



Summary of Józef and Regina Palik's life stories
Interview and recording of Philip, Regina and George Palik
by Adrian O'dell (NPHG) – November 22nd 2018

Regina Palik was born in Sosnowiec, southern Poland in 1929 and her husband was Józef Palik, born in 1922 in the same town. Because his father had been born in Germany, young Józef was obliged to join the German Army and in 1941, aged 19, he was sent off to the Russian front. In 1940, aged 11, Regina was transported to Siberia with her mother, father and brother along with thousands of other Poles. Life was very hard and they were often hungry during their stay. As part of the 1941 US "Lend-Lease" deal, Polish nationals were released from Siberia and the family made its way to Uzbekistan 3000 Km away on river rafts. Any who died en route were tossed into the river.

They headed towards the Kazakhstan border where a Polish Army was being formed and then were moved on to Persia (Iran) where they lived for about 3 years before moving on to Palestine (Lebanon). It was there that she met her husband-to-be, Józef, who was with the Polish Second Corps in Egypt under General Anders. Army personnel had been sent from Alexandria to Beirut for some Rest and Relaxation. Regina remembered that being in Beirut, which was like paradise, and meeting her future husband had been the best time of her life. Józef was able to return briefly to Beirut and married Regina.

Józef returned to Egypt but in 1947 the Polish Army was demobilised from there and transferred to England under Churchill's Resettlement Act. He arrived by train in Brandon, Suffolk with hundreds of other Poles. As an Army wife, Regina was able to follow her husband to England along with her baby son, Richard. She remembers leaving the beautiful climate of Lebanon only to arrive in England during one of the worst winters on record. Families were housed in large Nissen huts on a camp containing 3,000 soldiers. Three families shared each hut which was divided into sections by a rope covered with blankets to give some limited privacy. One large pot-bellied stove was the only source of heating and their memory is of being very cold and Regina was unable to find basics such as nappies.

As the War was over, the family considered returning to Poland but, had Józef returned, Philip believes that he would have been executed because of his early years as a forcibly-conscripted German soldier. He had served in the German Army at Stalingrad where he was wounded and awarded the Iron Cross. He was flown from Stalingrad to Rhodes and interned in a prisoner-of-war camp where he was also hospitalised. Along with a friend, they managed to leave the camp in a small boat with an English captain and they were picked up by a British submarine and taken to Alexandria, where he joined the Polish Army.

After the War, Regina had the family to raise (two boys, Richard and George) but she also worked in the EMCAR clothing factory as a machinist, a skill she had developed in Lebanon. Her English had also been learned there but Józef was able to speak seven languages, including Polish, English, German, Russian, Italian and French. He worked as a sawyer in a timber yard and then later in the same clothing factory as Regina.

The Palik family has returned to Poland for holidays over the years, but only after the fall of Communism. Richard strengthened the bonds with Poland by marrying a Polish girl and both he and his brother speak the language. As Polish children they were sometimes called names at school but, in later life, they realised that was because local people were envious of the Poles because of their work ethic. Generally, the family has had a happy life in Brandon and they still maintain Polish traditions at Christmas and Easter.

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