



## Summary of Aleksander Pietrzak's story

As told by Stefan Pietrzak Youngs

Interviewed by Adrian O'dell (NPHG) 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019

Aleksander Pietrzak was born in Warsaw on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1915. His father was a professor of mathematics and he had a brother and a sister. There are few records of his early years but it is known that he was in the Polish Air Force and had qualified as a pilot by 1939. He did not fly in any battles against the German Luftwaffe when they invaded in September 1939 but, after Poland capitulated, he managed to escape to Romania and then travelled to Britain. Images show that he spent some time in France in the Lyon area (possibly at Bron Aerodrome) but it is thought that he did not fly in combat from there.

He was inducted into a Polish Squadron of the RAF in 1940-41 in Blackpool and took part in a number of training courses around England and at an operational training ground at Grangemouth in 1943 after which he became operational. He was an excellent fighter pilot flying Spitfires and later Mustangs. He flew from Northolt, protecting London from V1 rockets and developed into an ace pilot, shooting down several V1s, a very dangerous occupation.

One rather harrowing story relates to an incident when he attacked a V1 at very close range. He opened fire and the blast from the direct hit blew off Aleksander's propellers and damaged his wing. Although he was at a very low height he was able to open his canopy and get out of the cockpit, and his parachute saved him from certain injury or death. As a result he joined "the Caterpillar Club", whose members were airmen who had managed to escape from a plane by parachute.

Stefan Young's grandmother and fifteen year-old daughter had held an open-house party for Polish airmen at Northolt. Aleksander was one of the Poles who turned up for a cup of tea and the daughter was smitten by this dashing Polish airman and the two began a secret liaison. Her mother eventually found out and complained to the commanding officer at Northolt that one of his men was seducing her daughter and he was duly reprimanded. Stefan's mother (the fifteen year-old girl) came home from school one day to find Aleksander and her mother sitting at the kitchen table, "getting on like a house on fire". He had managed to persuade her mother that he should marry her daughter and the engagement ring was there on the table!

So they were engaged when she was fifteen, married at sixteen, became a mother at seventeen but was widowed at the same age. Three months after the War ended, Aleksander was killed in a flying accident and it was a tragedy that someone who had faced such danger and survived so many battles lost his life in such a way. Stefan's mother could never really talk about that part of her life, it had been too traumatic. After some years, she met and married an Englishman and led a very happy life with him.

Aleksander was based at RAF Coltishall at the end of the War and always told his wife that he would eventually like to live in Norfolk as it resembled his homeland near Warsaw. She and her family moved to the county in the 1950s, thereby fulfilling part of her late husband's dream.

Years later a researcher contacted Stefan Youngs to tell him that he had managed to trace a German pilot who had been downed by Aleksander over Denmark in 1944-5. The pilot, Arno Rose, said that he had always wanted to meet the person who had shot him down and that, although he was sad to hear of Aleksander's death, he was proud to speak to his son, Stefan.

Stefan and his step-brother, Kelvin, have created one of the world's largest databases relating to military aircrews ([www.aircrewremebered.com](http://www.aircrewremebered.com)) which contains millions of data files and records of airmen from around the world. They work very closely with the Polish authorities and visit the country regularly. Stefan still has strong feelings for his Polish roots even though his birth-father died when he was a very young child and he has admiration and respect for the hardworking Poles who have come to Britain in the latest influx since 2004.

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