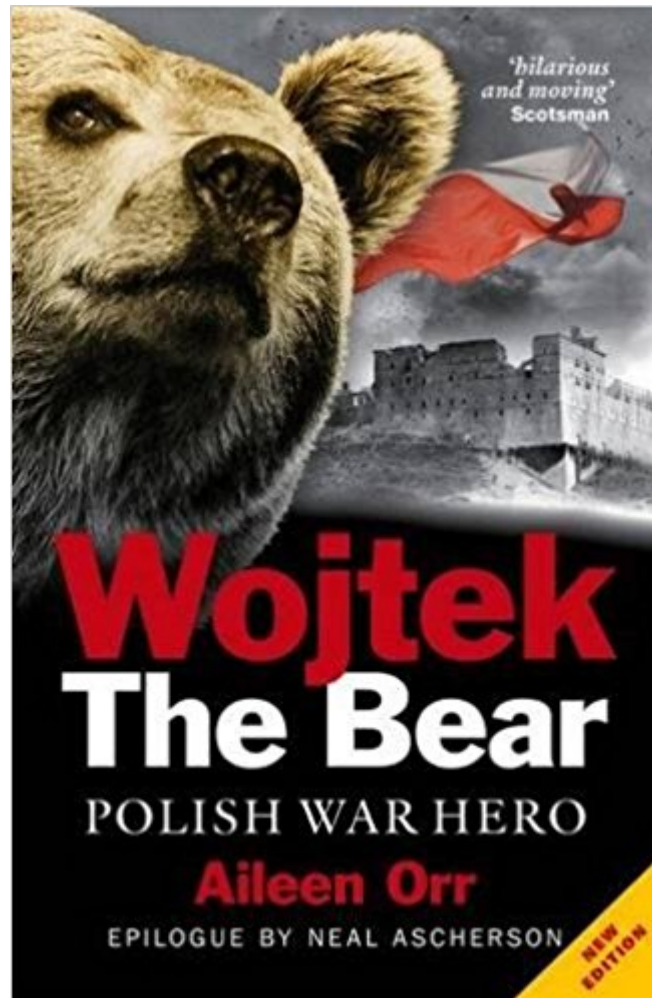




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Wojtek The Bear: Polish War Hero



Synopsis

This is the inspiring and charming true story of one of the Second World War's most unusual combatants – a 500-pound cigarette smoking, beer-drinking brown bear. Originally adopted as a mascot by the Polish Army in Iran, Wojtek soon took on a more practical role, carrying heavy mortar rounds for the troops and going on to play his part as a fully enlisted 'soldier' with his own rank and number during the Italian campaign. After the war, Wojtek, along with some of his Polish compatriots from II Corps, came to Berwickshire, where he became a significant member of the local community before subsequently moving to Edinburgh Zoo. Wojtek's retirement was far from quiet: a potent symbol of freedom and solidarity for Poles around the world, he attracted a huge amount of media interest that shows no sign of abating almost 50 years after his death.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'hilarious and moving' - Scotsman 'It is both moving and amusing' - Lord David Steel

Aileen Orr was born in Dumfries and raised in Lockerbie before going on to study at the London School of Economics. After a few years in banking, she married and became a Regional Director of the SCA. She stood for both the Westminster and Scottish parliaments and currently enjoys working with parliamentarians on a variety of issues and all things Polish. Neal Ascherson was born in Edinburgh and studied at Cambridge University. A journalist for many years, he has also written numerous books and is well known as an authority on Polish and East European affairs.

Reading as I do on various wars and battles of interest to me and while keeping the larger event in front of me. I came across a story of the Polish Army Service Corps that fought during the Battle of Monte Cassino among many other battles during the Second World War. Specifically, the Battle of Monte Cassino and the Gustav Line in Italy are among my all-time favorites of the war in Europe in which to read, study, learn, and devour. It was during one of my past readings on this battle that I learned of a bear adopted by the 22nd Company of the Polish Army Service Corps to which I knew one day I would have to read. The purpose of wanting to read of Wojtek (Voy-check) was in my first impression to grasp a deeper understanding of the Polish Army - it was in fact those boys who broke the Gustav Line and lead the way to the success at Monte Cassino after General Mark Clark (aka Marcus Aurelius Clarkus) expended the U.S. Army 36th Division (Texas) in attempting to cross the Rapido - an accounting he would later have to face in a Congressional Investigation to which he was acquitted - but would never earn a 5th Star to his collar either - as a point of interest on Clark he was the signature on the Truce for the Korean War. But, this book was about a bear; adopted as a cub who served well with his Polish Comrades - and is by all accounts a hero by every measure of the word. I thought I would learn about a bear and a battle in this book; what I came away with was a brief history known to us of the sadness of the great people of Poland. A people and a culture that were left behind not to earn their freedom until 1989 with the leadership and charisma of Lech Walesa. I also came away with a post WWII better understanding of the Scottish who adopted the boys of the Free Polish Army. The short 200 or so pages of this book are an introduction to a treasure trove of a depleted, betrayed, heroic, and wonderful people of the Polish. The Scots have a fascinating history as do the Welsh, the English, and the Irish. The only matter I did not agree with in this book was in the epilogue of this book by another author Neal Ascherson - he stated that FDR and Churchill gladly let Uncle Joe Stalin do what he wanted with Poland but by all historical accounts - Sir Churchill fought this behind the scenes and FDR was nearing the end of his tired existence by the time the Yalta Conference took place. My appreciation for Ms. Aileen Orr for her brilliant display and abilities with the "proper" English use gave this American a smile and a lesson on occasion. The simple pleasures are always the best and are priceless. This book and historical account is a gem and rightfully earned the five stars it deserves. NAZDROWIE! To Poland and "to your health!"

