

## Tales from... Near and Far.

### Introduction

Not that long ago a shop assistant in Peterborough complimented me on my excellent English. I was slightly taken aback at first and then realized that she assumed I'd arrived in the second 'wave' of Polish emigrés to come to these shores in recent years. Naturally I did try to explain that my father had settled here after the Second World War but to no avail 'Really good' she said, 'well done'.

As far as Polish names go mine is quite straightforward actually. You spell it as it sounds you see but I've long since given up waiting for the inevitable 'so how do you spell that please?' question. Sorry, but a lifetime of this coupled with a thirty-year teaching career trying to stuff German, French and Spanish into young heads has only served to reinforce my conviction that, in the main, the English really are as linguistically challenged as everyone believes. It's nothing to do with lack of ability, of course not. It's all down to lack of motivation. 'They all speak English anyway' right? Wrong actually, unless they want your money, but that's a rant for another occasion.

My name should be Palinski rather than Palenski, and spelt with an **-a** at the end (the feminine ending, just run with me on this one), so Palinska and not Palenski. And so to the first family anecdote that you've all grown so fond of. When dad first applied to join the Polish Settlement Corps (more of that later) and was asked to fill out a kind of 'demob' form <sup>1</sup>, his somewhat 'loopy' writing was transcribed from an **i** to an **e** by the clerk.

Having an 'odd' name, once you're at an age to notice, makes you very aware that other cultures do, in fact, not only exist but also speak and behave differently to most everyone else around you. There were examples of this all over at home. We ate cheesecake otherwise unheard of in Nassington and halva, purchased on a Saturday morning from the 'Red & White Store' in Peterborough. Boiled eggs came with horseradish sauce on Easter Sunday mornings. Mum had a duvet on her bed rather than blankets. Time here for another anecdote. In the long ago, when part of the Allied Occupation Force of Germany <sup>2</sup>, dad had written to her saying he was bringing her something back from Germany to keep her warm. Oh the excitement! Rather than the anticipated fur coat (thank goodness animals manage to hang on to theirs these days) she ended up with the aforementioned bed covering instead. Knowing mum she wouldn't have kept that disappointment to herself for long but, as usual, I digress.

And, of course, there were the language clues. The occasional bit of Polish from my brothers and mum. The Polish-English dictionary which is still amongst all the other books. The letters we received from my Aunty Anna in Poland at Christmas and Easter which I would dutifully take up to Leon Golan to be translated. And there were other Polish residents in the village as well, not just Leon but Paweł Behnke and they certainly interested me. This accounts, I'm sure, for my inclination towards the foreign. At school and university I would seek out the non-Brits intentionally. At Prince William in Oundle Laura Rowland, her dad stationed here at the American base at Alconbury in the late 1970s, became, and still is, a firm friend even though she now lives back home in Maine. I got to know Elaina Williamson from San José while I was at university in London and she too remains a pal (you might get to meet her yet if things go pear-shaped in the USA over the next four years, she's certainly looking for a bolt hole). And the languages of course. I studied three to A level after all and have never regretted it for a minute. As you can imagine, I'm quite handy on holiday.

But back to Nassington. There were army insignia in drawers but, oddly, no medals, despite the fact that dad saw action firsthand during Operation Market Garden <sup>3</sup>. The medals did eventually appear but only many, many years later. After the war you see, my father, along with very many other Polish servicemen, refused to accept any from the British authorities. My brother Fran applied for them a few years ago around the same time as attending the Order of Willem Commemoration service in Arnhem to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mission. Although the weather was dire and the proposed parachute drops were too unsafe to make in 1994, the event was well attended and understandably very moving. These medals he and Toni had framed, thanks to John Measures, along with documentation from the service and everything was displayed at home until I passed them on to Toni.

Now I mention all this because, you see, although eighty years since the end of this conflict, the ripples from it all are still around us if you only care to look. You may think that WW2 went relatively unnoticed in this neck of the woods but you'd be mistaken. Sure, there were no battles nor bombs really but there certainly were those who fought and who witnessed first-hand the big events that we all know about. The rise of mad old bad old Hitler and his goosestepping Nazi henchmen. His equally wicked Soviet counterpart Stalin. The London Blitz. Bombings. Barrage balloons and doodlebugs. Evacuees. Prisoners of War. Land army girls. And last, but by no means least, the 'Yanks'.

So, settle down, get comfy and read on, safe in the knowledge that the people you are about to meet ensured that, yes, we can indeed enjoy the peace in our time to do precisely that.

## **THE FIRST TO FIGHT** <sup>4</sup>.

Mum often told me how she had come to know that war was declared. She'd been in the garden of their home in Barrack Yard that September 3<sup>rd</sup> morning in 1939, the radio in the living room clearly audible in the background. She'd stuck her head through the open window and leant on the windowsill to listen quietly as the PM Neville Chamberlain, despite his efforts at appeasement, made the announcement. England and France had both assured the Polish government, worried by the aggressive stance of the Nazi regime, that they would intervene should anything untoward happen. The Poles, subsequently, had pleaded for help and loans to purchase suitable weaponry but little was actually forthcoming. Tragically their worst fears were realized and, on September 1<sup>st</sup>, German 'Panzer' rolled over the border. They met with no effective resistance, only bravery and cavalry officers on terrified horses. It was assumed by England and France that Hitler wouldn't actually do anything, you see, and that their efforts at appeasement and mild threats and finger wagging would be enough to deter him. They were duty bound, therefore, to declare war on Nazi Germany just a few hours apart. For the Poles, however, it was all too little too late.

Surprisingly my father, some 950 miles away in Biskupice, Eastern Poland, probably only knew about the war some two weeks after my mother although his entire family were far, far more directly affected. The Nazis may well have rolled in from the west but on September 17<sup>th</sup> the Soviets followed suit from the east. A pincer movement, doubtless hatched up on a previous occasion between Hitler and Stalin over a glass of Schnapps. Poland was doomed. Dad recalled how, in the middle of the night when you are least able to put up a fight, soldiers hammered on the door and told them to pack enough food for three weeks as they were all leaving. His village was not alone. In total 1.7 million other Poles had a similarly rude awakening on the night of September 17<sup>th</sup>. Their destination, if they made it that far, were Soviet gulags <sup>5</sup> in Siberia or Kazakhstan. I've met over the years other Polish

gentlemen of a certain vintage with similar tales to tell and I for one have listened. Chances are other peoples have similar tragic stories – Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks, Chinese and Serbian. We have an inkling of some, how the Roma fared for example, but many many more have not yet been shouted about loudly enough.

Few in England know of the plight of Poles at the hands of the Soviet army. Post war, when they tried to make their voices heard, people didn't want to hear in the elation of victory. Soviet Russia was an ally now and had been vital in the defeat of Nazi Germany and you don't want to hear nasty rumours about your new pals now do you? And so they were told to keep quiet, only talking to one another about their experiences.

But there were nasty tales to tell for certain. Both of my grandparents and their baby daughter Marisa perished. I cannot say how for sure but it was disease, starvation, overwork or a mixture of all three. In a recent documentary screened at the ICA in London, Janin Kwiatkowska recalls how her grandmother died on the month-long train journey to their gulag. Her guards unceremoniously dragged her body out of the carriage with two big hooks and left her in a ditch. Her mother died later in the Siberian camp and she and her little sister survived by catching and eating rats and the livers of dead dogs. My father spoke too of the day they, amazingly, somehow got hold of wizened carrots. They still had enough food value to improve their eyesight though he remembered, and he also remembered the freezing cold they had to endure. Stefan Waydenfeld, another survivor, went on to write 'The Way Back' <sup>6</sup> which later became a film. This is one of the few accounts of life in those gulags and the aftermath, not because the misery was minor but because there was no audience to hear it.

My entire family might all have died there had not Hitler broken his word though. Thank goodness he was unreliable. An unexpected invasion of Soviet Russia known as Operation Barbarossa <sup>7</sup> began on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941, and Stalin realized that his Nazi chum had stabbed him in the back. My dad always said that he had nothing against the Germans. They had saved his life after all on that day in 1941. The Polish government, now in exile in London, along with the British government, managed to persuade the Stalin that it might be wise to allow these potential fighting men to create a fighting force. Stormtroopers were heading full tilt for Mother Russia after all and so, under British direction, the Anders Army was created, named after the commander, General Władysław Anders, himself a former POW recently released by the Soviets from Lubyanka prison in Moscow. He was one of very few Polish army officers to have survived the massacre at Katyn you see. Perhaps you've heard of Katyn? When you invade it's probably a good idea to rid yourself of any potential future problems. Maybe it's wise to start with military men. The Soviets, therefore, slaughtered 22,000 officers, policemen and academics in the Katyn woods in 1940. This particular war crime, when discovered, was blamed by the Soviet authorities on the Nazis who do, after all, make a powerful scapegoat for tales of atrocity. But the Nazis, this time at least, were innocent. Having now switched sides this Soviet slaughter was, in effect, brushed under the proverbial carpet by the Allies, keen as they were not to offend the Russian Bear upon whom the success of the war might rest. And to this day they haven't answered for it. We know, of course, why that might be. It's the victors who right the history books after all.

Ain't that the truth.

So, along with very many others, my dad, along with his brother Zygmunt, set off for Iran (then Persia, and under British control) to join up. They were released in July 1941 and headed south. Having no suitable boots he took a pair of his surviving sister's, my Aunt Anna, cutting the toes out to make them fit and earning himself frostbite and permanently black big toenails ever after. But they made it, arriving and enlisting on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1942, at which point he was posted to the 22 Infantry Regiment. From Iran they made their way via the Middle East and South Africa to the UK and relative safety, arriving on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1942. He was then posted to the 1st Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Independent Parachute Brigade.

Phew.

Not so lucky were the ones left behind, the children and the women and the elderly who, if they were able, had no help heading south. Many were kept back to continue their work as slave labour, often perishing in the process. Those that did survive headed too for Iran and were encouraged to write down their experiences by Polish officials so that one day justice could be done. The new soldiers, however, under British control, were told not to do the same.

Now, you'll remember I mentioned the pleading for weapons to repel the invading Nazi forces? Think of that as the first thorn in the Polish side for want of a more suitable phrase and the first, I fear, of very many. The second would come at this point for, it seems, many of these young, ardent, willing Polish servicemen were promised that they would, indeed, get the chance to fight their invaders off and give Hitler, or Stalin, or preferably both a proverbial good kicking. The Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade was duly formed in Scotland in 1941 under General Sosabowski to assist in an anticipated uprising in Poland against the Nazis. Major General Sosabowski, as he would become, was himself no slouch. He had fought to protect Warsaw in 1939 but had been captured. Somehow he managed to escape, continuing the fight within the underground movement and eventually making it to France. When asked to lead the brigade he insisted on having the same training as his men in the spring of 1941, some in Fife and others in Manchester. Nine good jumps earned you a silver swooping eagle badge and jumps during battle a gold badge, the eagle now grasping a wreath in its claws. When the group first formed a rousing speech was given by General Sikorski, the Polish Prime Minister in exile and Commander in Chief:

*'As from today on you will be the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Parachute Brigade.*

*When the hour comes you will, like victorious eagles, swoop down  
upon our foe and you will be the first to fight back in our Motherland'*

**September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1941,**

Being Polish has long been, and certainly was back then, like living in a cul-de-sac between Jack the Ripper and Vlad the Impaler. You can never let your guard down and still they're keeping a watchful eye out on the Vlad 'wannabe' to the east. This was no exception. These men wanted and expected to be, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Polish Cadre Rifle Brigade by their side, fighting to free their homeland.

Sadly, this was not what happened.

The 1st Polish Parachute Brigade was taken over by the 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Corps and plans changed. The paratroopers were ordered instead to participate in Operation Market Garden in

September 1944 to help hold bridges in Holland prior to an allied armoured thrust into Nazi Germany and the riflemen were sent to Fife in October 1940 to protect against a Nazi invasion. As you might imagine, these particular decisions have been neither forgotten, nor forgiven, by the Poles. There may well have been perfectly good logistical and military reasons for this volte-face but even I with no direct experience of any of this nightmare can't quite forgive the powers that be for this, let's face it, betrayal. Winston Churchill was not a popular man in Polish circles of this era and their refusal to accept their medals when the dust all settled is perfectly understandable given this chicanery. The feeling was, true or not, that they had in fact been tricked into coming to defend England from invasion.

But back to dad and Zygmunt. My uncle joined the Polish Second Corps and eventually fought in the infamous and victorious Battle of Monte Cassino <sup>8</sup>. As an aside, they had their very own mascot, a rescued brown bear cub called Wojtek. He became a corporal and even assisted by moving boxes of artillery during the battle. After the war he too settled in the UK, living out the rest of his days in peace at Edinburgh Zoo. Perhaps this is something of a Polish trait, empathy for other living things when little, perhaps, is shown to you. Dad bought a turkey one year to fatten up for Christmas I was told on various occasions but, when it came to it, he didn't have the heart to do the dastardly deed. It had become a friend, you see, so he headed off for Stamford market with Toni to sell it to someone else. I'm digressing again aren't I? Apologies.

Thankfully dad and Uncle Zygmunt did find one another, years later in the 1960s, along with so very many others thanks to the wonderful work of the British Red Cross <sup>9</sup>. Mum told me how she opened the door one day to see a stranger standing there who turned out to be she discovered, after much hugging and crying and Polish histrionics, my dad's brother. He went on to marry an English lady, my Aunt Ellen, and emigrated to Australia to run a lemon tree farm. A bit like Wojtek then, something peaceful and gentle after all the hell and high water with the occasional cigarette and beer for good measure.

So dad and others in the same boat found themselves in Scotland being trained as paratroopers. In the summer months, as I sit in my garden watching the parachutes as they fall over Sibson, I often think of my dad. You can hear the people sometimes whooping with joy and exhilaration. Not being shot at you see, not my father's experience. Of course, other Poles and Czechs were active in the military too, but as fighter pilots, and here we come to yet another of those pesky thorns.

You'll have heard of the Battle of Britain <sup>10</sup>? In a nutshell, No. 303 Dywizjon (squadron) was operational for six weeks and claimed 126 'victories' making it the most effective RAF unit of them all even though they only joined the fray halfway through. Their reputation was fearsome and Antoni Głowacki an ace pilot of great repute but, of course, you haven't heard of him I fear. In total 145 pilots took part across various squadrons and the Poles were the largest foreign contingent involved. Without them, well, the battle might not have been won at all and it wouldn't be just me speaking German in these here parts now. There's an excellent film about it all, 'Hurricane'. It tries to put the record straight and give credit where credit is very long overdue.

