitude of the Russian guards. During the march, when the prisoners thought that they were in the middle of nowhere they came across a village full of old German soldiers from the First World War who had never been sent home — so they had set up their own colony. Obviously it came as a great shock to them to learn that not only had the First World War finished but a second one had started, and Herbie and the rest of the Polish Forces were prisoners of that war.

Of the original 27,000 who started the march, Herbie was one of only 3,000 who finished the

journey through to Cahawka, This can only be attributed to his supreme fitness, developed when he was Poland's Sports Personality of the Year from 1932 to 1939.

Working in salt mines

Herbie Uka spent 2 ½ years in Cahawka doing such jobs as felling trees, working in the salt mines and looking after the village pumping station. Apart from the last six months in the pump station, life at Cahowka was appalling. "We had to live on 5 oz. of flour and 1 oz. of tobacco a week," he said.

At long last Hitler made his fatal mistake and started a Second Front against Russia, who immediately released the Polish prisoners, gave them five gold roubles and transported them to Iran.

The feeling of freedom to Herbie was incredible, though he did not realise the consequences and after-effects that would come up on him when the war finished. On arrival in Iran, the British Forces supplied the Poles with all the necessary equipment and the Polish Army was formed. Under the supervision of a few British soldiers, the Polish Forces made their way to Tanganyika where they were trained for all kinds of warfare in only four months.

Herbie's first battle was at Tobruk, where he went "over the top" with the Black Watch and continued fighting with the Polish Forces right across North Africa.

After North Africa came Italy. The Americans took the West Coast, The British the middle and "the rest" made up mainly of the Commonwealth countries and the Polish Army, took the east coast.

Monte Casino

The feeling of victory was getting greater as the Allied Forces swept up through Italy. But the push was brought to a halt at Monte Casino.



The Battle of Monte Casino has gone down in history as one of the costliest fought in the Second World War. The Americans, British, New Zealanders and Australians had all tried to take the hill but failed. The Polish Army was the last resort.

After a long, hard fight, the Polish Army took the hill of Monte Casino. Herbie has a photograph at home of him at the top of Monte Casino sitting on a pile of rubble which was originally the monastery. It was the capture of this hill which ensured victory for the Allied Forces in Italy.

Serving with the Polish Army – North Africa.

It was while Herbie was on the Adriatic Coast the final victory was achieved and the Polish Army looked forward to going back home to Poland. The British- Forces arranged transport for them, saying that they were going home to Free Poland. "Naturally, we were all upset when we found ourselves in Liverpool, and kicked up a bit of a fuss," he said.

The British authorities finally persuaded the Polish Forces that going back home to Poland was asking for trouble, as it was now under Russian control. The Poles were also told that there would be plenty of work for them in Britain as well, so they were all put into trucks and transported to various areas of Britain. Herbie arrived in Castlemartin camp. After a few weeks at Castlemartin, he was found a job in Kidderminster at the Richard Thomas & Baldwin steelworks.

Father in prison

During his stay there he started to play football again, representing the local side, Kidderminster Harriers.

He also contacted the Red Cross to try and find his family in Poland. It was not long before he received a letter from his mother saying that it was inadvisable for him to go back as his father was serving a 15-year prison sentence in Moscow for Herbie's "crimes against the State."

On hearing this, he wanted to return to Poland to serve his sentence, but was eventually persuaded to forget the idea by a former Captain who had gone back to Poland without making his name known to see what it was like. The message he gave Herbie was that he would be lucky to be alive if he got to his front doorstep!

After 18 months, Herbie moved back to Pembroke where he now lives with his wife Shirley and two sons, David and Karl. At first he worked at Haggar's before going into the painting and decorating business. He also played a number of games for Pembroke Boro' but has now sold his business and retired due to ill health.

Although Herbie's father died five years ago he would dearly love to take his wife home to Poland to meet his sister and to try and find all the photographs he had of those pre-war days. This however, is unlikely due to the cost of such a trip and the difficulty in obtaining the necessary documents to make sure that he will be able to return, as he is still a wanted man there!

Herbert was talking in 1981, thanks go to his family for providing the information to enable his story to be written.

David Pring