The story of Wojtek, a brown bear adopted as a orphaned cub by Polish soldiers is well-known in some quarters, notably in Britain and among Polish veterans of World War II. However, his story may not be so well known elsewhere. Aileen Orr's new biography "Wojtek the Bear, Polish War

Hero" will help to remedy that. Orr grew up in post-World War II in the Borders area of Scotland on a farm near to a Polish troop demobilization center. It was there in the period immediately after World War II that her grandfather came to know and love Wojtek, a brown bear who served and was given a rank in the Polish Second Army. By the time Orr was a young girl, Wojtek had become a resident of the Edinburgh Zoo. This is where Orr would go to visit Wojtek. Wojtek lived until the age of 22. He died at the Zoo in 1963. The saga of Wojtek (pronounced Voy-check) begins with his adoption in 1942 by Polish troops stationed in Iran. His socialization was as a member of a platoon of men, not as a wild bear as he would otherwise have been, gathering and hunting for food, wary of men. What is fascinating is that Wojtek probably considered himself as much a human as a bear since from an impressionable age he had no mama bear to teach him. Instead, he modeled himself as a soldier, following the lead of the soldiers as they did their daily duties and practiced their field maneuvers. For more than five years, Wojtek lived freely with the Polish soldiers, modeling his behavior on theirs, wrestling with them, rough-housing and playing games with them, eating as they ate. A mascot and morale-booster, Wojtek was this and much more. The Polish Second (Artillery) Corps moved many times from Iran to Iraq, to Palestine, to Egypt, Italy and finally, to Scotland. As the Army moved, so did Wojtek. Wojtek smoked (and ate) cigarettes, drank beer, loved sweets, apples, pastries and honey. In desperate times, the men fed Wojtek from their own limited rations. What most distinguished Wojtek was his service in combat, especially his role in the Italian Campaign at the siege of Monte Cassino. It is there that Wojtek proved himself. Following the lead of his fellow soldiers, Wojtek lifted and carried heavy shells to artillery pieces. If the soldiers could do it, so could he. It is this image of Wojtek the bear carrying live shells in his arms that has become the enduring image of Wojtek's loyalty, sense of duty and comradeship with his fellow soldiers. This image of Wojtek is one of great pride and enduring spirit. Wojtek's image is used in the Polish Army to this day. The penultimate chapter details the effort to commission a statue of Wojtek in Edinburgh to honor him and his fellow soldiers for their service and to remind younger generations of what the expatriate Polish forces went through during World War II. The final chapter written by Neal Ascherson provides background and context for what happened to Poland in 1939 when Hitler and Stalin invaded and then divided it between themselves. Ascherson recounts what happened to Polish military and civilians from Soviet-occupied eastern Poland who were exiled to Russia. He explains how remnant soldiers and civilians became the nucleus of the expatriate Polish Army that would go on to fight Nazi Germany after Hitler broke the non-aggression pact with Stalin. "Wojtek the Bear" is written in an easy style, suitable for adults and teens. Five stars.

Great story of a little known event in world history. Wojtek was an amusing and touching story but the real stars were the Polish Army who fought so bravely and then did not have a country to call home. The Polish army that was not even allowed to march in the victory parade in London for fear of offending Josef Stalin. Truly a moment of which the British should be truly ashamed

Amazing Story about a Little bear and his Polish soldier friends. It's the stories of the soldiers which are interesting, more than the memories of Generals who tell it "their" way.

This is a great true story and I learned so much. I did not know how much the Poles helped the Scots in WW II. And, Wojtek is amazing! I wish I had known him. The statue is beautiful and the author so knowledgeable. A must read!!!

A great story about a truly remarkable bear, Wojtek, and a group of Polish soldiers that would not be defeated by the Russians or Germans.

A very enjoyable and engaging read. An aspect of WW2 that I had little knowledge of.

Wonderful story! Heartwarming and heartbreaking. I can imagine the sadness Wojtek felt when separated from his comrades. This is a must for readers of WWII stories.

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