So, with training done and Operation Market Garden imminent, down they came to the RAF airfield at Spanhoe near Stamford which had been earmarked by the USAAF as a suitable base for troop carriers. The American Squadron leader was Lieutenant Colonel G. Hamby Jnr., his men known as 'Hamby's Rough Riders'. I had an interesting meeting some months back at the Kings Cliffe Airfield

Museum with a gentleman whose father had piloted one of these planes full of Polish paratroopers, ready for the Arnhem drop. Whether our father's paths had actually crossed we were unable to verify but certainly they came within spitting distance at what must have been a time both terrifying and exhilarating in equal measure. They both survived, which is miracle enough given the chaos and poor planning, and here we have thorn number four. You'll have seen 'A Bridge Too Far'? Well, think Gene Hackman who portrays our old friend Polish Commander Major General Stanislaw Sosabowski and his general mood of world-weary disbelief at what his men are being asked to do (just ignore Hackman's woeful Polish accent, same acting school as Dick van Dyke). A combination of poor weather and bad planning meant that this part of the mission was a failure. The men were dropped in batches rather than as an effective fighting force. Sixteen planes carried four Polish squadrons, initially planned for the 19<sup>th</sup> but delayed by the weather until the 21<sup>st</sup>. They had to be dropped at Driel, further from the bridge, and with so much equipment it took time for them to exit the planes under heavy flak fire. To put it simply, they were dropped too far away. Ground troops had not secured Arnhem Bridge so once down the Poles had to fight their way to their objective and very, very many were lost. Others were dropped on the wrong side of the river and had to swim across, loaded with equipment, many picked off in the water or simply drowning. Thus the troops, both at Arnhem and Driel, did not achieve their objective, namely, to capture the illusive Arnhem Bridge, and nearly one quarter of their force died as a result of the mission. When trying to retreat over the river at Driel there were not enough boats to accommodate them all and, again, many were shot in the river while trying to swim across. I suspect, after an unexpected comment by my cousin Sandra, that my father certainly knew about, if not experienced firsthand, the bravery of the Dutch resistance forces who sheltered 138 stranded Polish troops until they could be saved during Operation Pegasus 11. The summing up of this part of Operation Market Garden reads thus:

*'The constant pressure of the German forces caused the Arnhem position to be abandoned on the night of 25 September. An estimated 1,130 British and Polish airborne troops were killed... and another 6,200 captured. All objectives but the bridge at Arnhem had been achieved, but without that key bridge over the Rhine, the operation had failed. All troops, both airborne and troop carrier, had done all that they could do, but it was not enough.'*

When the survivors returned some of them at least were relocated to Easton-on-the-Hill. Quite apart from being a lovely village with a rich history of its own, you'll find a memorial to the Polish servicemen there. I've known about it for many years of course, and mum and I would drop by on occasion. It's both moving and awe-inspiring and the good people of the village maintain it with great respect and dedication.

The original memorial was built where the Polish barracks had one housed the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and Airborne Signals Company, their officers meanwhile living in private houses. Though trained in Fife and Manchester they were billeted around the Stamford area and their headquarters were in Rock House, including General Sosabowski. There is a plaque there to commemorate them all and the Stamford Endowed School Chapel still has their standard. The school provided billets and training facilities and one of the classroom blocks, Clapton House, was the medical centre for the paratroopers. By 2007, with but one surviving former paratrooper left, Basil Borowik, the decision was made to decommission the Brigade from September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007. The standard itself had been made in occupied Warsaw and presented to the Brigade in 1944 prior to Operation Market Garden. But, with not enough paratroopers left to parade it successfully, it was given into the safe keeping of

the school chapel where it is still. You can go and see for yourself if you wish, just get in touch via the school website. Ask for Dale Harrison and you'll get a thorough tour of all related sites the school is clearly still so proud of. This includes the grave of Smokey the dog who would become their mascot. In 1943 a Medical Officer, Captain W. J. Mozdierz, was in London and found a dog in the ruins of a bombed out building. Not having the heart to leave him there he brought Smokey back to Stamford where he was adopted by the men and shared their lives. This even included taking part in training missions and jumps, complete with his own tiny parachute. But the tale has a bittersweet conclusion I'm afraid. In a nutshell, when the men disappeared overnight en route for Arnhem, Smokey was left behind. Although he was being cared for he was so broken hearted that he took to howling and refused to eat. Not long after he died and was buried in the garden area outside Clapton House. By 1996 his grave had been forgotten. Enter Lt. Col. George Woolf, commander of the school CCF at the time. He took it upon himself to restore and relocate Smokey's grave to a more prominent position and so it came to be. Not only that but a rededication ceremony complete with full military honours no less was organized, the Polish Ambassador at the time in attendance. The Military Band, just to add to the event, played Chopin's Funeral March as the men stood to attention and saluted.

Gets you right there doesn't it.

After the war, when the site at Easton-on-the-Hill became privately owned land once more, a second memorial was built in Spring Close Park in 1984 thanks to Dennis Ford and Jan Szymanski. It opened officially on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1984 but on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021, disaster struck when it was destroyed by a falling tree. Thanks to the local community and donations, their Parish Council, the 'First To Fight' History Group, the Polish Embassy and the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, a new memorial was created, complete with the original ball from the top of the former one. It was made by local stonemason Andrew 'Butch' Baker and his son William and includes salvaged material from the 1984 monument remains. There's a Youtube video showing the event, just type in Easton-on-the-Hill – odsłonięcie pomnika (go on, be a devil) and take a look. It was unveiled by Professor Hal Sosabowski, great grandson of our old friend on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2023. 250 attended the parade and dedication ceremony, the date chosen to coincide with the 82<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Independent Parachute Brigade being formed. The event was followed by a celebration in the Village Hall with Polish folk songs, food and a screening of, what else, 'A Bridge Too Far', many marveling at that ropey accent I bet. I don't know as, unaccountably, I missed it to my great shame. I had contributed to its creation at least but somehow the event itself passed me by and I will never forgive myself.

Way back in 1944 after they arrived back from Arnhem mum went over to Easton-on-the-Hill she said, cycled I suppose, I stupidly didn't ask. They were all so silent, she recalled, when they got back. They wouldn't talk about it and were stunned into silent reflection. My dad never did talk about it apparently, other than the odd comment, but that seems to be the way with soldiers who've survived real battles in the face of real enemies. The only ones who can really understand are those who've been through it with you or something similar, family simply can't appreciate it all. A powerful evocation of this can be found in 'All Quiet on the Western Front' by Erich Maria Remarque <sup>12</sup>. Different war, different side, same old madness.

I should add at this point that the misery for the Poles was not just confined to the Arnhem drop alone. There were training missions too, quite a few I suppose, but one of them ended in disaster.

As mentioned, if you know where to look there are shadows of this war all around us here, and certainly so in Tinwell. On the 8<sup>th</sup> July, 1944 two C-47 Dakota Skytrain aircraft from the USAAF 315<sup>th</sup> Trooper Carrier Group crashed you see, 26 Polish troops and 8 US killed as a result. They had taken off at 21:30, 369 in total heading for Wittering, doing practice formations according to witnesses. The Polish dead were buried at the Polish War Cemetery in Newark and the Americans at Madingley near Cambridge. Should you wish an outing on a summer's day you could do worse than visit the church at Tinwell. There's a small memorial there inside in a far corner, but there nonetheless. The inscription reads,

**TO THE MEMORY  
OF THIRTY-FOUR BRAVE MEN  
WHO FELL NEAR THIS PLACE  
JULY 8<sup>TH</sup> 1944**

There was a commemoration service in Newark to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this tragedy, one of very many during last year and this year, no doubt, will see many more.

Some family war related anecdotes do make me smile though.

My brother Toni told me that one Thursday in 1953 he came home from school to find my dad sitting in the living room with a half empty bottle of cherry vodka (his preferred tippie, a Polish invention, don't believe the Russians, they're all like Chekov in 'Star Trek'...) by his side. Very merry thank you very much, but also very unusual to have him at home on a workday. Why, asks Toni?

*'He's celebrating'* mum explained. *'Joseph Stalin died'*.

### **Messing about on the river**

Over the past few months I've been talking to people about their parents' wartime experiences but very rarely has it been possible to speak to someone who actually remembers this time period vividly. Enter Joyce Hardick. She is now in her 90s, living in Oundle, and very happy to tell you about the war years that she clearly enjoyed a great deal. I suspect, for the civilian population in these 'ere parts, especially young, single women, it was the time of their lives. She encountered our American cousins when she was taking a stroll into Oundle with a friend, but more of that later. She also knew a few Polish servicemen, not least those who were at the Naval College at Lilford Park near Oundle.

I know. A naval college?

Well, yes, a naval college indeed but far more besides. We enter the post war period here. In a nutshell, Great Britain found itself with a quarter of a million Polish ex-servicemen and their families who were not going to head back to Stalin-controlled Soviet Poland, not on your Nelly. What to do with them the government pondered? In 1947 it was decided that the least they could do would be to help train and educate either the men themselves or their offspring and so was born the Polish Resettlement Act <sup>13</sup>. From nurseries to universities, funds were apportioned to aid in education and language skills and Lilford Technical School began. This was a mixed ability boarding school catering for boys from around the country between 13-17 years of age. The school took over the



Nissen huts <sup>14</sup> vacated by the WWII hospital that had been on the site. In the main the emphasis was on mechanical engineering, with a three- or four-year course on offer depending on your ability. The humanities were not overlooked, however, and a good general education was offered to the 400 or so boys on the roll until it closed its doors on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1954. Now, the following detail seems very Polish to me. As this was mainly a boarding school, there was a two-hour break in the middle of the day so that the pupils could do some sport if they chose to in full daylight. So the boys themselves set about building their own football pitch with a grandstand and tennis courts too along with basketball courts and six canoes to use on the nearby river Nene. My neighbour Ken Barlow, after watching my brother Toni and I at work around my house and garden one summer's day, said to me quietly '*I'd rather have you working for me than me working for you*'. The Poles are not a people scared of a little hard work.

A school was quite nearby too I discovered recently during what was another seemingly innocuous chat. Marilyn Jenner runs the Woodnewton History Group but has another claim to fame. During her school years she spent five studying at the Holy Family Convent of Nazareth in Pitsford, Northamptonshire, a girls Catholic boarding school run by mainly Polish nuns for Polish girls except for just the one – Marilyn. She neither spoke the language nor had Polish connections and nor was she a Catholic, but her parents felt she would receive a good education there and were willing to pay the fees. Not all the nuns were Polish, some were Irish or even American and the French teacher was a native speaker. A Miss Baranowski taught ballet even but, as much of the education was in Polish, the decision was taken to move Marilyn to pastures new. The convent school eventually became the Pitsford Grammar School. Boys had their own boarding school too at Farley Court in London. At Pitsford though there was an annual 'festyn', during which the skills imparted by Miss Baranowski were doubtless put on display, along with folk songs, Polish fare (including the infamous kielbasa sausage I bet) and a general good time was had by all. '*People came from all over*' Marilyn remembered. She also remembered the pile of dirty shoes kept at the school for the potato season when, during lesson time, they were expected to go into the fields on the school land to pick them. What became of them she doesn't know but I like to think the nuns were brewing cherry vodka....

But what about the sailors I hear you cry? Well, a Polish Merchant Navy College was formed in 1945 in a disused camp in Walsall, Staffordshire. Unsurprisingly, I must say, the British merchant navy didn't recognize its nautical training or qualifications so, in 1947, it was merged with Lilford Technical College where navigation and engineering were taught to 45 advanced students from the original Walsall site. So. Sailors. At Lilford Park.

Of course, come the end of the war, many former soldiers had the chance to return to their homelands but, as is clear by the boarding school full of children, many chose not to. Would you have done? Gone back to Soviet controlled Poland, or Czechoslovakia, or Eastern Germany? Of course not, and neither did others quite apart from my dad who settled in Nassington. If you're lucky you'll remember them.

Let me begin with Leon Gołan. He and his wife June used to live at 58 Church Street. I knew Leon due to his aforementioned translation duties for my mum but my old pal Jayne did a little digging to find out a bit more of his wartime story for me. I was in the garden at the time, last summer, fighting with the weeds and I could hear her and her mum Anne talking to June who at the time was 99 and full of stories. By the afternoon Jayne had passed on her notes to me.

Leon was born near Gdańsk but, aged 12, he and his family had another of those rude awakenings, in their case, on the west and from the SS. It seems that they were taken to labour on a farm rather than in a camp but come the Sikorski-Mayski Pact<sup>15</sup> of July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941, he too was able to head to freedom and join the forces in Iran. Like my Uncle Zygmunt he saw action as a dispatch rider during the Battle of Monte Cassino and after surviving all this came over to our corner of the world and moved into the former RAF camp at Sibson. This had previously housed Italian POWs and newlyweds thereafter to ease the housing shortage until council housing was built in the early 1950s. At some point he befriended Paweł Behnke and together they went to dances and did what young men should have been allowed to do all along, namely enjoy themselves. When first 'demobbed' they were all given vouchers for a new suit and, most impressive of all, a trilby hat. Mr Breed was the tailor at Wansford where many of them went, my dad being mighty proud of his dapper new suit after so many years of deprivations and hand-me-downs. They were employed in the brickyards in Peterborough as were so many at this time, Italians included. The offices were in Wootton Avenue in Peterborough and should you happen to go by there you'll spot a blue plaque, put up by the PETERBOROUGH CIVIC SOCIETY which reads as follows:

*'This plaque acknowledges the contribution made to the rebuilding of Britain after World War Two by the company's workforce, including many members of the Italian community'.*

I was chatting to Laura Burns in the hairdresser's the other day and she mentioned that the site of the former London Brick Company at Fletton is where the Hamptons development near Serpentine Green now is. The Italian restaurant there, 'Mattoni', is so called as this is the Italian word for bricks. Never say I don't teach you anything. If you go inside, and also in their sister branch in Eye (and lovely it is too), you'll find old images framed on the walls of the brickyards and the very Italian workers mentioned on the plaque. Indeed, to find out about the importance of the brick industry to the area, go to the website of 'Mattoni's' in Eye for a really concise and thorough history.

But back to Paweł and Leon. They would begin to date, and eventually marry, best friends June Castledine and Jean Sewter, and settle down to family life, not talking to their families at least about their experiences. Nor did they go back to visit Poland. My dad didn't either, perhaps too worried about being arrested there by the authorities, who can say. They did all keep in touch with family who had survived, sending them gifts and essentials. My Aunty Anna, for example, used to specifically ask for penicillin on occasion, which was duly and lovingly purchased and sent off until, that is, mum discovered that she was using it to fatten up her chickens. The penicillin exportation business from Nassington subsequently stopped.

As an aside, their fears about going home during Soviet control might not have been all that paranoid. In the 1980s when he left university, my nephew Stefan went for an interview for the British Civil Service. Despite his excellent qualifications and general demeanor he was told, sorry, but no thank you. *'You have relatives in Poland don't you? It's too much of a risk. They might put pressure on you through them'.* Oh dear, better safe than sorry I suppose.

As for Paweł Behnke, well, he had been training as a paratrooper too but was thankfully too young to be involved in the Arnhem campaign. He was reluctant to talk about his experiences and his daughter Janet knows really very little about what he went through. I know that she and my brother Toni discussed it all on occasion and that Paweł too refused his medals when the war came to an end but more than that I cannot say. He came to this area to take up work for the London Brick Company

(so called as it was mainly bricks for the rebuilding of parts of London that they were being used for) as they were, in effect, given a choice of working either there, down the mines or on the land if they wished to stay in the UK. He did visit Osowka, his home village, just the once, and his sister-in-law Anne Barwell remembers him talking about it when he came home. He had found it a depressing experience, as the area was still so badly damaged and had not been built up in any discernible way since the war. But he kept in touch, as they all did, with their families, carefully wrapping anything he sent, usually medicines, in a towel before sending it off.

And our final Polish connection? Well, a family member in effect, as Wasyl Myskow (Myskowski actually, but he chose to anglicize his name, sick of all the '*How do you spell that?*' questions no doubt) married, as my mother always put it, Cousin Audrey. Although he would move away from Nassington after she passed away aged just 36, he is actually buried in the cemetery here along with her, in the grave behind that of my father so, in a sense, I've known him all of my life. He was born on the western side of Poland in Tarnopol, so had the Nazis rather than the Communists to contend with. Herded into a prison camp he too managed to escape (something lacking in the security at these places it looks like) and made his way to Italy. Though not the friendliest of places at the time, he was eventually picked up by the British and the rest you can now work out for yourselves. He, like Leon Golan, became a dispatch rider and after the war he, like both Leon and Pavel and my mum and dad, 'squatted' as mum so charmingly put it, at Sibson camp.

