



## Summary of Mieczysław Hasko's life story

Interview and recording of Dona Haefliger (daughter, née Hasko)  
by Adrian O'dell (NPHG) – November 9th 2017

Mieczysław Hasko was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1913 at Lopjanka (or Rafajłowa) Ukraine, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the reason why he spoke fluent German (as well as Polish) all his life. He was the youngest of six siblings (four boys, two girls) and his father was from Hungary and his mother a Ukrainian. The family all worked in forestry and lived in a very large house as the grandfather was part of the Forestry Commission. Mieczysław attended university and studied aircraft engineering and later became a glider pilot and instructor. He joined the Polish Air Force but, to his great regret, was never allowed to fly as he was needed as a crash investigator.

Shortly after he had left his home in September 1939, Russian forces invaded Poland and burned down his house. There are conflicting stories about the route he took to escape from his country but it seems he went via Hungary and Italy and into France where he boarded a vessel as a stoker en route to Scotland and then onto the U.S.A. Documents show that he visited New York in 1940.

The date of his return to the UK is unknown but he met his wife to be, Eileen Smith, in the Derby Baths, Blackpool and lived in a caravan with his family in Fleetwood. He was transferred to an RAF station in Lincolnshire and travelled around the country from there inspecting air crashes. It is believed that he was parachuted secretly into Germany towards the end of the War and reported information back to London about the German concentration camps. He also made regular visits to London to meet with the Polish Government in exile.

The family moved to Great Yarmouth and decided to buy a hotel, the Barons Court, even though they had no experience as hoteliers but he and his wife built a really successful business. He was a perfectionist in everything he did but that dedication may have been the cause of a stress-related illness. The hotel was open from Easter until October and the whole family, including two daughters, had to work extremely hard; his wife Eileen did all the cooking, while Mieczysław and the children helped serve at table, clean and polish. The hotel was Austrian in style and Mieczysław (with his daughter Dona's help) did all the building work within the property.

Although his wife visited Poland after the War, he never returned there although his Polish family regularly came to England and worked in the hotel during the summer months. But he remained a very proud Pole (with a strong accent) all his life and enjoyed cooking Polish specialities. One unusual characteristic was that he would never drive a car as he thought they were dangerous machines, even though he had been an aircraft engineer. Instead, he went everywhere on his bike.

He had been a very heavy smoker for most of his life and unfortunately died of a heart attack at the age of 50, while in Germany. Within one year of his death, Eileen decided to sell the hotel as the workload had become too great and their daughter Dona was then living in Switzerland. She is still proud of her Polish ancestry and maintains contacts with her family in Krakow and Zakopane.