



Summary of Wanda Leahy's story about her parents Franciszek and Leokadia Rozalewicz

Recorded by Tessa Black (NPHG) 27th November 2019

Wanda Leahy (née Rozalewicz) has lived in Norfolk for about 50 years but she was born on a Polish Resettlement Camp in Brandon (Suffolk) in 1949. Her father was Franciszek Rozalewicz (born 1919 in Wołkowyje, Dubno, Wołyń, Poland, now in the Ukraine) who lived on a farm with his parents and three brothers. Her grandparents, Jan and Bronisława née Soczyńska, had been asked to move from their land which was close to the Ukrainian border for safety reasons but when they refused, there was rape, torture and murder and their house was burned down by the Ukrainian Liberation Army which had carried out widespread genocide in Poland at the time.

At the start of World War II in 1939 Franciszek was still living with his parents but in 1941 he was forcibly conscripted into the Russian Army. Pursuant to an agreement between the Polish government-in-exile and Stalin, the Soviets granted "amnesty" to many Polish citizens, and Franciszek travelled south to Iran falling ill en route but survived with help from a friend. In 1943 he joined General Anders' Army (the Polish Armed Forces) and he spent time in Italy between 1943 and 1946 winning a medal at the Battle of Monte Cassino. At the end of the war he passed through France and onwards to England while still in the Polish Army but he was discharged in 1948.

He had met his wife to be in 1947 in England. She was a displaced person but she too had been in Italy. Wanda's mother was called Leokadia Głab, born in the small village of Trok, near Kraków. When she was 14 years old in 1943, German Army personnel arrived in the village to say that children of working age (10 years and upwards) were to be picked up that evening. Leokadia was told to pretend she had a limp so that the Germans would see she was incapacitated. However, that ploy did not work and she and others were taken away from their families and dispatched to Austria. She spent all of the War working on an Austrian farm.

Franciszek and Leokadia moved from Gloucestershire to Brandon in search of employment and improved housing. He found work on Lakenheath airbase as a kitchen porter and cycled to work from Brandon on a daily basis. At the age of 36 years old on, an evening in March 1956, he was struck by a car driven by a US serviceman and was killed instantly. It was a very hard blow for Leokadia who by now had four children to support. She was eventually re-housed from the family's Nissen hut home situated on the Brandon Resettlement Camp.

The family survived the earlier difficulties and Wanda decided to research her father's life. She visited an exhibition in Brandon which had a display of Polish memorabilia. One of the organizers suggested that she should provide him with her father's details, following which she was able to get more information from the Polish Air Force Association Charitable Trust in Ruislip (and a very helpful lady named Margaret Goddard). As a result she was able to obtain her father's unclaimed war medals. They are now her prized possessions.

Following a chance meeting with Tessa Black of the Norfolk Polish Heritage Group, Wanda Leahy decided to pass on her father's and mother's stories to be recorded and saved for posterity as part of the NPHG Archive Project.

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