Happy days.

Wasyl too tried to meet his family again, but on only one unsuccessful occasion. He and his mother agreed to meet in France but somehow managed to miss one another and she died in 1950 so they never had the chance again. His children, like all of us, never got to meet their grandparents or aunts, uncles or cousins at all. Bad enough, but we also never got to understand that Polish side of ourselves, neither the language nor the culture. Half of us is missing. As a teacher I learnt very quickly that having a foreign parent is no guarantee of bilingualism either. Having a foreign mother, well, usually yes, but a foreign dad? Unusual, and I am no exception. I speak a few sentences but that's it, despite my obvious linguistic leanings. No more does Pavel's daughter Janet, nor Wasyl's children either.

And so to thorn number five. Come victory over the Japanese there was a big victory parade through London on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1946, a show of strength from Great Britain and its Allies. Cheering people lined the route and watched as the brave men and women from all corners of the world who had won the Second World War paraded by them proudly. They were all there you see, from all four corners of the globe. All except the Poles. Despite being the fourth largest group of Allies they were not allowed to attend. The powers that be didn't want to upset Stalin you see, him being such a valued ally and so the Polish, who had been vital in keeping England safe from invasion, were crossed off the guest list.

That's gratitude for you.

And the final thorn? You may remember that I mentioned General Sikorski, the Polish Prime Minister in exile and Commander in Chief? Well, many Poles of that era would tell you that he was, in effect, assassinated on the orders of Winston Churchill.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1943, the General's plane crashed into the sea off Gibraltar shortly after takeoff. All but one of the seventeen on board were killed but, although officially ruled as an accident, conspiracy theories have swirled about the true cause of the crash ever since. He was a strong-willed character, a war hero and extremely popular with the Poles of that generation but it was going to be far easier to have a weaker man in charge in a Poland to be delivered up on a platter to the Soviets. What would one more death be in the great scheme of things? The Polish Institute of National Remembrance has since investigated the event and, although they have uncovered no proof either way, are satisfied that the plane was not deliberately sabotaged. Nonetheless, mystery surrounds the identities of the bodies found at the crash site. The Head of Counterintelligence for the Iberian Peninsula between 1941 – 44 was none other than Kim Philby, the Soviet spy, calling into question whether they were perhaps behind any plot. Sikorski's daughter Zofia was meant to be aboard the plane but was 'spotted' as a prisoner in a Soviet gulag in 1945 by elite Polish commandos who tried unsuccessfully to rescue her at the end of the war.

All very mysterious.

Yet for all the mistakes and bad decisions, the betrayals and the cold-shoulders, the government of this country couldn't have stopped Hitler and Stalin's inevitable carving up of Poland and the misery and heartbreak would have doubtless happened in much the same way during the war itself at least. What this country did do, however, was offer a sanctuary to people like my dad and Leon and Wasył and Paweł, and a safe one too without the fear of being bullied or worse by a tyrannical government. We may grumble about our MPs and PMs but we can rest easy in the knowledge that we are unlikely to get shuffled onto a train at gunpoint in the middle of the night with not even a kielbasa sausage to sustain us. They made homes here and found wives and steady employment and started families of their own to make up for the ones they had had snatched from them at the most brutal period of world history. For that they were all, I'm certain, eternally grateful. Dad was happy here in Nassington and enjoyed his life, albeit a far too short one. He became part of this accepting community and many still remember him. He enjoyed a pint and the odd cherry vodka, often on a Sunday lunchtime, at the Three Horseshoes or at The Three Mill Bills where he was a member of the darts and dominoes teams. He had a thriving allotment and took the family for picnics at the Backwater by the river in the summer. He would always take me to see the rhododendrons at Sandringham, at mum's prompting no doubt, when they were in full bloom around the time of my birthday. The very few photographs I have of the two of us together were mainly taken there or at nearby Hunstanton. He was popular and kind and is still, trust me, greatly, greatly missed.

Yet none of them decided to be naturalized, so attached were they to their Polish heritage. And for that I too am eternally grateful. If needs be, in this post Brexit world, I can, you see, get dual nationality if I so choose.

### **'His odd coat from heel to head was half of yellow and half of red...'** <sup>16</sup>

There are various misconceptions it would seem surrounding the evacuation process that the authorities insisted on during World War II, not just nationally but locally too I have come to discover. A fair few evacuees turned up in Nassington after all, 'immigrants' as they were referred to by Headteacher at the time Mr Horne, as opposed to our 'native' children. It wasn't just in the UK that such great upheavals occurred either. In China 60 million fled their homes in the face of Japanese aggression. With Axis victories in 1940-2, Belgian and French families packed up and headed out of

the cities, as too did German mothers and children in the face of atrocious Allied bombing raids as the war progressed. In total it is estimated that 175 million people relocated at some point during this conflict and still more were mobilized into military and munition factories.

In Great Britain many assume evacuation led to a clash of cultures, the urban being thrust upon the rural, 'rough' children billeted with more 'genteel' folk. As we look back we've been given the impression that these children were generally made to feel unwelcome. Was all this actually so and how did the evacuees who found themselves left at Nassington Station in 1939 fare?

The first wave of evacuees in the UK were on the move in the autumn of 1939. More than 1.5 million people were moved in just a few days, clutching their government issue gasmasks (which turned into sandwich boxes according to mum after not too long) and with a label around their necks.

There were three types of evacuation in fact: official, organizational and private. The biggest group fell under the official label. Although the vast majority came from the London area, other big conurbations were deemed unsafe and Greater Manchester, Tyneside and Merseyside were affected too. And it wasn't just children either. Mothers with infants, pregnant women and disabled adults were also rehomed in countryside locations. Then came the organizational group. State machinery was relocated. The Air Ministry set off for Harrogate, the Admiralty to Bath and a newly formed Ministry of Food was set up in Colwyn Bay. Staff from the BBC were rehomed, the hope being that a programme of light entertainment could ease the stress between all the news broadcasts, the actors and writers now well out of harm's way. And the private? Well, if you had the means or the opportunity, children or families were packed off to relatives in the country or opted to stay in rural hotels.

At this point in the war air attacks were expected and with them poison gas. Memories of WWI <sup>17</sup> were still fresh in many minds and the government and populace feared that the punishments meted out to troops in the trenches would be visited on the civilian population. There was also a fear amongst the 'great and the good' that such attacks might weaken the nation's resolve to carry on and capitulation in the face of invasion would, therefore, be inevitable.

It's amazing what you can do when you put your mind to it. Local authorities were tasked with organizing the whole thing and teachers and members of the Women's Voluntary Service were engaged to implement the scheme. In the reception areas the WVS organized the accommodation. Mum told me on various occasions that, if you had no small children under four and you also had the space, then you were obliged to take an evacuee into your home. Evacuation itself was voluntary, but once the children arrived giving them a home was not. In reality compulsion was not necessary as very many volunteered to host these undoubtedly scared and bewildered children thank goodness, and there was an allowance for having them after all, not to mention their ration books. In the main it was those from the 'lower' classes who stepped up to the plate rather than those living in bigger and wealthier surroundings. Isn't it always the same though? Those with the least are the very ones willing to give the most.

So off they set, the 1.5 million, quite an achievement and with not a single fatality en route. The reception at the other end, however, could not always be praised in quite the same way. Some households would only accept one evacuee, meaning that siblings were split up at a time when a familiar face was most needed. Others, especially in agricultural areas, were exploited as cheap

labour. Children of different religions and races found themselves in villages where such differences were utterly unknown. In the desire to get main line stations clear of all the youngsters and their often sobbing families, the children were herded onto trains with little attention paid to keeping school groups together. This meant that often weeks elapsed before the correct charges arrived at the intended reception area. Some evacuees arrived to a well-organized greeting and were duly hustled off by their new 'mum' for a hot dinner and a welcoming evening, while others were not so lucky. The School Logbook in Nassington at the time details the arrangements thus:

*'This evening 47 evacuee children arrived from London. Use was made of the School in the evening to house the children until billets were found...'*

**25<sup>th</sup> September, 1939.**

*'I, this day, admitted 54 evacuee children... 47 of these are living in Nassington and 7 in Yarwell'*

**30<sup>th</sup> September, 1939.**

The problem was that the need to get the children out of the cities was paramount, but how they were dealt with when they arrived was largely ill considered. Families were not told where their children had been sent lest they change their minds and fetch them back, thereby clogging up train services, and the children too were often too young to know where to go if they found themselves being neglected or even abused. Only half of those who had applied for evacuation made it out of London at all and 70% of those in Newcastle never got the chance to leave the city.

The feared air bombardment didn't come until summer 1941, by which time many of the children had been allowed to go home. Similarly, the invasion so feared didn't materialize at all (thanks in great part, amongst other brave flyers, to those Polish airmen during the Battle of Britain, just saying).

When France fell in June 1940 the new proximity of German air bases led to a renewed evacuation, mainly from coastal areas. By September 1940, with nighttime bombing raids over London in full force, evacuation was organized again, either preemptively or to rehouse bombed out families. Interestingly though, now that bombs were a reality, the uptake rate for evacuation was lower than at the beginning of the war except for the final wave in 1944 when London was on the receiving end of V1 flying bombs<sup>18</sup>. At this point evacuation levels were akin to those in 1939, but families went home as soon as they perceived the danger to be over.

So what of the experiences here in Nassington? Apart from children (two more appeared on October 1<sup>st</sup>, Alan Rans and his brother Barry) some teachers, Mr Sims and Mr B Greenberg, along with 20 desks, 2 blackboards, a teacher's desk and a partridge in a pear tree no doubt eventually made an appearance.

In the main the children who arrived here came from London, and many from the Jewish part of Tottenham. Colin Sharpe remembers how a rabbi used to come to the school to take lessons with these children alongside the aforementioned class teacher Mr Greenberg. My mum, and others in the village, used to refer to the former Congregational Chapel as the 'Zionist' Chapel as it would be used for religious services on Saturday mornings. During my involvement with the History Group over the past two years I have been contacted most often by people trying to trace the people they stayed with as evacuee children. This is no small task as records of who was billeted where seem

either not to have been kept or to have been lost in some way over the years but, should anyone reading this be able to shed any light on things, do please let me know.

Maureen Baylis for example. She and her 11-year-old aunt Kathleen Parker were evacuated here in 1939. They were dropped off at Nassington station and 'chosen' the following day, thankfully, by a '*very kind couple*'. She was only four and their stay did not last too long so she has only the vaguest of memories of it all and cannot remember the family's name. She does remember that the eldest son of 18 died of scarlet fever, at which point they headed off to London once more. The irony is, of course, that country life has dangers too, not least such diseases that were rife and deadly at the time. Most tragic of all was the fate of Derek Wakefield who drowned here in the river during the summer of 1941. He too gets a mention in the School Logbook:

*'Mr Sims was out of School from 1:55 to 3:10 today. He was attending the funeral of Derek Wakefield, the boy who was drowned at Yarwell on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Schoolchildren were represented by Alfred Cackett and Robert Knight'*

**July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1941**

And that is the only record of this boy's short life that I've found so far. He is buried in our cemetery in plot E12 but there is no headstone. I've been told that his family did not attend the funeral, perhaps because their presence here would have alerted other families to the whereabouts of their own children, or perhaps because they simply couldn't afford to attend, we may never know.

Many of the 'immigrants' fared well in the village, at least in terms of academic achievement. Again, Mr Horne makes mention of various successes:

*'Information has been received during this week indicating that Stanley D. Rosenbaum has been awarded a London Supplementary Scholarship and that Helena Bloom has been awarded a London Junior County Scholarship. Both these children were Immigrant Children on the roll of this School when they sat the Examination. Stanley D. Rosenbaum has since left the School...Deborah Kheifitz has been awarded a London County Junior Scholarship. She has since left this School...Information arrived today that Bernard Hirsch has been awarded a London Country Junior Scholarship. He is an immigrant boy attending this School.'*

**31<sup>st</sup> July – 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1941**

It is worth noting that only one of the four children mentioned remained in the school past 1941.

A gentleman called Ken Gooding kindly sent me an account of his experiences in Nassington. He was a tot of five when he arrived and taken in by Mrs Muntton who was '*kind and patient*'. Over to Ken:

*'Although I must have got into the usual scrapes of a growing teen-child, I can't recall her ever raising her voice to me, and there was certainly no smacking, a punishment widely accepted in those days'.*

Although his personal experience was a happy one, he has little sympathy for the organizational merits of what the government called 'Operation Pied Piper' <sup>19</sup>. Rather a clever name, on one level, don't you think, a German folktale recorded by the Brothers Grimm, of an evil piper who lures children away from their homes? I doubt that Adolf played the penny whistle but if the cap fits...

He states, as too did my mum, that he was hardly aware of the war here and only really knew anything was going on due to the POWs who worked on the farms. I suspect that these were Italians who were held at the camp in Sibson. Sadly, despite my efforts, I have been unable to find any former Italian inhabitants of said camp, nor their offspring. Laura Burns did mention that a lady who used to come to her salon did remember, as a child, pelting them in Station Road with stones as they went past, but more than that we do not know. After the war, you see, Italy was not handed over to Soviet Russia and so they were free and safe to go home. I've heard anecdotes, though, about how they worked on the local farms, one at Yarwell for example. George Shields mentioned that his own father had come across them often as a boy, and how friendly they were. Elaine Quincey said the same thing. At primary school they were often sent potato picking on Jack Pike's farm and there were about a dozen Italian POWs too, guarded admittedly, but free to work. They made wooden toys for the children even, and Renee Marshall from Kings Cliffe remembers them working for her father on his farm also. She recalls their easy manner, and how the USAAF men from nearby Kings Cliffe base, those of Italian origin, would give her treats to take to them when they dropped by the shop where she used to work. Some of the POWs would ask her to get them things from the shop, which she was happy to do until a local criticized her for 'fraternisation' <sup>20</sup>. Of course some of them might well have been devoted members of Mussolini's PNF <sup>21</sup> movement of the 1930s and a stint in rural Northamptonshire might have been tolerated with a mix of fury and frustration. I think not, though. It's a stereotype, of course, but the Italians do seem to me to be more lovers than fighters, so maybe their time in our midst was a good, albeit not permanent, one. The site at Sibson when a POW camp had a little chapel, decorated by the inmates, and a hospital too. After the war phials of morphine and bullet clips were found there by people who later went to 'squat' there <sup>22</sup>. If, by any lucky chance, you know someone who can enlighten me about any of the Italian POWs I'd love to hear, as none of them married local girls as far as I know. So, *per favore*, get in touch with any information should you have it, *grazie mille*.

But back to Ken. He mentions his father in his account, a Desert Rat <sup>23</sup> who survived the war, but during the whole of his five-year sojourn in Nassington he never received a letter from him. On top of all the homesickness, most of these children also had worries about their fathers to contend with. They may well have heard radio reports or seen newspaper headlines about battles and defeats. Some may have heard worrying conversations between the adults taking care of them or at school and had no way of knowing if their own daddy was in the firing line.

Ration books.

