

Exhibition pays tribute to selfless acts of courage

■ William Yeoman

As Remembrance Day approaches, it's good to be reminded of the heroes and sacrifices of other nations and other times.

Starting on Monday at Parliament House is the historical photographic exhibition *Time for Heroes*, which tells of the triumphs and tragedies of the Polish resistance to the 1939-1945 Nazi occupation.

More specifically, it focuses on two powerful stories.

One concerns the activities of the Polish Home Army, or *Armia Krajowa*, during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. The other relates to the extraordinary escapades of one AK member, Capt. Witold Pilecki who in 1940 allowed himself to be incarcerated in the Auschwitz

concentration camp in order to help inmates and file clandestine reports on the camp's activities.

Pilecki (1901-1948) was a veteran of World War I (as a young scout) and the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-21. During World War II, he served as a platoon commander before, in 1939, helping establish the Secret Polish Army, which would eventually become part of the AK.

In September 1940, Pilecki assumed the name of Tomasz Serafinski and deliberately joined a group of Poles being rounded up in the street by Nazis. Once in Auschwitz, Pilecki formed the underground Union of Military Organisations, which supported inmates, helped get information about the camp to the outside world and prepared for a possible uprising.



Capt. Witold Pilecki

His reports on the atrocities taking place at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp were sent to Warsaw, then passed on to the allied

powers, who ignored them. Pilecki was able to escape from the camp in 1943.

He also survived the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 — only to be unlawfully executed by the communists in 1948.

There were many other such instances of heroism by AK members and their allies leading up to and during the Warsaw Uprising, which saw ordinary men, women and children join the AK in an attempt to throw off the yoke of the occupying Nazi forces after enduring years of brutality.

Some were Australians, like Sydney-born soldier Walter Edward Smith, whom the Germans took prisoner when they invaded Crete in 1941.

Smith subsequently escaped from occupied Poland's Stalag XX-A, was captured again and escaped again, after which he promptly joined the AK and the

ill-fated Warsaw Uprising.

Australian RAAF pilots also supported the AK from the skies. One such pilot was Sgt Keith Bruce Chisholm, who was shot down over Poland and, like Smith, escaped from a prison camp. Making his way to Warsaw, he was concealed by the family of lawyer Halina Kozubowska. Chisholm lived with them for 18 months, which meant the family also lived for 18 months with the constant fear of being found out and executed by the Gestapo for hiding an escaped enemy prisoner.

So many lives, so many stories — so many heroes.

Time for Heroes is on from Monday until November 15 at Parliament House. Entry is free. The exhibition's organising committee will present the WA Parliament with a new edition of Pilecki's Report W KL Auschwitz 1940-1943