

## BILL BIEGA -- PERSONAL PAGE

Here is some family background:

Our family originated in southern Poland, in the upper valley of the river San. Our branch of the Biega family goes back to Jan Biega, one of the sons of Josef Biega, who owned a small farm in the village of Dębna, about 15 miles north of the ancient town of [Sanok](#). Read the full story about the remarkable careers of three generations at <http://biega.com/biegafam.html>.

My father, Bolesław Biega, was studying international law at the Sorbonne University in Paris. There he met my mother, Marjorie Thomas, who was a member of the British delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference that ended World War I. He graduated and was given a position in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They married in London in 1921 and returned to Warsaw



I was born in Warsaw in 1922, in the flat of my Aunt Jadwiga on Three Crosses Square (*Plac 3ch Krzyzy*). Shortly afterwards, my father was assigned to the Polish Embassy in London as Second Secretary. Unfortunately, my mother died two years later. Subsequently my father remarried, another English woman, Baba Seely. I lived for several years with her parents in the village of Sutton-on-Sea on the North Sea coast, and went to school there. Then in 1934, after my father had returned to Warsaw, I joined him in Poland. I was enrolled in the [Sułkowski](#) school in Rydzyna, in western Poland. I had only one year left to graduation when Nazi armies invaded September 1, 1939.

The full story of my life under German occupation and the following years is covered in my book ["Thirteen Is My Lucky Number"](#). You may read some excerpts at <http://biega.com/book.html>. However I will continue with a brief outline.

As a member of the high school Cadet Training Corps, I marched east across Poland with my unit to avoid the onrushing German armies. On September 17, when we were in a troop train halted a few miles west of the Soviet Russian border, the Soviet armies invaded Poland. Following country tracks through forests and swamps to avoid Soviet troops, we marched back to within a 100 miles of Warsaw and participated in the last battle of the Polish army against the Germans at Kock, which ended October 5.

As the Germans had closed schools, I completed high-school in secret groups. Later the Germans allowed a school for technicians to open. University professors used this as the venue for conducting university courses. This way I completed my undergraduate courses in electrical engineering. Having also joined the Underground Home Army - *A.K.*, at the same time I completed clandestine officer training. Upon graduation I was leader and instructor for several groups of five in the "Kilinski" group in the underground, preparing for the eventual uprising against the occupier.



As the Soviet army was within a few miles of Warsaw in their westward advance against the Germans, the Uprising started August 1 1944. Stalin halted the Soviet advance, and refused to allow allied British and American planes to land on Soviet territory, thus virtually preventing any reinforcements or supplies from reaching the fighting Poles. Recent

programs on CNN and the History channel, as well as Norman Davies' book "Rising '44" have well documented this betrayal of the Polish Underground by our allies. Nevertheless, the Polish Home Army continued its struggle against superior German forces for 63 days. During this time, although wounded, I also managed to wed my long time sweetheart, and Underground companion, Lili - the [wedding](#) was recorded by a film unit that was stationed across the street, and has been seen in many publications and tv shows.

Upon the capitulation we both went into German prison camp, from which we emerged on the eve of the Allied victory in May, 1945. I then worked for over a year as Polish Liaison Officer to the U.S. Army. My first task was helping evacuate Poles and other eastern Europeans to western Germany from Saxony prior to its takeover by the Soviets. Then I was assigned as liaison to the American occupation forces in south-western Germany, with my base in Esslingen. There our first son, Mark, was born in June 1946.

When the Allies withdrew recognition of the Polish Government in exile (based in England), we went to England. I was demobilized in 1947 and started working as a draughtsman for a small company manufacturing transformers. With the help of Bill Murray-Lawes we purchased a small house in Catford, East London. A year later I passed the British examinations for an electrical engineer, and I obtained a position as chief design engineer with a small company in London, located on the Strand. Our second son, Peter Wojciech was born in 1947. We wished to go to the U.S. where many of our friends had already gone from Displaced Persons camps in Germany. However the quota for U.S. immigration visas for Poles was already used up for many years into the future.



In mid 1950 the U.S. Congress passed a bill providing 18,000 extra visas for members of the



Polish armed forces in exile. Just after Christmas, 1950, we were on our way on the liner "Queen Mary", our passage being paid by the British government.

To our surprise, there was another Biega - Jan Biega - on the ship. He was approximately our age and on his way to Florida.

After a single day stop-over in New York we continued by train to Detroit, where our sponsors lived. In those days the sponsors had to put up a bond to ensure that we would not require any public assistance!

We did not sleep well on the long over-night ride in the train. It was very hot for us used to cold houses in England. In the morning we looked out at the country covered with snow. In New York it had been warm, but in Detroit it was real winter. At the station we were warmly greeted by our great friends from our time in Esslingen - Witold and Irena Skuba. Our new life was about to begin.

So as not to be a burden on our friends, I immediately started looking for work. I was very surprised how many job offers I received in response to about 20 letters that I sent to companies chosen out of the Detroit Yellow Pages. For several months I worked as a draughtsman at the electrical equipment manufacturer "Square D". Then I replied to an ad in the newspaper and received a job as a design engineer in the Specialty Transformer Department of General Electric in Fort Wayne, Indiana. There I quickly advanced to section leader. The photo shows how engineers

worked before electronic calculators and computers. All calculations were made on slide-rules and mechanical adding machines, all design work written out by hand on paper.

Our next three children, Annette, Philip and Eileen were all born in Fort Wayne. There too we bought 3/4 acres in a southern subdivision called Langford Oaks and built a ranch style home.