Rationing <sup>24</sup> didn't end in Britain until July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1954, some nine years after the official end of the conflict in Europe. Although a village area offers plenty of room for growing your own and poaching rabbits (enter my Uncle Harold and his mate Jack Woodward), still you were limited to a very large extent. If, post 1942, you worked at the USAAF base at Kings Cliffe you might also be given treats by the troops. Working in their store, the PX <sup>25</sup>, could mean the occasional extra food item to flesh out what the ration book allowed you.

For most locals, though, food was allocated according to coupons issued by the government and it seems that the nation was healthier then by far than today, limited as they were to the amount of fat, sugar and red meat that they got their hands on. As an example, each person in the main was allowed 4 ounces of butter per week. An ounce is slightly less than 30 grams. A pack of butter these



days is 200 grams. Imagine cutting a block of butter into eight slices. Each slice had to last you a week. It just about lasts me two slices of toast in the morning but, there you go. Some evacuees that Ken knew had their ration books taken from them as soon as they were 'chosen'. The family used the food, he says, while the new child in their care was fed on scraps. You can only hope that this was a rare occurrence but it was known to Ken so it was an experience of at least one person. There's a certain way of knowing that Ken truly was here in Nassington, oh yes indeed. He refers to villagers as 'top enders' and 'bottom enders' and he was, my brothers Toni and Fran would be horrified to hear, a 'bottom ender'. They weren't born until after the war of course, but the shenanigans they got up to were probably not that dissimilar to Ken's escapades. Toni often told me how the two groups used to 'fight'. In these 'good old days' they were out and about from sunrise to sunset during the summer months, making fires on which to bake potatoes and apples for their lunch, shaping and firing arrows at one another across the field in the middle of the village, tying 'the enemy' up and leaving them to shout for help. Roger Newton was a 'bottom ender' and recalled how his gang used to make their way into the church steeple (the door was locked, of course it was, but there was a notice saying KEY ON HOOK with an arrow so, hey, work it out). From there they could pelt any passing 'top ender', or innocent passerby, with pigeon eggs.

Those were the days.

Ken too mentions the education offered at the school. It would seem that a mixture of natural ability and good teaching courtesy of Nassington School worked well for him too: *'the village school must have been excellent because when I eventually returned to London I seemed to be more advanced in reading, writing and arithmetic than most others in my peer group'*.

His brother Peter was sent far away to Halifax where his experiences were not so kind. He was to run away repeatedly until, eventually, he joined Ken and Mrs Munton. She had started with two evacuees, making you wonder why Peter and Ken couldn't have been together at the start, but the other poor boy was packed off as he was a bed wetter. So Peter moves in although his experiences seem to have upset him quite fundamentally. He had become something of a 'hooligan' according to his brother you see. After the war they both went home to London but, and much to Ken's regret, they didn't stay in touch with Mrs Munton and nor does he know what actually became of her own son. Again, if you do, please get in touch so that I can pass on the information.

Other evacuees are remembered also. Crispin Woodcock, who lived with Mr and Mrs Hill in Barrack Yard. Peter Jarvis, something of a handful at school it seems but who nonetheless loved his time here so much that he requested his ashes be buried in the churchyard as, indeed, they were. Alan Rans and his brother Barry who certainly created issues for the Headmaster Mr Horne who makes specific mention of them in the School Logbook. I suspect he may have been the boy my mum mentioned, who grabbed the cane and set about Mr Horne with it, an experience that shook this well-meaning gentleman a great deal. The Rans boys arrived, just the two of them, a couple of weeks after everyone else. I wonder, had they proven to be a handful elsewhere and were 'relocated' here? This would have happened a second time if Mr Horne had had his way as mentioned in the Logbook, as an attempt was made to send them to a 'hostel'. You can only wonder now why Alan was so distressed. Bad behaviour (teacher hat on here) is usually a cry for help or attention, something not so appreciated at such a time and in such a place and under such circumstances.

And last, but certainly not least, there was Barbara Lawrence who many of you will remember as Barbara Gilder.

I spent a very enjoyable afternoon at 'Elsie's' (where else?) last summer reminiscing about Barbara. Although I only knew her to say hello to, I was aware from mum that she had been evacuated here but had never gone home, the assumption being that she had lost her family in the Blitz. I've learned by now not to trust my assumptions, so who better to ask for the whole story than her daughter Melanie?

Now Melanie and I were at school together so, again, I knew who she was but she was a year or two older. People are amazingly kind and willing to share their stories with me and this was no exception. Not only did I get Barbara's take on the whole business, but Melanie brought along photographs too of her mum as a young woman in her single days. So here you have it, warts and all.

Barbara was born in Tottenham on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1933, so when she arrived in Nassington in 1939 she was just over six years old. Many of the evacuees arriving at the school in those two big waves were not, after all, school age. Barbara remembers there being just seven or so evacuees in the school when she finally got to go, most notably 'Boon the Typhoon' who was a bit of a runner by all accounts. Her own mother was a single mum though, a Welsh lady, and she certainly survived the war, as too did the rest of the family. They had not, then, been bombed out. It seems that, although Barbara wanted to return home after the war, the family told her she would be 'better off' staying in the country. Her mum sadly died of tuberculosis in 1947 so, chances are, she might have been aware of her own illness in 1945 and wanted to save Barbara from its consequences. Of course, being a single mum in the 1940s, perhaps she was also not in a position to take care of her properly, so stay in Nassington she did. In the main she had a happy enough time as an evacuee but especially when she was able to leave school and start working for Sam Fenn. The choice of occupation for many girls once they left school was either to work in the laundry or on a farm and so she opted for the latter, cooking the breakfasts every day in what turned out to be a happy place of employment. All people have their idiosyncrasies of course and Barbara, it seems, had a real fear of fireworks. As children Melanie and her siblings were not allowed any either. Barbara remembered the silver paper dropped from barrage balloons to confuse enemy radar signals and, more specifically, the 'doodlebugs' that made it through to end up over London. As a small child such fear and noise imprinted themselves on her memory, hence the fear of all the whizz bangs.

But what of the other side of it, those London children who stayed put in the firing line? My other half's dad George was one such child. He was one of five, with four younger sisters who lived throughout the war in Feltham, London. He was just four when war broke out but the vivid images are still retained, most of his memories of the time being positive ones. We have this image of the 'plucky' Londoners all using the underground stations as bomb shelters but, in truth, London Underground did not approve of them being used in this way and discouraged it. With the Blitz in 1941-42, however, they had no choice but to give in to the demands of the locals, many of whom had taken to buying tickets and refusing to move from the station's safety. An article in the Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1940 reported as follows:

*'Little heed was paid last night to the appeal of the Ministries of Home Security and Transport asking the public to refrain from using the London tube stations as air-raid shelters except in the case of urgent necessity'.*

It's hard to imagine anything more urgent than dodging Nazi bombs and doodlebugs but, there you go, London Transport, ever helpful. Its attitude changed though on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1940 after a continuous period of bombing that left 430 dead and 1,600 injured. Shelters consequently became more organized and London Transport was commissioned to build a series of eight deep-level shelters. At one point there was even a Tube Refreshments Special train to deliver food and drink to those taking shelter. Over the eight months of the Blitz, which ended in May 1941, 30,000 civilians were killed in London alone. They got their 'revenge' though, 25,000 perishing in the fire storm unleashed on the civilian population in Dresden in February 1945. The 'justification' for this was to weaken the resolve of the Nazi regime by breaking civilian morale.

I say two wrongs don't make a right.

But back to George. Prior to the use of the underground, or for those not close enough to a tube station, the building of an Anderson Shelter <sup>25</sup> was encouraged. I understand from mum that my grandad Jack built one in their garden in Barrack Yard but when they got up next morning, it had collapsed. Not much use against a doodlebug then. As for George's family shelter, he remembers that both it, and the one in the schoolyard, though upright, were perpetually full of water. There were sirens all the time, practice ones to train the populace into orderly evacuation, but so realistic were they that you couldn't tell the real from the unreal and everyone grew blasé and reluctant to up sticks and take shelter, especially on a chilly night all snuggled up in beddy-byes. George remembers having lessons in the shelters, and how people would start a sing-along. They could watch the bombs drop too, both a frightening and exciting experience, and he also remembers the silver papers dropped from the barrage balloons. Gardens were full of vegetables rather than flowers and the neighbours were all prepared to help one another out. Some recollections are sadder though, such as that of the shell-shocked soldier coming home. He couldn't walk properly nor keep still as he came down the road. The local children pointed and teased him, mimicking his walk and laughing.

The innocence of youth.

## **Heimat**

As mentioned in relation to the Polish ex-servicemen in the area, many, if not all, chose to stay in the safety of England rather than risk their necks in the tender care of the Soviet occupiers. And then came Lech Wałęsa. He and his Gdansk shipyard trade union movement finally, and without violence, put an end to Soviet rule in Poland and set the wheels in motion for the end of Soviet rule for the whole of the Eastern bloc. It was probably time for it to end, lack of finances you see, all too expensive repressing millions of people, but it was Lech who started the whole ball rolling to its inevitable end. As a student I had only two posters on my wall in my university digs. One was of Adam Ant, all kitted out in his Prince Charming gear, make-up, earrings, thigh-high boots and all, and the other of Lech Wałęsa. What I did with either of them I now cannot say but I do wish I'd hung on to them, too quick to throw things out I'm afraid. Oh well.

At the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall a big commemoration ceremony was held at the Brandenburg Gate. Numerous dignitaries were invited, not least Lech himself. The climax of the event was the symbolic fall of a row of hand-painted and decorated dominoes that lined the route where the infamous wall had once stood and it was Lech who pushed the first of them all, just as he had done as the leader of the Solidarność <sup>26</sup> movement. That started me off as you can imagine,

tears, pride, even now while writing this I've a lump in my throat. If you get to do my 'Berlin tour' with me sometime I'll take you round that very area. Tucked by the Reichstag is a simple enough looking piece of brick wall. The sign fixed to it tells you that it is the very wall that Lech clambered over to get out of the shipyard on the day of that first strike.

But it wasn't just Eastern Europeans who were displaced by the war, but very many Germans too, and quite a fair few remained right here or very close by, disinclined as they were to return to their former homes also now under Soviet rule in the east.

Now, unsurprisingly, even at an eighty-year distance, the families of these men take a little persuading to tell their side of the story but, with my background in the language and my unabashed love for the people and the culture, they feel pretty safe talking to me about it all. Old habits die hard but a bit of coaxing has got me a long way.

Steve Kruger for example. You might know him. He lives in Wansford now but his father was in the Luftwaffe and was shot down over Normandy during the D-Day invasion. His dad Heinrich Kruger was born in Güstrow, near Rostock, which fell under the control of the Soviets thanks to the Yalta Agreement <sup>27</sup>. This later became part of the DDR when the Soviets had a hissy fit and opted to create an independent state on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1949. Post war then Heinrich was not inclined to wend his way back home.

But I'm jumping the gun a tad. In 1944 Heinrich is shot down and taken captive by American troops. Two of his brothers had died during the war tragically and he was sent as a POW to Canada. As for his parents, well, his father was taken prisoner by the Russians so didn't survive, and his mother was thrown out of the family home and had to get on as best she could.

Steve mentioned how his father had told him about the zealots in the POW camp, for they surely existed, who tried to pressurize the others to cause trouble, escape, and generally be a pain in the butt to their captors. The majority of his fellow POWs were having none of it though. They were now, after all, well out of it. The first to resist, after all, had been the Germans. Many of you know that we have our own home in Berlin and at the end of our tube line, the S1, is Oranienburg <sup>28</sup>. This was one of the first Nazi concentration camps and was opened in 1933 specifically for the detention of Germans who opposed the regime – journalists, writers, politicians, intellectuals, even church men. Around 3,000 were interned there until it closed in July 1934, at which point surviving inmates were taken to the camp in Lichtenberg.

Very many resisted, their stories often lost, ill-remembered or overlooked. One of the more famous ones, brought to vivid life in the film 'Valkyrie' of 2008, tells of the failed July 20<sup>th</sup> plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. This was not the only attempt on Hitler's life. There were forty-two in total, none of them, obviously, successful, but the attempt by Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg certainly shook Hitler to the core. He was never quite the same afterwards it seems, horrified that his own high-ranking officers would turn on him. Von Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators were summarily executed by a firing squad at the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. This building has since become, fittingly I feel, the German Resistance Memorial Center, a site intended to commemorate those members of the German army and general population who stood up to the regime. The place where von Stauffenberg and the others died is marked by a memorial with an inscription as follows:

*'You did not bear the shame. You resisted. You bestowed the eternally vigilant symbol of change.  
By sacrificing your impassioned lives for freedom, justice and honour'*

**Inscription at the von Stauffenberg memorial**

Von Stauffenberg and the others knew, as did so very many, that the atrocities perpetrated by the regime were both atrocious and would rightly cast a shadow over Germany for many, many years. So he tried to do something about it as, evidently, had many before him in a big or a small way. Anyway, watch the film, highly recommended.

So, Steve's dad. Eventually, post war, he was moved to POW camp 229 in Yaxley. You were lucky to be taken prisoner by the Brits it seems for post war statistics found that only 0.03% of German POWs didn't make it out alive from them in comparison to 58% in Soviet camps, 2.6% in French camps and 0.15% in American camps. The Geneva Convention <sup>29</sup> had stated that, once a peace treaty was signed though, POWs should be released to return home but, in some cases, they were retained here until 1948. One of the first to complain was Labour MP Richard Stokes. He maintained that these German men were entitled to know their expected date of release as even convicted criminals know when they are likely to be freed. It was an affront to their human rights and a betrayal of the very values that the Allies had been fighting to protect. By 1946 there were still 402,000 POWs in the UK. The politician and writer Harold Nicholson, in May 1946 said *'that we should treat human beings in this manner while proclaiming aloud our belief in the sanctity of human values is more than wrong, it is blind and stupid'*.

They were, as you can imagine, a diligent and reliable labour force though who were set to work on farms in this very area, helping with the harvests for example. They repaired roads (would that we still had a few hanging about...) and even swept up the mess after the VE Day celebrations in London in 1946 (fair enough I suppose). One stumbling block was, of course, their political allegiances. My own father was part of the Army of Occupation <sup>30</sup> that was sent to Germany post war to ensure that those pesky Nazis didn't get up to their old tricks again. Releasing potentially hundreds of raving Fascists was, let's face it, unwise, and so POW camps were required to check on the moral rectitude of their inmates. Steve's father remembered that there was, undoubtedly, a Nazi element amongst the POWs and the notes kept at Yaxley camp reflect this as follows:

*'At least 100 Nazis boycotted the lecture and tried to induce others to follow their example. Both prisoners and officers are in the main hostile to this section which exercises an evil influence. The great majority seem to be anti-Nazi'*

**June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1946**

The British public soon came to agree with the idea of repatriation, many voicing their support for it in numerous letters to newspapers and in the formation of the Save Europe Now group. They sent a petition to the PM of the day, Clement Attlee, who soon announced that 15,000 would be repatriated per month. The POWs in Yaxley, it seems, reacted badly to the news:

*'Disturbances caused by a group of POWs occurred during the evening rollcall... This may have been caused by a misinterpretation of an announcement that German POWs were to be repatriated at a rate of 2,000 a month – and at that rate it would take well over ten years for all POWs to return home'*

**8<sup>th</sup> August, 1946**

The vast majority of the group did not approve of such *'shouters and troublemakers' and 'resented their methods of force'* and subsequently political screening was introduced to ascertain the political correctness, as we would now deem it, of those potentially eligible for release. The matter, by now had become a pressing one:

*'Morale was bad, mainly because of the C+ agitators who were due to be removed from this camp. Other reasons were bad news from home and lack of information regarding repatriation. There were four attempted suicides recently'*

22<sup>nd</sup> August

Steve's father remembered that others were more successful. Some did manage to hang themselves, too afraid to face being repatriated to the now Soviet sector of their homeland where a dangerous welcome might await, or too depressed to want to wait any longer to go home.

