



Summary of Władysław Kowalski recorded life story

Interview by Tessa Black (NPHG) February 2017

Note: Figures in brackets [] represent timeline of audio recording

Władysław Kowalski was born in Germany where his parents were working on 18th August 1924 but returned to Poland at a young age. He remembers going to school with his cousin Wanda from the time he was seven until fourteen years old. In 1938 he travelled to France with his three brothers and joined his parents who were working there. [02.20]

He learned to speak French very well and trained as a hairdresser but when the Germans overran France he was forced to work as a coal miner. While he was there he met a fellow-worker who looked after him. After three months his new friend asked if Władysław would like to join the Polish Underground Resistance. He jumped at the opportunity (without telling his parents) and the Germans didn't bother him because he had a job as a coal miner. It was all very exciting and he volunteered to do anything. [07.04]

The Resistance were in contact with London and asked for arms supplies to be dropped to them. His job with the others was to go and collect weapons dropped at night by RAF planes and then to hide the guns and ammunition. The arms were distributed by women couriers during daylight hours as they didn't arouse suspicions as men would have done. After some months his friend contacted Władysław again to ask if he would like to go to England and, once again, he enthusiastically grasped the opportunity. [09.10]

He and many other young men were told to keep all these plans secret from the Germans and his parents. A ship had been organised to take all these young volunteers to England and that was done using a converted fishing vessel from Belgium to Portobello near Edinburgh in Scotland from where they were transferred to a training camp at Duddingston. [12.15] A six week intensive training programme followed but it was a very enjoyable experience. They were told they would be going to school and were moved to Blackpool for selection. Władysław had not been well-educated but he was sent to Coltishall in Norfolk where he joined the Polish Air Force 303 Squadron as ground crew. He worked alongside a mechanic, readying the planes for action. [14.23]

There were sad times when pilots and planes were shot down or lost but gradually the tide of war started to swing in their favour. The pilots were lovely people who mixed well with the ground crew, playing football and having fun. There were two other Squadrons at Coltishall, 316 and 307 but Władysław knew little about their activities [16.27].

He stayed at RAF Coltishall until the Japanese were defeated and was then demobbed. [17.10] He met and married his "lovely English Rose" Barbara Everett in 1947 and they lived with his wife's parents for nine months at Hoveton, Norfolk. He had two children; Linda and Stefan. [20.54].

Catfield, Norfolk

11th February 2017