However, I had a desire to work in marketing, and felt that my knowledge of languages and European experience would be attributes for a position in international sales. I made several overtures for a position in international sales. I made several overtures at General Electric, but they were rebuffed. When a small company in Chicago that manufactured transformers offered me the position of Sales Manager, I accepted. We bought a house in Deerfield, a suburb north of the city, in 1959. For a while the company prospered and grew, but then the rapid expansion exceeded its financial resources and the company became bankrupt.



In 1963 I was fortunate to get a new job quickly. I became Engineering Director for Hevi-Duty Electric, a division of Sola Basic Industries, directly under its president Harry Eikenberry. The transformer plant was then located in Watertown, Wisconsin. For a while I lived there in a room during the week, returning home to Deerfield for the weekends.



at the end of 1964 I was given the opportunity to take the same position in a still larger division of the company, Sola Electric, located in Elk Grove Village, a western suburb of Chicago. As at Hevi Duty, my major purpose was to improve efficiency by streamlining operations through increasing standardization and matching development projects to the needs of the market. Sola Electric also had subsidiary companies and licensees in other countries so I got a chance to travel. As Sola's representative in NEMA (the National Electrical

Manufacturers Association) I ended up heading the USA delegation to the International Electronic Power Supplies Standards committee (IEC-SC22E). I attended standards meetings in Paris, Zagreb and Stockholm. In addition I was involved with the Industrial Applications Society of IEEE and for several years was Meetings Chairman and was involved in organizing the annual meetings in various cities.

I found that I had a natural talent for international negotiations, so when an opportunity arose to join the Sola Basic International division, I applied. In March 1971 I started there, directly under Vice President Jim Hosler, with responsibility for sales of all Sola Basic Industries products in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. I handled sales of 12 different divisions manufacturing a wide array of electrical and electronic products.

In particular I devoted much attention to the opening of new markets in the Near East as well as eastern Europe where the chains of Communism were slowly loosening. Within a couple of years I had gained significant contracts in Greece, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Poland and Bulgaria. To reduce the time spent traveling across the Atlantic, I established a new base in Athens which was less than two



hours flying time from the most important markets in my area of responsibility. I set up the office there in the April 1976.

Living in Athens and running an office there in the 70s was very interesting but also frustrating, more on that in a separate article. We rented an apartment close to the sea in Paleo Faliron. All our family, except Mark visited us there, as did many friends. I traveled at least every other week all over Europe, the Middle East and Africa.



With Abe Dranetz in front of sign welcoming Dranetz meeting in Monte Carlo 1979

Suddenly Sola Basic was bought by General Signal Corporation, who decided that an International Sales operation was unnecessary! Many of the old Sola Basic divisions felt that they needed the assistance of the Athens office and covered the cost of its operation for a year. But, without any central direction in the U.S., everything fell apart. I closed the office and we returned to Chicago in February 1979.

Fortunately I soon found another job as Manager of International Sales for a small company manufacturing highly specialized electronic instruments - Dranetz Technologies in Plainsfield, New Jersey. The most popular of these instruments were unique voltage transient detectors. With the full support of the company's founder, Abe Dranetz, I was able to quickly expand foreign sales until they became 1/3 of the total, and became

Vicepresident-International Sales. During this time I traveled all over the world, except mainland China and central Africa.

Some of my travels, particularly to the rapidly developing Mid-Eastern countries are described in other pages on my web-site, for example <http://biega.com/arabia.html>. In the earlier years travel to these countries was quite difficult and required living under very spartan conditions. There were a few scary moments such as a visit to Beirut when the civil war engulfed it.

Many American salesmen never spent much time in the countries they visited, they always hurried home. On the contrary, I enjoyed my work as an international salesman, because I took advantage of free time and weekends to get to know the countries and their people, as seen in the photo below. We sold our house in Deerfield and purchased the house in North Brunswick, where we still live.

In 1987, at the peak of its expansion. the company was sold to a British conglomerate. I decided to cash in my chips and retire from corporate life. I purchased a 36 foot (11m.) sailboat "Syrena" and sailed all over the Caribbean. I had always been interested in sailing and previously I had had other sailing boats - "Kochanka" on Lake Michigan in the early 1970s - "Neries" while in Greece 1976 to 1979. At other times I chartered yachts to sail with family and friends on various waters around the world. For stories of some more interesting cruises, see <http://biega.com/destinations.html>.

In 1993, reluctantly I sold "Syrena" and settled down at home to concentrate on consulting, writing and developing this and other web-sites. I have still sailed and traveled, obtaining material and photos for inclusion on this web-site.



With Thai family near Bangkok - 1992

In the summer of 1993 Peter became ill with Leukemia. After fighting bravely for many months, in January 1994 he received a bone marrow transplant from sister Annette in the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research hospital in Seattle. February 19 he died with all the family at his bedside.

All my children are married and gave us 12 wonderful grandchildren:

Aaron, Troy and Jason - sons of Mark and Katie Heckenberger (State College, PA).

Shawn and Brian - sons of Peter and Jeannette Gilbert (Oakland and Sacramento, CA).

Brandon and Matthew - sons of Annette and Mark David (Tucson, AZ).

Ryan and Monique - children of Philip and Panny Poon (Redondo Beach, CA).

Erik, Jeffrie and Raymond - sons of Eileen and Steve Stys (East Windsor, NJ).

#####

For more family details, see my web page <http://biega.com/biegafam.html>, and my book "**Thirteen Is My Lucky Number**", which describes my experiences in the war years, in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, in prison camp, and then as an emigrant to the United States.

Enlargements of all pictures on these pages may be seen on my personal pages at <http://biega.com/biega-bc.html>.