Eventually Steve's dad was released. He had a girlfriend by now but, unfortunately, her family did not approve of her *'fraternising with the enemy'* and they disowned her until Steve was born. At this point they moved into the house owned by the farmer Heinrich worked for. He even provided this young family with a company car. Like all the others Heinrich sent food parcels and gifts to his family now in eastern Germany, chocolate, soap and coffee for example. Often these items never made it to their destination, damaged perhaps, or intercepted and stolen. Heinrich Kruger had been nineteen when he had been captured, a radio operator, but he had been training to be a bricklayer before the war. He was now gainfully employed, living in a peaceful country with a wife and baby boy and all seemed good. Well, nearly. Steve remembers how he would come home from school sometimes to find that swastikas had been painted on the front door. His dad would quietly remove them each time they reappeared but, eventually, they stopped. He and his brother were bullied at school and called *'Nazis'* well into the 1950s. When I was teaching I always asked the children at the beginning of the school year to cover and decorate their books with images of German, Austrian or Swiss life. *'Nothing to do with the war though'*, I would always warn, explaining why it was now inappropriate. All but one took notice over an entire thirty-year period, just the one boy in my teaching training year. He opted to daub a huge red swastika on the cover of his vocabulary book. Off he went to the Headmaster for a detention and a lecture about prejudice.

Back to Steve though. As children they were not allowed to watch the war films that still litter our screens today as his dad felt they were biased. Dutifully Heinrich reported to the police on a regular basis as he and others like him (Poles included) were required to do but he chose to be naturalized. He died many years later after a happy and productive life. At his funeral, Steve told me, there was standing room only so popular had he become with the local community. He had often made deliveries to local farms and three hundred came to pay their respects, Jack Mould just one of them. Quite a journey, from swastika daubing to a packed-out funeral. All the legislation and exhortations from politicians and the like can't do what living alongside someone can. Ignorance is not, after all, always bliss.

Next we come to Otto Stiehler. So, I bumped into his daughter Grace, you guessed it, at *'Elsie's'* (that place is more like a time portal than a mere café, I kid you not). After a little reassuring she was happy to share family photos with me and, this time, a couple of letters in German too. *'I don't know what they say'*, she admitted, *'I don't speak German and dad didn't tell me'*. Well, happy to oblige, I

took a look. You remember me saying that POWs were subject to an enquiry to see how safe they were to release into the wild? What Grace had was, in effect, the letter received by the Commandant of his camp from the mayor of the town where Otto grew up, namely Wurzen, near Leipzig, now in the DDR <sup>31</sup>. In effect it is something that any German family would cherish like gold dust. The crux of it was written proof that Otto had never had Nazi affiliations, had not joined the party and had rather been active in the trade union movement and left-leaning sports club. No hint of anything suspicious whatsoever and would they mind releasing him please? As I say, gold dust, proof that your granddad or great-granddad had not voted for the Nazi party. Put yourself in the place of a modern German family if you will and imagine what you might know about your forebears. What might their role have been during the war and why were there no photographs of him in uniform? If you've ever seen 'The Music Box' movie you can see what the worst scenarios might look like <sup>32</sup>. The vast majority were not involved with the worst of the horrors but Grace knows for 100% sure that her dad's slate is completely clean. It was understandable, therefore, when I went to her home in Elton, to see the photograph album he'd kept as a soldier. Embossed on the front was a German helmet and a swastika. Inside were photos of his comrades, smiling and laughing, one of two studiously playing chess. Some were snaps of distant battles. Some were snaps of military equipment. But for Otto, and those like him, these were merely memories and the album itself something to keep them in rather than something to hide or be ashamed of.

Otto had been captured by American forces while driving an anti-tank gun lorry. During the incident his leg was injured and he was taken by his captors to hospital. This was towards the end of the war and he would often tell Grace that had they not done so he would have died for the German forces were low on supplies. The Americans weren't angels though, stealing his boots while they had him at their mercy but thankfully nothing worse. He would also tell Grace that he'd had no choice but to join up but his attitude to the Nazi party might well have explained why he only had the one medal, for a spell of time at the Eastern Front where the undesirables were sent. So cold was it that they had to eat dead dogs and horses, and the German populace were called on to donate their own winter coats for the soldiers had not been supplied with any. So much for the vaunted German efficiency, it clearly didn't reach to the Nazi party.

Post war as a POW his job was to deliver prisoners to local farms for their work detail. They lived in huts that they were expected to build for themselves and wore armbands or jackets with a clearly visible P or yellow circle on them. He would remain a POW until 1948 at which point he worked both at Belton House and later for Jack Pike (as too did my dad for a while, I wonder if their paths crossed?).

Grace remembers, as a little girl of 9, going to visit her German family, now living in East Germany. There were soldiers everywhere, she said, and the atmosphere frightened her. Visas were needed and there were stops at regular intervals so that paperwork could be checked. She remembers looking out towers too, and that the flats in the block where they lived shared a communal toilet. The family had stayed in the same area throughout the war so they were easy to find and Otto would regularly send parcels and packages to them once safely back in England again. They too did not always get there or, if they did, packages had been opened and ruined.

Her father would happily talk about his wartime memories and said that he for sure had known nothing of the camps. This, of course, is a bone of contention still amongst those who study this

period in German history. How could the local population not have known what was going on in the concentration and extermination camps? I remember having a similar conversation with my other half. In London, his flat is in Wandsworth, literally down the road from the prison. Do you, I asked him, know what goes on within those walls? I was chatting with John 'Jock' McNeil the other day, a former policeman who, on occasion, used to escort prisoners to Wandsworth Prison. What first struck him about the place was how deceptively small it looked from the front. Once inside it widens out into a sizeable complex cut off from the housing and people that surround it. During the war many of the labour and concentration camps were in isolated areas of course and, according to Otto at least, soldiers who accompanied the trains were sometimes executed to keep them quiet. During his trial, the Commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, was calm, matter of fact and perfectly happy to talk openly about how his camp operated. It was he who decided on the use of Zyklon B<sup>33</sup> in the gas chambers to maximize efficiency and, he stated categorically, everyone who worked there was sworn to absolute secrecy about what went on behind the walls.

Latterly Otto worked in one of the shoe shops in Oundle and, due perhaps to his strong accent, a teacher from Oundle School approached him to ask if he would mind being interviewed by some of his pupils. Afraid about any potential repercussions, although decades after the war, Otto refused. Our constant diet of war films and documentaries has kept WWII very much alive in people's minds after all, and the National Curriculum, insisted Margaret Thatcher at the time, should teach the history of the Second World War. Nothing wrong with that of course, if you don't know your history you are destined to repeat it, but a degree of evenhandedness might not go amiss (I always keep that soap box nearby as you may have noticed).

And finally we come to Eddie as many of you would know him. I knew Eddie extremely well and I have a lifelong debt to him for it was he who introduced me to Germany and all of its many and varied pleasures. His family, sisters Lieselotte and Gerda, and his brothers Guido and Ernst, along with their own families, cared for me when I spent a year living alongside them as part of my German degree. I have them to thank in part for my love for the country and people, and for my fluency in the language. So, if you spot me in the cemetery muttering in German rest assured that I'm simply saying thank you to Eddie and having a little chat as I always do when I go up there to see to my dad's grave.

Eddie Lange was actually Erwin Lange. As far as I understand it he had been training to be a policeman before the war but, for that entire generation throughout Europe and much of the rest of the world, those best laid plans were violently ruined. He certainly told me that he drove a tank and that he was a POW in North Carolina, suggesting that he was taken prisoner in North Africa by the British who had to send many of their captives to the USA for want of space to hold them all. I'm told he was most likely in the 90<sup>th</sup> Light Division which fought, however, in Sicily and Italy rather than North Africa, but Eddie didn't talk much, as none of them did, about the war, at least not to family members who wouldn't have understood much anyway. He did tell my mum that his own mother buried his medals in the wood near to where they lived in what was Silesia, for fear that they would be found by the Soviets. Martin Longfoot made me laugh, as he often does, the other day. We were talking about Eddie who certainly enjoyed a pint and they would sometimes get chatting in The Queens Head. On occasion Eddie would let snippets fall about the war after one too many rum and peeps'. I can hear him now - *We'd have won the bloody war, boy, if we hadn't run out of petrol...*



While in America he acted as a translator but, I suspect, he learnt English on the spot for at one time I had the English language books that he used in the camp. What on earth became of them I do not know but I truly wish I'd hung on to them, it's a bad habit throwing things away. Maybe I'll find them in a corner rolled up in my Lech Walesa poster, fingers crossed.

Eddie's family came, as mentioned, from Silesia, so they were right in the fun zone when the Soviets came rolling through in the latter part of the war. Having spent a great deal of time talking to his sisters and brothers about their experiences, I know that they ended up briefly in a Polish labour camp directly after the war. They were not treated well, as you can imagine and understand too to be blunt. They developed there a real aversion to tinned tomatoes. One year four came to visit England and mum thought a typical English breakfast would be just the ticket. Obviously Jack Mould's sausages were on the menu, along with all the usual delights, but not one of them touched the tomatoes. It seems that this is what they were 'served' for dinner every single day and consequently they didn't find them particularly appetizing. Again, thanks to the Red Cross, Eddie tracked the family down in 1966 to their new home just over the Dutch border. They couldn't have got much further away from the Soviet zone of influence if they'd tried.

POW camps usually occupied former RAF camps. Very many were at Kings Cliffe from March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1946, when they were returned to the UK from the USA, Canada and Belgium. Kings Cliffe was No. 702, a reception and transit camp through which some 28,000 German POWs passed. Most of them only spent a few days there. Apart from the Commandant and other officers there were camp interpreters too and the medical officer was German. Major C. H. B. Readman, the commandant, wrote an account of the camp, stating that its capacity was for 3,000 permanent POWs. All huts had electric light and it was unusual in that there was no barbed wire around the perimeter. Morale was not high, though, despite the good treatment and conditions. Those who had come from the USA had hoped to be repatriated directly but, instead, found themselves in leafy Northamptonshire with no clear idea when they might be going home or, conversely, worrying that they might get packed off to the DDR. Football seems to have been a big deal though, with three teams at Kings Cliffe alone and even a league with neighbouring camps. The football ground is described as 'first class'. Once a fortnight the inmates were shown newsreels or educational films and the canteen had a radio tuned in to German stations in the mornings. There was a professional musician, Hans Busch, in their midst, who directed the '*excellent string and wind orchestra of 15-18*' POWs. They gave concerts at neighbouring camps even. This reminds me of a story told me by Graham Marshall about his father-in-law who had a farm. They too had German POWs working there, one of whom was an accomplished violinist. When he learnt of this, father-in-law insisted that he always wear gloves to protect his hands and, sure enough, when he finally returned home to Berlin, he was able to pick up his old profession again. If only the governments would leave well alone you can't help wondering.

Much of what we know about life on the camps is anecdotal as censorship restricted what could be reported in official sources. Still, men like Eddie and Otto and Heinrich had tales to tell and some of the letters sent home have thankfully been preserved. Guess what? Mike Murray purchased a selection of them recently on Ebay and, I'm delighted to say, asked me to do a translation. Here, then, are some impressions of life straight, as they say, from the horse's mouth.

The majority of the missives are in the form of postcards with little space for much information. Most were written by Artur Wilhelm to his family now in the 'Russin-Zone'. They make for pretty dull

reading to be honest – ‘*Here are a few lines, received your last letter, glad to hear you are all well, give my best wishes to everyone there*’, that sort of thing, but in each and every one he says how he is longing for the day when he can return home. The very last one reads ‘*so, mum, this’ll be the last harvest you have to get in without me*’. There the correspondence stops so I’m trusting that he finally made it back. What became of him I cannot say but I hope his life was a happy one, and that their time in the Soviet zone was not too onerous.

There are a couple of full-length letters also, one or two from Emil but also from a lady called Hildegard to her brother Bruno, likewise a POW at Kings Cliffe. It’s easy to think that the POWs had it worse but this was not the case for ‘Hilde’. The letter was sent in mid-December and the temperature was -20. She was alone, her brother far away and Christmas coming. She had no tree and no one to celebrate with, not much food and so it is not surprising that she wonders ‘*why God has sent me these things to bear*’. Poor lady, let’s hope Bruno got back to her.

But what became of the camps when the Italians and Germans finally got to leave? Did they turn into farmland? Were they used as barns or storage? Are they, even, still there? Or were they, initially at least, used for housing. Well, yes, they were as it happens, and many of you reading this might well have spent some time at one as a small child. I had the good fortune to chat to a couple of ladies who remember life there very vividly and this is what they had to tell me.

### **‘We weren’t squatters Jean, we paid rent’.**

My Aunt Eileen, when she and my Uncle Harold visited for tea from Rushden, would often get quite affronted when mum reminisced, as was often the case, about them all ‘squattin’ after the war. ‘*No Jean*’, she would bristle ‘*we paid rent*’. Aunt Eileen didn’t enjoy the experience much though. At night, you see, you could hear mice and rats scuttling over the corrugated iron roofing. Lovely.

Locally squatting during this period was rife. Old Sulehay, once the German POWs were gone, saw many young families move into the abandoned Nissen huts and others, mainly Polish, went to Sibson, duly cleared of the Italians. Angela Gibson (née Coston) told me that her dad used to offer a taxi service between Sibson Camp at this time to take the former Polish servicemen to the Cross Keys in Wansford. Certainly my dad enjoyed the odd glass of cherry vodka as you now know, and she recalled how they would gift her dad Polish spirits and kielbasa sausage, perhaps from the ‘Red and White Store’ in Peterborough.

The problem, as today, was an extreme housing shortage which became acute in 1946. During the war no new homes were built while others were destroyed in bombing raids. The workforce had also been dispersed and added to this were newly married couples, often with babies, three and a half million ‘demobbed’ soldiers and foreign troops and POWs not willing to go back home. Couples were reduced to sleeping in kitchens or on the landings of the family. All political parties had housing as a priority in their election manifestos in 1945, and when Labour came to power Aneurin Bevan, Labour Minister of Health, insisted that ‘*only the best is good enough for the working class*’.

But buildings of quality take time and the need was imminent.

Mass squatting began in August 1946. The BBC reported ‘*a strange new mood of orderly lawlessness*’ spreading across the country after a cinema newsreel report about a man moving his

own family into a Nissen hut on an abandoned army camp. There were thousands of these now empty sites dotted around the country after all and so 46,000 upped sticks and headed off.

These families were not moving into private houses and the dwellings were low value, so the government agreed to reconnect the facilities and allow everyone to stay until Christmas. They had now become 'authorised' squatters and liable to pay rent so, for the time being, the government had a solution to the problem, albeit a temporary one in their view. Then came the issue of the 123,000 Polish troops understandably unwilling to go home. They too, needed somewhere to go and the same solution was offered.

Temporary it would prove not to be and neither did the government remain happy with the situation. Many former squatters, now paying rent, were to stay put until 1953 and local councils had little control over the people who had now established homes on these out-of-the-way sites. Not satisfied with the basic accommodation, the families had worked to improve their own living conditions. Life at first was hard. The huts were cold and damp with separate washrooms and toilet blocks that all had to share. They were out of the way so shopping had to be ferried to and fro by hand or in a pram. With time and effort, however, the 'squatters' got organized, opening small shops and even schools for themselves, improving the living conditions and developing the gardens. In effect the camps were communities of young people, a little more adventurous and perhaps a little more anti-establishment than most. Many residents were from foreign backgrounds where life had been particularly tough and so they worked to create a comfortable life for themselves at last. A history of this period, 'The Squatters of 1946' by Paul Burnham, describes it all often as having '*a holiday camp atmosphere*'.

