Aquila Polonica Finds Its Niche
Finding a market for books about Poland during WW2

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Terry Tegnazian isn't Polish, and as far as she knows, neither is anyone in her family or her husband's family. Yet the former Hollywood lawyer has started what might be the world's only publishing house that specializes in books about the Polish experience during WW2. And if early buzz is any indication, the books Tegnazian publishes could prove quite popular. They've been picked up by Book of the Month clubs, received praise from authors like Alan Furst, been named finalists for independent publishing awards, and prompted the release of DVDs of historic newsreels that had long been forgotten.

The launch of Aquila Polonica--which means "Polish eagle" in Latin, referring to the country's traditional symbol of a white Eagle against a red background--occurred thanks to Tegnazian's curiosity. She was practicing law in Los Angeles, specializing in motion picture finance, and decided to try her hand at filmmaking and novel writing. While researching a book about a Polish fighter pilot during WW2, she joined an Internet chat group on the subject. There, she met Stefan Mucha, a half-English, half-Polish graphic designer whose father was liberated by the Allies. Realizing the dearth of English-language information about Poland during that period, Tegnazian and Mucha decided to try to fill the void by publishing books that speak to the era's "amazingly heroic and tragic story," says Tegnazian, a history that was "suppressed for decades by the Communist regime. Only since the fall of Communism in 1989 have the true facts begun to surface."

Three years and five trips to Warsaw later, Aquila Polonica has acquired more than 30 books, and just began publishing last fall. Its list includes books that originally appeared in English and have gone out of print, books in Polish that are being translated into English for the first time, and original manuscripts. Its first two books, The Mermaid and the Messerschmitt: War Through a Woman's Eyes 1939-1940 by Rulka Langer (nominated for a Benjamin Franklin Award) and The Ice Road: An Epic Journey from the Stalinist Labor Camps to Freedom by Stefan Waydenfeld, were previously published in English but were of print. Waydenfeld was invited to blog on The Huffington Post, which generated interest in his book, but Langer--and many other authors whose works Aquila Polonica has acquired--is no longer living (the house deals with heirs to license publication rights). However, Aquila Polonica's release of the DVD Siege, a rarely seen and newly restored, historic newsreel of original film footage of the Siege of Warsaw, can stand in when authors can't. Siege was nominated for an Academy Award in 1940 and inducted into the U.S. National Film Registry in 2006.

Aquila Polonica is releasing two more books this summer, the reissue of 303 Squadron: The Legendary Battle of Britain Fighter Squadron by Arkady Fiedler and Jarek Garlinski, and its first original title, Masks and Shadows by Krysia Jopek. Tegnazian anticipates releasing the rest of the titles she and Mucha acquired over the next couple of years. Aquila Polonica books are distributed by NBN.