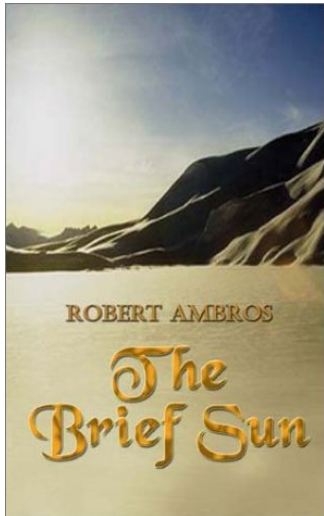


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***The Brief Sun* by Robert Ambros (2002), 228 pages.**



This is a well-written novel by a surgical Pathologist living in upstate New York. It is based on extensive recollections of his many family members, who experienced various phases of World War II, in particular the infamous Siberian exile, followed by the campaign of Gen. W. Anders and his 2nd Corps in Italy. The author deftly merges many sources, including historical accounts, to offer an illuminating insight into the events described; he has an uncanny ear for dialogue. Judging by the modest words printed on the back cover, this novel is under-advertised.

It begins with grim scenes in Northern Siberia, where many Poles in the summer of 1941 are suddenly released from camps and invited to join Gen. Anders' formation, while many others miss the opportunity. The most gripping part of the narrative really begins when the hero of the novel, Andrzej Bartkowski, sails from Krasnodovodsk on the Caspian Sea for Pahlevi in Persia. Ambros shows a remarkable understanding of the eventual predicament these soldiers face in Italy, but he avoids tedious military accounts and instead focuses on individuals. This novelistic approach adds to the richness of the book. Most of us know this segment of history, but it is very instructive to look at it from one person's Point of view.

Young Andrzej at the age of sixteen finds himself thousands of miles away from his home in eastern Poland. The Soviets stab him twice: on September 17, 1939, in his back while Hitler's armies attack from the west, and again in 1940, when he is ruthlessly evicted and shipped to a labor camp in the Urals never to see his home again. Yet he considers himself lucky when, barefoot and in rags, he is allowed to travel to the Polish centers in southern Russia and eventually to leave this God-forsaken land. His very young cousin travels to New Zealand, assisted by a humanitarian rescue operation, while Andrzej soon finds himself on the Italian front.

Unfortunately, there is no happy ending to the military campaign. Following the March, 1945, Yalta Agreement, Gen. Anders writes in desperation to the Commander of the British 8th Arm that the decision of the Three Powers Conference is a grave injustice and contradicts his sense of what is honorable. A short time later Winston Churchill tells Anders: "We have enough troops today, and we do not need your help. You can take away your divisions." This is the lowest point, a deep humiliation, a feeling of betrayal.

In the closing chapter it is a relief to learn that some months after the end of the war, Andrzej is en route to New Zealand to join his only surviving relative, young Michael.

***George E. Suboczewski***

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