By 1956 the majority of camps nationally had closed and most were moved into newly built council housing, here initially in Northfields Lane at the 'top end'. Indeed, so unsettled by the whole 'self-help' attitude of the squatters were the 'powers that be' that the building of council housing was accelerated as a result of the wave of post war squatting. In the London area the Communist Party exerted quite an influence and some former squatters became Labour Councillors in their turn, their experiences informing their political narrative. As Paul Burnham puts it:

*'squatting, with its strange new mood of orderly lawlessness, reminds us that there was indeed a volatile social force acting from below as working people demanded a better world in this period. The indications are that the squatters... seemed to have had the support of public opinion'*.

**'The Squatters of 1946: A local study in national context' *Socialist History* 25 (2004)**

Mum spoke of this period of her married life with great fondness and it wasn't just her who had, unlike Aunty Eileen, fond memories. Very many other Nassington families spent a very happy time at Old Sulehay.

Guess where I met up with Valerie Lewin, née Sharp? Over the ubiquitous cuppa and slice of something sinful she filled me in on life at Old Sulehay Camp in the post war period. She even had a map to show where the various families had lived and where the shop and school room were. It was quite the little community you see. Once it was more official you had to apply to the local council for residence at one of these old POW or RAF camps and, if you were lucky, in you went. These Nissen huts were cold in the winter and enjoyed condensation in the summer thanks to all that unforgiving corrugated iron. At Old Sulehay there were about seventy huts alongside the shop, school room and function room where the Salvation Army Sunday School used to meet. On occasion there were

jumble sales or parties. They had big gardens so families could keep chickens and rabbits and grow veg. Old Sulehay Lodge is nearby and from there they could get milk too. All in all then pretty self-sufficient. Should one of the ladies need a midwife the one from Wansford used to come to her assistance, making her way through the woods on her trusty bike. But what Valerie remembers with particular affection is the community spirit.

As for education, well, the older children were near enough to go to Yarwell which still had a school of its own back then, but the parents were not keen on the smallest children trekking quite so far through the woods each day. On making their feelings known Northamptonshire Education Committee relented, on the condition that a suitable teacher be found for the camp itself. Luckily Dr Teall was Headmaster in Yarwell at the time (the school closed in 1960) and he had the perfect solution. His wife. She was happy to help and was, after all, fully qualified and on maternity leave after the birth of her daughter Maryon. A Nissen hut was duly kitted out with desks, a heater and a blackboard and Mrs Teall was ready to let battle with her twenty odd charges commence. Each day, Maryon told me, she and her mum would set off on her bicycle. By the time they arrived in the colder months someone had already lit the stove. The group ranged in age so Mrs Teall, at a time before the National Curriculum, was able to devise a teaching programme of her own as she saw fit. Although Maryon was a toddler with her own little house created for her to enjoy her '*toddlerdom*' in, she was perfectly happy to mix in with the older children. She, like Valerie, described this period as '*idyllic*'. For the children it most probably was but for the adults perhaps not so. I remember mum telling me how she left my dad in bed one winter's morning in 1947 with the instruction to have the fire lit by the time she got back from the shops. She was heavily pregnant with Fran at the time but still struggled down through the snow to the bottom shop only to get back and find dad still snoozing in bed. The fly on the wall doubtless had some colourful language to entertain him that day.

As for the school, morning playtime was spent in the woods. Lunch was eaten at home and a particularly strong memory for Maryon concerns May Day. There was once an old oak tree in the wooded area at Old Sulehay, known as 'The Wishing Tree Oak', to which a procession from Yarwell School would make its way for the crowning of the May King and Queen each year. They were voted for by the children, so all very egalitarian. The children picked various flowers from the woods and outlying area and Mrs Teall and other adults would help the children make them into garlands in the school. These would then be paraded through Yarwell village, ending up back at school for tea with lashings of squash and jelly and ice cream. Dr Teall wrote a thesis about all this. I know as I managed to hunt one down at Leicester University where it is kept for nosey people like me to go through. My intention is to share his findings on Northamptonshire Mayday Celebrations with the school in May, but should you be impatient there is a YouTube video based on a BBC 1 news report – just type in Yarwell Mayday 1956, it's quite charming and you might recognize a few people still.

Another annual event was rosehip picking. During WW2, due to the shortage of imported oranges and the like, people were encouraged to pick them between September and October as they are a rich source of vitamin C. There was even a Rosehip Collector's Club in the 1950s-60s with which schools got involved, the rosehips bagged up there for sale to the Delrosa company that turned them into rosehip syrup. For the children it was a great source of pocket money as the scheme was financed by the local council and the collection, organized by the Women's Institute, picked them up from the schools, post offices and homes that got involved. 1lb of rosehips earned you 3d (about 75p today) and children had a card to record how much they had gathered. Badges were then available

as you hit various collecting milestones, and the subsequent syrup was given to mums at baby clinics or offered for sale nationwide. Apart from this the ⅓ bottles of milk for school children were delivered daily, drunk quickly in the summer before it went sour and kept by the stove in the winter. That, of course, was stopped by the Labour government under Harold Wilson in 1968 for secondary school children, and by 'Thatcher, Thatcher 'Milk Snatcher' in 1971 for the over-sevens <sup>34</sup>.

Both ladies clearly have great memories of their time at the Old Sulehay Camp. The eventual building of modern council housing in the early 1950s put an end to the idyll and the community was subsequently flung far and wide. Although many did move to Nassington some went to Peterborough, Easton-on-the-Hill and Kings Cliffe where it was never quite the same again.

## **Land Girls and Lumber Jills**

Come back in time with me if you will to the formation of the Women's Land Army (WLA) during WW1 in 1917. Due to the shortage of food and paucity of men to work on the farms, the Ministry for Agriculture recruited women to work on them in their stead. The scheme was reintroduced, for the same reasons, during WWII and, initially, it was for volunteers only. Eventually, however, single women were conscripted, either to work on the land or in factories. The work on farms was hard and dirty as the girls did everything that their male counterparts had been expected to do. They drove tractors, ploughed and hoed, caught rats, milked cows, you name it they did it. Days were long and free time pretty scarce until 1943 when they were given the legal right to a full week's paid annual leave but even then they were encouraged to do something useful for the war effort such as organizing a dance or a whist drive. Exhausting. Although they had a uniform it was not obligatory to wear it but many did nonetheless. It was not until 1950 that they were finally disbanded as food until then was still rationed and returning soldiers still en route to Blighty.

But it wasn't just farms was it? Oh no. In 1942 the Women's Timber Corps (WTC) began. Singapore had fallen, Egypt was under threat and the Battle of the Atlantic was in full swing and so even more men were drafted from industry to be deployed abroad. Timber was vital for the war effort and so the female population was called on to help fill the gap. Quite apart from working in the sawmills they were expected, just like the land army girls, to do what the men had hitherto done and so they set to felling trees and hauling them to the mills. Without these two groups of women labouring in the fields and many others in the factories, the war would have been a different experience, and a more miserable one, for many. Come the end of the war, though, they were expected to 'pick up their knitting' again as if nothing had happened.

The Daily Express, however, had something to say about this, fuelled by pressure from some of the women themselves. They had campaigned for decades for recognition but not until a national newspaper heard their calls did anything, finally, get done. There was a reunion at the Royal Albert Hall in London for the 4,000 former 'Lumber Jills', the first time in effect that they had the chance to get together and talk about the old days. The WLA was finally invited to march past the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day in honour of the work they had done and, in December 2007, the Government finally announced that surviving Land Army girls and Lumber Jills would be awarded their very own medal, the first being awarded in July 2008. But why do I mention them you may be wondering?

Marie Harrison of course.

Some of you will remember Marie and Douglas 'Duggy' Harrison but did you know that Marie, born Marie Smith in Kennington, London, had been a Lumber Jill? She volunteered to join, anxious to help the war effort as her sister was doing in the ATS in East Africa and her brother in Japan. And so she left the unleafy glades of London to come to the countryside, hardly ever having seen a tree before at her own admission. And she loved it. Evidently it was damned hard work. When she had her first child Paul the doctor said *'he'd never seen such muscles in a woman'* before. And so, once her bit for the nation came to an end in 1949 she decided to stick with the country life and visited her sister Sue, now living in Yarwell, to consider her options. She was thinking of moving to what was then Rhodesia to become a policewoman but Fate would change her mind. Who should come striding into 'The Fox' one evening but Bubby and the rest, as they say, is history. Marie told her family that the WTC had been a fantastic time. Many of the women connected with this era of our history seem to have felt the same way and many do so, I suspect, because of a specific group of incomers to our area.

The Yanks.

### **'Overpaid, oversexed and over 'ere'**

Tens of thousands of American servicemen would arrive in England in early 1942, the largest number ever invited here from foreign shores in our history. East Anglia, for logistical reasons, saw the majority of them roll in, on trucks, in jeeps and by train, the overwhelming emotion for the local population, caustic comments such as the one above aside, that of relief. Finally, someone had come to help.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group left California on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1943 heading for Kings Cliffe. What had once been a WW1 RAF base was renamed USAAF Station 367 and, on 26<sup>th</sup> August, they were here. The enlisted men had crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Elizabeth, quite a perilous journey given the U-boats and the seasickness. Some of the good people of Kings Cliffe had found out on the QT that the arrival of the 'Yanks' was imminent and duly prepared themselves. A delegation assembled at the station, doubtless in their finery, ready to meet and greet and welcome with enthusiasm. They waited with anticipation for the train to pull in at the station and for the hoards of fighting men to appear. Excitement was high. Men from California, movie stars nearly. Wowsa. Unfortunately, though, they had been slightly misinformed. Just three corporals disembarked on that summer's day.

And a doughnut machine.

Joyce Hardick from Oundle, now well into her 90s, remembers their arrival there very clearly. She happened to be heading into town the morning that they appeared and was greeted by a *'sea of khaki'*. Men were lounging. Men were smoking. Men were chatting. Men were chewing gum. They were even riding around on bicycles and Victoria Hall was packed out with them, laughing and chatting and full of confidence. Joyce experienced two new things on that first day – the taste of coca cola and what a wolf whistle sounded like. As she says *'with the American's arrival life picked up at the perfect time, giving us endless entertainment and fun'*. Close to home at Kings Cliffe, though, once billeted in Nissen huts at Old Sulehay, the men were less than impressed with their new circumstances. For one they were at a distance from the actual airfield and for two, the base had a drab and dreary appearance. Even in August there was mud (something pretty alien to your average Californian believe you me).

The first commanding officer was Colonel Barton M. Russell. Of the three squadrons in the 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group the 77<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> were based at Kings Cliffe and the 55<sup>th</sup> at nearby Wittering until May 1944. Aircraft, such as the revolutionary Lockheed P-38 Lightning, were soon shipped over from the USA and so some serious preparations for the eventual D-Day landings began.

But all work and no play makes Gene a dull boy. The men, encouraged by their commanding officers for the sake of boosting morale, set about making the base feel more like home. A snack bar, complete with that doughnut machine, soon appeared. There was a comprehensive library and a music room and even a college where the servicemen could study a wide range of subjects. Soon baseball, volleyball and softball teams were formed along with a league between various other bases as well as fencing and wrestling groups. And as they marched, dance music was played over the tannoy – The Andrew Sisters, Benny Goodman and his Orchestra and, of course, the inimitable Glenn Miller.

But back to the serious business. The first mission as a complete group flew on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1943. They were over the continent for 13 minutes with the intention of engaging enemy aircraft. Time is so elastic, though, isn't it? What was so short in minutes must have felt to some like an eternity, yet they all made it back safely to base. One of the biggest raids was over Frankfurt on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1944. This 21<sup>st</sup> mission saw the 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group participating as part of the largest force ever sent over enemy territory. By March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, their destination was Berlin itself. Thirty P-38s took off from Kings Cliffe at 1106 hours and arrived 2 hours and 26 minutes later, joining up with bombers fifteen miles west of the capital.

In September 1943 an extra hundred men arrived at Kings Cliffe, tired, dirty and hungry. They were required to perform normal duties as policemen but also to guard crashed aircraft. I remember mum saying that when a plane came down up the Fotheringhay Road some of the local children rushed there to see what had happened '*like little ghouls*'. Thankfully they couldn't get close to the site due to these policemen. My Uncle Harold had quite a collection of shrapnel that, as a boy, he was mighty proud of and mum had a fair few lapel insignia given to her by US troops at dances and the like. All that too has sadly disappeared over time. Of the dances there is more to come later, trust me, but one quick aside. October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1944, was a memorable day at Kings Cliffe. It was the venue for the last hanger concert by the legendary Major Glenn Miller and his band. Of course no one knew that at the time. Would that they had, and could have prevented his loss in the freezing English Channel on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944. The concert was held in the Callender Hamilton hangar on the base, some 2,500 personnel crammed inside, not just from Kings Cliffe itself but from other bases as this was a big deal. Civilians were not meant to attend but I suspect that a few did and what a day that must have been. After the concert the men were further treated to the Rita Hayworth and Grace Kelly movie 'Cover Girl'. You remember that scene in 'The Shawshank Redemption', when they're watching a movie, waiting for the star to flick back her flowing hair? That's Rita, a real sex symbol in her time. For the men it must have been a great day's relaxation prior to the invasion of continental Europe that finally put paid to Hitler at least, if not Stalin and the Soviet regime. That would all take until 1989 of course, and a group of Polish shipyard workers. But I repeat myself...

In latter years a memorial was erected on the site of the base by KSR International to mark the very spot where this concert took place. When you visit you are walking on the original hangar floor so forgive its appearance and unevenness. The memorial, in its turn, has been recently updated, with

information boards and seating added all around and there are plans afoot to continue the process by the gentlemen responsible for the Kings Cliffe Airfield Museum. Trevor Sharp and Mike Murray really are a fund of information about the entire history of the base and the 'American invasion' that saved our bacon in the 1940s. And, trust me, they'll be more than happy to share their knowledge with you (the museum is open on the second Sunday of every month).

The last mission, no. 312, was on April 25th, 1945. Their aim? To attack the Skoda armaments factory in Pilsen in Czechoslovakia. Uniquely, the workforce were warned ahead of time about the impending assault on the radio in an attempt to keep them from going to work, many, after all, being forced labour and free of any wrongdoing. You have to wonder how conscientious they were in their production of weaponry? Did they, like those who did the same in the Oskar Schindler factory in Brännlitz, Czechoslovakia, produce little usable ammunition on his direct order?

Since 1942, after all, things had been going ever more pear-shaped for the Luftwaffe. They were unable to launch big raids of their own, deciding therefore to try and knock morale by picking on places of historic and cultural interest, such as Bath. These 'Baedeker Raids' were so named after the famous tourist guides and were used indeed to select suitable targets.

In total, the American servicemen at Kings Cliffe participated in 312 missions over enemy territory. Twenty-eight pilots had at least five 'kills' confirmed, earning them 'Ace' status, the first two from Kings Cliffe being Lindel Graham and James 'Slick' Morris. They became known as the 'Loco Busters' due to the number of trucks, freight wagons and no less than 400 locomotives that they managed to destroy. The black and white stripes often painted on their planes would eventually identify them as Allied in the build up to and subsequent D-Day battles. Nine missions flew out from Kings Cliffe on D-Day June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944 <sup>35</sup>.

