



Summary of Doris Rowland's recorded story about her husband Franciszek Klaczak (2017)

Interview by Adrian O'dell (NPHG) January 2017

Doris Ellen Rowland was born in Norwich in 1927. Her husband was Franciszek (Frank) Josef Klaczak and the couple first met at a bus stop near the Roman Catholic Church in Fishergate, Norwich. They both got on the same bus and sat beside each other. Within a few minutes Frank asked Doris if he could go out with her but she turned him down, saying that she only went out with her sister! The following week they met on the bus again and this time she agreed to go out together, first weekly and then more frequently.

After just a few months, Frank asked her parents if they could get engaged and they had no objection. "They thought the world of Frank" as Doris's father had been in World War I and Frank had been a soldier in World War II. Frank could speak some English but mixed in a lot of Polish words.

When the War started in 1939, Frank had been in the Army at Czestochowa but when Poland fell he was taken prisoner and kept in a concentration camp where he looked after one of the German officer's horses. He escaped from the camp and went to Yugoslavia and joined up with the Polish forces where they were given French army uniforms. When France collapsed his unit became part of the 8th British Army fighting through North Africa and then at Monte Cassino.

The Poles were taken to Venice where he stayed for two years as the authorities did not know what to do with all those soldiers. Eventually they were shipped to Scotland and then relocated to Aldershot in England. Following that they were sent to a resettlement camp in Norfolk. Once demobilised he worked for some time at Buxton Lammas flour mill before moving to RG Carter the builders in Norwich. The flour mill tried to get him to return as he was such a good worker. However he liked the work at Carters where stayed for the rest of his working life. He travelled around the county in charge of site compressors and then spent most of his time in the company's garage looking after the cars, vans and trucks.

During the war, Frank was awarded a Cross of Valour for his efforts at Monte Cassino and after the War he wanted to go back there with Doris. When they tried to do that the pass was blocked by snow and his dream of seeing where he had fought so hard was never fulfilled. He died shortly after that and Doris vowed to make the trip to Monte Cassino in his memory when she was able to lay a wreath of poppies at the Polish cemetery.

Why did he change his name from Klaczak to Rowland? The couple thought that if they were to have children, things would be easier if they had an English name. The couple had different religions and, when they went to get married, the Polish priest was not happy about a Roman Catholic marrying a girl from the Church of England. However, the parson at St Catherine's C of E church was much more positive so they were married there in 1952.

The name 'Rowland' was Doris's mother's maiden name and Doris and Frank had a very happy life together making several attempts through the Salvation Army and the Red Cross to track down

Frank's family in Poland, without success. At times, such as Christmas, he became very sad because he had lost his family but eventually he was able to make contact with a brother and then his sister. The same year Doris and Frank went to Poland to meet his family and subsequently made nine more visits. Frank loved Norfolk but in his later life he used to reminisce a lot about his wartime years. He died in 2002 and Doris lives to this day in their marital home in Norwich.