



Summary of Antoni Czapp's recorded life story

Interview by Klaudia James (NPHG) June 2017

Please note that Antoni Czapp suffered a stroke which has limited his ability to communicate in English. Therefore, the audio recording carried out in June 2017 consists mainly of a question and answer session with the interviewer, Klaudia James.

Antoni Czapp was born in Polchowo, Poland on 21st August 1925, the youngest of four children. He was diagnosed with pneumonia and pleurisy aged 8 with little hope of recovery but he survived. He finished school at 14 when the War started.

German planes flew over his village in September 1939 and then the German army occupied the settlement. Most of the soldiers were very friendly to his family as his father spoke German but those in SS uniforms were not at all friendly. Life in the village settled down to some sort of 'normality' but in 1942 boys and girls aged over 16 were selected for forced-labour in Germany.

Toni and his brother Josef had to report to the Labour Exchange in Puck and Toni ended up in Gdansk which at that time was more German than Polish and he worked on a farm, feeding and cleaning pigs and delivering milk to the railway station. He saw prisoners in trains being taken to German concentration camps. It was a very sad and difficult period although he also had some wonderful experiences, including the time when he helped a horse give birth to a foal for which he was rewarded with 5 marks.

At the age of 18 he was called up into the German Army, a worrying time as he knew that two of his friends who had been conscripted into the German Army had died on the Russian Front. He was given a uniform and sent to Wejherowo for 3 months. Following that he was transferred to Lubeck for training and when that was completed he travelled through Germany and Holland to Denmark.

It was a memorable journey as he fell ill again with pneumonia but no one in Denmark wanted to help as they thought he was a German soldier. He was hospitalized and recovered and 2 months later was sent to join his company in Lillehammer, Norway. The company was rushed back to Oslo and then to France as the British had begun to invade. The German army was forced to retreat, to Belgium then Holland and he was forced to dig trenches and fell trees to slow the British advance.

There was heavy fighting between the Germans and the British near Nanmegen in Holland. Shortly American bombers attacked the area and dropped paratroopers. Antoni managed to lie low but when the Germans surrendered Antoni was taken into captivity by the Americans but he was delighted to be in their custody. When they discovered he was Polish and had been forcefully conscripted into the German Army he was transported through France to Scotland in the early autumn of 1944 and joined the Polish 9th Lancers Regiment.

He was stationed in Galashiels where he passed a driving test and then transferred to Bridge of Allan near Stirling. Within 2 weeks, the War was over. He was again moved to Banff and began work as an army cook in the Officers' mess but then found himself moved to Dunblane where he joined the Royal Army Transport Corps working in the kitchens.

Gradually many of the Poles began to emigrate to Canada or return home to Poland and the unit became too small to operate and was disbanded. Fortunately for Antoni, one of the officers had

wealthy friends in Warwickshire who needed a cook and he was offered the position by the Longsdon family at Foxcote House. He enjoyed his 14 months there and became friendly with a young English girl called Betty who also worked at the house.

In 1949 Betty moved to Attleborough in Norfolk and persuaded Antoni to join her there, even organising a job interview for him in nearby Norwich. He left Warwickshire and started work as a relief chef at Grove House, a private surgical nursing home. He continued his relationship with Betty but, one day, a young nurse called Maureen came into his life. Two years later he and Maureen (also known as Lucy) were married in Norwich. The couple had three children, Anthony, David and Sharon and continued to live in Norwich.

After working at Grove House for 8 years, the business closed and Antoni worked in Purdy's restaurant, then a butchers shop and finally at the Royal Hotel on Prince of Wales Road. He then rented an allotment and grew rabbits for sale until someone stole the rabbits so he bought two pigs. That was the start of his own business and he moved out of Norwich to his present home at Kirby Bedon, raising up to 130 pigs and collecting waste food which he processed into pig feed.

Antoni was an enterprising man with the Polish ethic for hard work and, now of course retired, he continues to live at his beloved Firs house in rural Norfolk.

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