In total seventy American airmen lost their lives due to missions from Kings Cliffe throughout their time amongst us. They are buried in Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial in Madingley, a small slice of the USA just forty miles away. I remember going there as a child with mum and my brother Toni. He was a founder member of the 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group Historical Society, along with John Measures from Wansford but I was too young to really appreciate what I was looking at, education is wasted on the young after all. But I do remember that day quite vividly so it certainly made an impact. The place was immaculate. And it was peaceful.

After victory, for some at least, there was a gradual run-down of personnel after the end of hostilities in Europe in May 1945. On August 1<sup>st</sup> the airbase was opened up to visitors for Armed Forces Day. It was the children who were treated with particular generosity. A big leaving party was organized especially for them and so they came, from all the outlying villages, collected by trucks with their parents and escorted to the base. Serena and Colin Sharp, Len Chambers and Valerie Hunter all remember the event with great affection. They were driven around in the jeeps. They were allowed to sit in the cockpits of the planes. They were given a fun and carefree day with no thought of rationing. They were given tins of sweets and cocoa to take home. A photograph was taken of them all beside one of the planes and you can still pick Colin and Len and Bill Shepperson out if you look very closely. But most of all they were left with a positive impression of these generous men who had come into their lives with such a bang when this little island needed them the most.



The USAAF left for good on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1945 and the base was 'deactivated' on 18<sup>th</sup> October that same year.

Eventually, in 1959, the airfield was sold for private use. In 1961 contractors moved in to break up the runways and perimeter and the ensuing hardcore was used for the Stamford and Wansford bypasses and for rebuilding the A1 trunk road.

In 1981 the Kings Cliffe Airfield War Memorial Trust was formed. Through their efforts a memorial was dedicated to all units, a representative from each attending the ensuing ceremony. The Duke of Gloucester unveiled the memorial on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1983, the land having been donated by Frank George. It is still there of course, by the side of the road with a US and British flag flying. Take a look, make a day of it. Visit the airfield museum one Sunday, stroll down for a look at the Glenn Miller Memorial, call in at The Command Post café next door for a quick cuppa and swing by the memorial before you head home. If it's past 4:30pm you can even get dinner at Village Pizzas which is on the site where the officers once lived. Opposite is the site of the dance hall, PX and cinema. Lovely. And the 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group Historical Society is also active so keep your eye out for any special events they have up their sleeve. They keep in touch with the American side of the group too, including relatives of the men who served at the base and, of course, in 2024, opened the small museum on the site of the old air base. They would, as mentioned, love to see you and hear any anecdotes that you might like to share.

But how did the local population of Nassington and the surrounding villages take to all this? Was this 'invasion' in the end, a positive thing?

### **'How ya baby...'**

The USA is a vast country so, for many of these American newcomers, their own countrymen were something of an alien breed quite apart from the 'quaint' British locals. Troops and airmen from Wyoming would rub shoulders with those from Alabama. Mormons from Utah would encounter Italian Americans from the Bronx, Californian surfers met men from the chillier climes of Maine. All lumped together in a foreign land far from home, their own attitudes could differ wildly and segregation continued in a military context despite the exhortations of both President Roosevelt and General Eisenhower that it should not. Everyone found themselves balancing on a steep learning curve.

These servicemen knew too that, in time, their fate was to invade Europe and, potentially, fight to the death for the safety of a continent they often knew little about apart from high school history lessons or family anecdotes. Some still had axes to grind, about the treatment of their Irish forebears while others held grudges fostered way back and handed down through the generations from the War of Independence. Very many were also afraid. Others held sincere religious beliefs and had qualms about what they might be expected to do when push finally came to shove. And then there were the men now free to spread their wings far away from watchful parents and wives.

So the pressure was well and truly on both the military authorities and the local communities to make the time these foreign allies spent here as comfortable, calm and stress free as possible. Homesickness, along with everything else, would just be another hurdle to get over.

Some serious forward planning would be needed.

It was not simply in military contexts that the American servicemen and the local communities would rub up against one another. No indeed. Living near a base afforded the chance of well paid, regular employment. Suddenly there were jobs aplenty in the PX or NAAFI or created by the Red Cross in clubs. Otherwise you could do cleaning, laundry or mending. With men of fighting age out of the picture all this fell to women, both single and married, and younger men not yet conscripted. Enlisted men, when on leave, might meet the GIs in local pubs or just round and about the villages on bicycles or in jeeps and, in time, events were organized with the sole purpose of allowing the locals and incomers to mix freely. Many American servicemen were keen to get involved in the local communities or churches so, with all this fraternization on the cards, guidelines were needed to help smooth the way. Back to Joyce Hardick. She could cut a rug herself by all accounts but only in terms of the more 'traditional' dances such as the waltz and the foxtrot but the jitterbug was a thing of mystery. Luckily, though, one of the London teachers who had arrived with the evacuees taught the local girls how to do some of the more modern dances and, on one occasion at the Victoria Hall in Oundle, Joyce got chatting to a gentleman called Ray Sexton. He suggested that she help him teach the Americans how to do the British dances and they, in exchange, would teach them all how to jitterbug. He had trained at the Arthur Murray School of Dance and would eventually go home and start his own dance school. That must have been a sight. Valerie Hunter, as a child, would sit under the table in the old school hall in Nassington while her mother served refreshments. She liked to watch all the ladies dancing with the GIs you see, one of whom could well have been my Aunt Eileen. According to my mum, she loved *'flinging herself about'*.

In 1942 the United States War Department issued a seven-page pamphlet to all those going to Britain ahead of the invasion of occupied Europe. It attracted much attention here too as it gave an unusually direct view of how the British were seen abroad. A film was also made by the Strand film Company, *'Welcome to Britain'* and, together, they offer us a snapshot of a 1940s Britain 'occupied' by the 'Yanks'.

In terms of linguistic first contact it seems that George Bernard Shaw had it right. We were, indeed, two countries divided by a single language:

### FOR THE ENGLISH

### FOR THE AMERICANS

### STEREOTYPES

*'The British are regarded as 'standoffish'. Do not take offence when addressed 'How 'ya baby'. Under this 'fresh' exterior they are, simply pleasant young American boys'.*

*'Don't talk about Chicago gangsters as if they represented 90% of the population of America. The films may have fostered this impression, but the vast majority of American people live very much as we do'.*

*'You have a great chance to overcome the picture many of them have gotten from the movies of an American made up of wild Indians and gangsters'.*

### MANNERS

Privacy is valued on a small island with, then, forty-five million people. *'Keeping quiet on a train is about respecting the other person's space, not about being unfriendly'.*

## LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

*Explanations are given of what hotdogs and hamburgers are. Cookies and crackers are biscuits, candy is chocolate, French fries are chips, bills are bank notes. As for drinks a high ball is a whiskey and soda, ale is beer unless they are 'up the pole' and teetotal. Similarly trash cans are dustbins, the Five and Ten is something akin to a discount store and the drugstore is a chemist.*

*'Don't use phrases like 'bloody' or 'bum' as they will be regarded as offensive'.*

## MONEY AND CURRENCY

*Pre-decimalisation currency is explained eg twenty shillings to a pound.*

*'Wages are lower in the UK so don't make fun of their currency even if it is confusing. American soldiers enjoy the highest wages so don't throw your money about and rub it in'.*

The whole issue of 'Lease Lend' and the ensuing war debts was clearly a very touchy subject. Nazi propaganda at the time was making much of '*Uncle Shylock and his silver dollar*'.

## RATIONING

*'Don't take offence when things are compared disparagingly to 'back home'. Stay calm and explain why rationing is necessary and coupons needed, or why things are in short supply after three years of war':*

*'If an American soldier brags about his country, in all probability he is feeling homesick for it, and just to talk about it brings the homeland nearer'.*

*'If you are invited over for dinner and told to eat up, go easy. It may be the family's rations for a whole week spread out to show their hospitality'. As for food wastage, this is a definite no no as 'gasoline and food represent the lives of merchant sailors'.*

*'Offence may be taken about how we make coffee but remember that they can't make tea'.*

*'The British don't know how to make a good cup of coffee. You don't know how to make a good cup of tea. It's an even swap'.*

## COUNTER ARGUMENTS

*When Americans boast about their skyscrapers and the beauty of Niagara, the English should, politely, retort with a thousand-year-old tower of London and effigies of crusaders.*

## NAZI PROPAGANDA

*'Most important of all, remember that every time you lose your temper with an American... you are fighting Hitler's battles for him. Germany's propaganda at the moment is directed mainly to the task of separating Britain from America'.*

*'Hitler wants to drive a wedge between the USA and Britain so don't do his work for him. Don't fight old wars about the War of Independence or see them as persecutors of your Irish forebears'.*

So far, so similar, but as foreign servicemen arriving in someone else's country there were a few more sensitive areas to pay attention to:

- English as a language didn't spread throughout the world because the people are '*panty-waists*'. They are tough and have been through a lot and now want to dish it out.
- As for the weather, the '*almost continual rains and mists*' will take some getting used to.
- Size of things matters less than the age. London has no skyscrapers because it is built on '*swampy ground*' rather than rock but the Tower of London is a thousand years old.
- Britain may look '*shop-worn and grimy*' but factories haven't wasted time on making paint since 1939 and parks have few men to look after them – '*The trains are unwashed and grimy because men and women are needed for more important work..*'
- '*Be careful not to criticize the King*'.
- They are warned about things they might find wrong, like driving on the left, drinking warm beer or having money based on an '*impossible accounting system*'.
- As for entertainment American troops are advised against cricket which may seem slow to them, and towards soccer. Otherwise, they are told, the great place of entertainment is the pub which is the '*poor man's club*' where men come to see friends and not strangers. Should you meet one of your opposite number, a British Tommy, advice is firm;

*'you can understand that two actions on your part will slow up the friendship – swiping his girl, and not appreciating what his army has been up against'*

- There have been fundamental changes to everyday life to be respectful of:
  - Lights are blacked out every night
  - Road signs have been removed
  - Grazing land is now used for growing vegetables and wheat
  - Factories and workshops produce goods for the war effort
    - Women now work in factories and the fields
    - Goods are very scarce, particularly soap
- Prejudices are also subtly addressed. British women have shown their bravery under fire and earned the respect of their male counterparts so, if you see a woman in uniform with '*a bit of ribbon on her tunic – remember she didn't get it for knitting more socks than anyone else in Ipswich*'.
- Apart from the usual hints on British words and weights and measures that is pretty much that. The pamphlet ends with a final piece of sage advice...

*'It is always impolite to criticize your hosts;*

*It is militarily stupid to criticize your allies'*

And then they were here.

Vehicles, men marching, planes flying overhead, training missions, movement, noise. How would it go on to work out in reality?

Well, in our little corner of the world at least, these are some of the tales we continue to tell...

To the majority of young women of the era it must have seemed like a magical period full of excitement and music and men in dashing uniforms. It did to Joyce in Oundle, it did to my mum here in Nassington and it did to Renee Marshall in Kings Cliffe. They, after all, were not expected to go out and fight. Imagine it. Sun kissed men in smart uniforms from California with movie star accents. Goodness, some of them were actual movie stars. Clark Gable, the King of Hollywood himself, was stationed at Polebrook Airfield from May to September 1943 to direct and star in a recruitment film, *Combat America*, to help the war effort. As a tail gunner he would go on to fly at least five missions over enemy territory and would even be spotted out and about the local area. Wow. Overnight the excitement level had been ratcheted up a fair few notches and, wonder of wonder, dances were soon being organized. These men need no longer simply be admired from afar. With a hall and a dance band already in situ so all that was needed was someone to dance with. Most who remember this period comment on the generosity of the Americans in their midst and the dances they organized were no exception. To provide partners for the enlisted men military trucks would come round to the local villages on a Friday evening to collect any young women who might wish to attend. Strict regulations were put into force to ease the minds of reluctant mothers seeing their often teenage daughters driven off to a military camp for an evening of 'fun'. Importantly, an MP would count the girls on to the vehicle, off again into the dance hall, which they were not allowed to leave during the evening, and back on to the truck to take them home. Servicemen were not allowed to leave the camp with them (although, on occasion I'm reliably informed, they would hide underneath the seats and manage to sneak out...).

Providing the music and song were The Imperials. So good were they that they were chosen to open the famous Stage Door Canteen when an English version appeared in London's Piccadilly in 1944. At Kings Cliffe the dance hall was next to the cinema on the base where the young ladies from the local area would be dropped off and collected later. There was no entrance fee and no alcohol and dancing was from around 8pm until 11pm with refreshments provided half way through the evening. With rationing this alone was a real treat but, for most, it was all about joining in and watching the action. For the girls, there was never a shortage of partners nor a shortage of dances for that matter as, before long, the local villages got in on the action and organized events of their own.

In Kings Cliffe dances were held on Tuesday and Saturday evenings and on other nights in Apethorpe and Nassington too. At the Sibson camp, even after the war, dances were held on Sunday evenings. Sometimes transport was provided, by Jack Starsmore in Nassington for example, for a small fee, otherwise it was Shanks's pony or your bike. With no lights on the latter allowed, however, getting home again was a perilous affair. In Nassington dances were held both in the current school hall and also the old school hall along the Woodnewton Road which, at the time, was known as Parish House reflecting its use as a community hub. In the former, village ladies would clear desks away after school on the Friday, polish the wooden floor to make it good to dance on and put everything back ready for school on a Monday morning. Village events at whichever venue had an entrance fee of a shilling which covered the refreshments and the purchase of any records. These village affairs were not exclusively for foreign servicemen though as anyone was welcome to attend, village boys and men from other bases included. Renee Marshall from Kings Cliffe told me how well the Americans could all dance and how dashing they looked. The local girls loved to attend. The local boys understandably felt a degree of resentment at the competition for dance partners that they now had to contend with, not to mention those uniforms and those accents – my own uncle once told

me that 'no English bloke stood a chance with your mother' and the rest, as they say, is przeszłość (I'm slipping in all manner of stuff now, not just German).

There was, on occasion, trouble. Mr Terry, Headteacher at this point, made a complaint;

*'The S.A.O. called today concerning a complaint sent to the office about the behavior of foreign soldiers attending Dances at the School. This complaint is to be investigated'.*

What this behavior was, who can say. I'll leave it to your imagination. Suffice to say that dances were no longer held at the main school itself from then on.

Some struck up genuine, and lasting, relationships with young women in the area. Michael 'Ernie' Klein was born in Manistique, Michigan and grew up to own a barber's shop pre War. He went on to serve with the USAAF 8<sup>th</sup> Army based at Kings Cliffe where he would meet Barbara 'Peggy' Hull who he eventually married. They did not go back to the USA due to his mother-in-law's bad health and were married at St Michael's Church in Stamford in 1949. He would continue to work full time for the RAF at Wittering but also part-time as a hairdresser in Nassington, having his own small barber's shop attached to the Queen's Head pub which he rented. People still remember him – tall, his once jet-black hair now silver grey, glasses. He drove a big black Buick car around the area and lived in the house next to Moulds Butchers. He is remembered with great affection.

Those who chose to marry and settle in the USA had to wait, however. Due to a strict immigration policy after the war many wives didn't make it over the Atlantic until years after, some with babies and toddlers. Others, though, heading over the water to a new life were sometimes greeted on the dock by the original wife and children and had, simply, to return home. Others were indeed met by their new husband only to find that he was not, in fact, a rich man, movie star or cowboy with his own ranch but rather a simple guy with a simple home in the middle of nowhere.

Others were unluckier still. GI fathers did on occasion abandon their babies. These might be accepted by a reluctant or angry returning husband or passed off by the mother as a 'cuckoo in the nest'. Promises of undying love were sometimes broken, the soldier vanishing into thin air once their active service began. Local women and families were not always kept informed. Their boyfriend could have perished on the beaches of Normandy or simply done a moonlight flit, some would never know. Doubtless there were GIs who were never told that they had sired a child, the mother might too fearful of leaving home to travel into the unknown.

For children, though, relationships with the Americans began at a distance. Youngsters would watch their comings and goings and, eventually, begin scouring the outlying countryside for things of interest. Shrapnel and Perspex were particularly prized, especially by uncle Harold, so the rubbish dumps created by the bases acted like a magnet. Much of what was found was innocuous – empty bomb boxes to turn into rabbit hutches, things to swap, especially the highly prized cigar bands or stamps found on discarded envelopes – but there were live cartridges on occasion alongside the used ones. After three years of war people had little so, to find an unopened Field K ration tin, complete with cigarettes, biscuits and a tin of Spam well, you felt like you'd struck gold. Theirs must have been dull Christmases in the States though some children assumed, as the 'balloons' they came across after a while were always white. And not even round ones, but cigar shaped...

Quickly, though, children lost their wariness and discovered that if they asked 'Got and gum chum?' they would be rewarded with Juicy Fruit or a Hershey Bar. On a Saturday night, if they waited outside The Three Horseshoes beer would be passed out to them through the windows. Oundle Brewery soon found itself running short so great was the demand that output had to be increased.

The children began to visit the bases with little censure from either their parents or the military authorities and, in exchange, would run errands and deliver messages for the GIs they befriended. They could watch baseball or softball games on the camp, even invite them home for dinner.

And so to the men who encountered them. Some, like my uncle, were too young to fight, others too old. Many in this area were in reserved occupations, such as agriculture, food production and the railway but most, of course, were on active service and fighting abroad. They, however, would come home on leave. Uncle Harold worked on the base in the PX too. He remembered his time there, before being called up himself, as a wonderful experience. Surrounded by breezy, cheerful servicemen the work was fun and the food plentiful. Tins of peaches seem to have been a regular gift, brought home along with other treats that the family would otherwise not have got their hands on.

Certainly, though, some servicemen were invited back to people's homes for less innocent reasons. Older women were be invited to social events at the Officers Mess on the base which were altogether more adult affairs than the dances for the local girls. Cars were sent to collect them and not trucks. Refreshments were of an altogether more alcoholic kind if you preferred. The dance band was on hand too and, at least once, there was an 'exotic' dancer there to entertain the gentlemen at least. Local anecdotes suggest that love affairs were being had, sometimes illicit, by the women left at home while their husband's were away on active service ( 'everyone one, even the married ones, had an American boyfriend' mum once told me. Oh dear) These men might well have had families of their own at home but life was very much more precarious and uncertain then and how differently might we have acted under similar circumstances?

And then they were gone. Mum told me it was 'all so quiet' after they left. For Joyce 'it felt like the saddest day of our lives'. Over the intervening years various TV series and movies have been made about the relationships between the men and women who encountered one another – 'We'll Meet Again' in the 1980s, 'Yanks' in 1979 starring Richard Gere, 'The War Bride' in 2001 and, most recently the series 'Masters of the Air' which began in 2024. There are books too, 'From Faraway they Came' for example. My mother loved each and every one and, I remember, one summer's day a few years ago how thrilled she was when some American World War II planes flew over our garden heading, I suppose, to an air show. 'That was my era' she said to me and, in truth, it was. The memories that generation had of their experiences still fascinate us after all so what it was like to actually live them can hardly be imagined.

I, for one, am more than a little envious.

## Notes

For an article about the history of evacuees during WWII please refer to *p. 22- 29 BBC History Magazine February 2025, 'I felt very alone in a world gone horribly mad' Dan Todman.*

1. **Demob form** – The Polish Resettlement Bill was drawn up in 1946 and the Act passed in 1947. This allowed Poles who had fought under British command to be demobilized from the

forces and live in Britain thereafter if they so wished. It was the first ever mass immigration legislation passed by Parliament and allowed 220,000 Poles to remain here. Half chose to emigrate or return to Poland. Arrangements were made to bring immediate relatives and dependents over where possible if they had made it through to the British zone of Germany after the end of the war.

2. **Allied Occupation Forces of Germany** – the British Army of Occupation (BAOR) was responsible for the occupation and administration of the British Zone in north-west Germany after WW2. After the Potsdam Conference in 1945 the three leading Allies (USA, Great Britain and the Soviet Union) decided on the fate of post war Europe. Germany was divided into four occupied zones under the control of Great Britain, France, the USA and Soviet Union. The idea was to divide Germany to weaken it and ensure that it could not rise to its former strength.
3. **Operation Market Garden** – this was an Allied military operation fought in the German-occupied Netherlands from 17-25 September, 1944. Its objective was to create a 64 mile salient into enemy territory with a bridgehead over the Rhine to create an Allied invasion route into Germany. This was to be achieved by seizing nine bridges with a combined American, British and Polish airborne force = Market, and British landing forces = Garden.
4. **The First to Fight** – this phrase is associated with Poland with reference to their resistance against Nazi Germany. They were the first country to actively oppose invasion and 'Poland, first to fight' was a common slogan representing their stand against Nazi aggression. It is also the title of a book by Roger Moorhouse about Poland's experience in WW2 and the name adopted by a support group for relatives and friends of those who fought at Arnhem.
5. **Gulag** – The GULAG was a system of forced labour camps in the former Soviet Union. This acronym stands for the Russian phrase 'Main Directorate of Correctional Labour Camps'. They were run by a division of the secret police and were used for mining, construction and timber work. The system began in 1930 during Joseph Stalin's rule and ended in the early 1950s.
6. **The Way Back** – a 2010 movie inspired by the 1956 film 'The Long Walk', a memoir by former Polish prisoner Sławomir Rawicz who escaped a Soviet gulag and walked 4,000 miles to freedom in World War 2.. The film stars Colin Farrell, Ed Harris and Saoirse Ronan.
7. **Operation Barbarossa** – the name given to the Nazi invasion of Soviet Russia and the Axis Powers (Italy and Japan) that began on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941. 3.8 million troops invaded on the western side of the Soviet Union and it became the largest and costliest military offensive in history. By the end, on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1941, 8 million had died.
8. **Battle of Monte Cassino** – a series of four military assaults by the Allies against the Axis power, Italy. The aim was to break through and head for the capital Rome. It began on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1944. The battle, that ended four months and one day later, was an allied victory. Both a Polish and a British flag were raised over the ruins of the fort on the hill.
9. **British Red Cross** – this organization offers worldwide neutral and impartial humanitarian aid through the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movements. It was founded in 1870 with a view to offering impartial and unprejudiced help where needed. During WW2 members worked in hospitals and care homes, drove ambulances and much more, funded by an appeal that raised over £54 million. They arranged parcels for POWs and medical supplies, educational books and recreational materials. Post-war they helped reunite people through the Messaging and Tracing Service.



10. **The Battle of Britain** – in this military campaign the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy defended Great Britain from large scale attacks by Nazi Germany's air force. It was the first major military campaign to be fought entirely by air forces. It lasted from 10<sup>th</sup> July until 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1941. Nazi Germany's failure to destroy Britain's air defenses and force it out of the war was its first major defeat. The name comes from a speech made by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons on the 18<sup>th</sup> June ' *The Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin*'.
11. **Operation Pegasus** – Between October 22 -23<sup>rd</sup>, 1944 Allied military forces, M19 and the Dutch Resistance evacuated 138 men who had been in hiding since the Battle of Arnhem a month before.
12. **All Quiet on the Western Front** – 'Im Westen nichts Neues' is a German anti-war novel written by Erich Maria Remarque in 1929. It tells of a group of school friends persuaded by the adults and the propaganda around them to join up for WWI. None of them survive. The book was banned by the Nazi regime and ceremoniously burned. In its first 18 months in print it sold 2.5 million copies, has been translated into 22 languages, made into five movies (the most recent one winning the Oscar in 2023 for the Best International Feature Film) and is a regular set text on the A level German syllabus.
13. **Polish Resettlement Act** – with so many Poles wishing to remain in the UK post war a scheme was devised to help them integrate into British society. In effect, men of working age were required to take up employment with the London Brick Company, down the mines or in agriculture. Former troops were put into the Polish Resettlement Corps and expected to report to a local police station on a regular basis. Army Form B271 (Polish) states clearly that if any of the questions were willfully answered incorrectly, they were liable to 'TWO YEARS IMPRISONMENT WITH HARD LABOUR'. The Assistance Board was given responsibility for the welfare of some 12,000 Poles who arrived on or before the end of 1948. They often spoke no English and special schools were set up to help with education and resettlement. By 1950 the language of choice had changed from English to Polish and they followed the English curriculum.
14. **Nissen huts** – this is a prefabricated steel structure originally for military use, especially as a barracks. They are cylindrical in shape and of corrugated iron. After the war many were used to house the civilian population.
15. **Sikorski-Mayski Agreement** – this was a treaty between the Soviet Union and Poland signed in London on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1941. The two notable signatories were the PM of Poland Władysław Sikorski and the Soviet Ambassador to the UK Ivan Mayski. Stalin had agreed to declare all previous pacts with Nazi Germany null and void and to invalidate the September 1939 partition of Poland. He also agreed to release the many thousands of Polish prisoners held in Soviet camps. From them the Anders Army, later known as the Polish II Corps, was formed, 40,000 men strong.
16. **The Pied Piper of Hamelin** – a fairytale recorded by the Brothers Grimm, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and a book in verse form by Robert Browning based on the legend from the town of Hameln, Germany. It is a tale from the Middle Ages about a piper, dressed in multi-coloured (pied) clothing, who is hired by towns to catch their rats thanks to his magic pipe. When he plays it the rats follow him to their death in the river but, when the people of Hameln refuse to pay him his due, he lures their children away too.

17. **WW1 gas attacks** -on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1915 a wave of asphyxiating gas was released from cylinders embedded in the ground by German troops to smother the allied line of the Ypres salient. Gas attacks only accounted for 1% of the total deaths in this war but the fear factor was high thereafter, also amongst civilians. In 1925 the Geneva Protocol prohibited its use. The first to use gas in warfare were the French, who deployed tear gas in August 1914, but this merely irritated the eyes and was not deadly.
18. **V-1 flying bomb** – this was in effect an early cruise missile. Known to the Allies as the doodlebug or buzz bomb, it was developed for the terror bombing of London. The range was limited so the launch facilities were along the French and Dutch coasts. Sometimes He111 aircraft were used. The first V-1 attack was on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1944 prompted by the successful Allied landings in France. At their peak, 100 a day were fired across the Channel.
19. **Operation Pied Piper** – the name of the government programme to evacuate vulnerable children and adults from cities during WW2
20. **Fraternization** – from the Latin frater = brother. This is the act of establishing intimate or unsuitable relationships with people or groups considered unethical, controversial or problematic. In extreme cases it can be taken as a form of treason and during WW2 as Allied forces progressed into formerly Nazi occupied countries, those deemed to have fraternized were often subjected to physical attacks, such as having their hair shaven in public, beatings, or being tarred and feathered.
21. **PNF** – the Partito Nazionale Fascista was the political party created by Benito Mussolini. It was a fascist party, rooted in Italian nationalism, with the intention of restoring and extending Italian territories, similar to the Nazi idea of Lebensraum (spazio vitale in Italian = living space). The Italian Constitution bans the formation of any similar party to this day.
22. **Squatters** – squatting was a civil disobedience movement in Britain after WW2. People occupied empty military sites and houses to address the housing shortage. As they paid no rent they were deemed to be ‘squatting’ but it was not made illegal until 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2012.
23. **Desert Rats** – the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division of the British Army was named initially the Mobile Division on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1938. Their aim was to reinforce and maintain the British strategic presence in Egypt and defend the Suez Canal. It was renamed the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division in February 1940. The insignia was a jerboa, a kind of rat, hence the nickname. During WW2 they helped defeat the Germans in North Africa when very many German soldiers were taken prisoner. Unable to accommodate so many in Britain, many were sent over to Canada or the USA.
24. **PX** – American bases often referred to their shops as the PX but it was actually a system that provided soldiers with comfort items, rather than essentials, such as candy, beer, cigarettes, soap and razor blades. They were described as ‘*the world’s largest department store...run by civilians in uniform*’.
25. **Anderson shelter** – these were steel shelters built in the gardens of UK homes to protect people from air raids. They were named after Sir John Anderson, the Minister of Home Security at the time. They were often partially above ground and covered with earth and were meant to accommodate six people. The roofs were factory made and bent into shape and the shelter kits, including bolts and a spanner, could be bought. 1.5 million were distributed before the war and a further 2.1 million afterwards. If built properly, and using the correct parts rather than stuff you found lying about in your shed, they could withstand a 100-pound bomb falling six feet away.

26. **Solidarność** – this was a Polish trade union and social movement that fought for workers' rights and social change. It was founded in 1980 by Lech Wałęsa and others at the Lenin Shipyards in Gdańsk. It all began with a series of strikes against Poland's communist government which they tried to suppress with martial law. Through their resistance and determination the union grew into a non-violent anti-Communist social movement with 9.4 million members. Poland became the first non-Communist country in Eastern Europe in 1989 and Lech Wałęsa became President of Poland from 1990-95. In 1983 he also won the Nobel Peace Prize.
27. **Yalta Agreement** – between February 4<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup>, 1945 a conference was held between the three main Allies of the USA, UK and Soviet Russia to discuss postwar reorganization of Germany and Europe. They were represented by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin. The location was Yalta in Crimea, then the Soviet Union. The plan was to discuss both collective security and self-determination for the liberated peoples of Europe but the conference became the subject of intense controversy due to the decisions made with little consultation with the representatives of many of those affected.
28. **Oranienburg** – on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1933, the first Nazi concentration camp was set up in a disused brewery in the town of Oranienburg. Initially political opponents of the regime were imprisoned. It was often used as a propaganda tool, to show how well inmates were treated under the regime. Newsreels were made of this 'model' camp shown weekly in about 5,000 cinemas in the country. 3,000 would pass through its doors. Members of the Reichstag, the German parliament and politicians and intellectuals of various kinds were incarcerated here. Daily life was one of hard labour and punishments. At least sixteen inmates died in the camp. It was run by the SA (Sturmabteilung = Storm Troopers) but, after Nacht der langen Messer (The Night of the Long Knives), when the SA was absorbed into the SS (Schutzstaffel = protection unit), the camp inmates were transferred to Lichtenberg Concentration Camp.
29. **Geneva Convention** – this is a set of international laws that establish how civilians and soldiers should be treated during armed conflict. States are required to enact legislation to punish those who break the rules. The current convention, signed by participating parties in 1949, followed on from the one drawn up in 1929. The protocols were expanded in 1977 and 2005.
30. **The Army of Occupation** – The Army of Occupation Medal was awarded for military service of thirty or more consecutive days of duty in on the occupied territories after World War II.
31. **DDR** – the German name for what was known in English speaking countries as the GDR or German Democratic Republic. DDR stands for Deutsche Demokratische Republik. The East German government claimed that they protected their citizens in the east from Fascist corruption from the west and eventually built a wall to keep such interlopers out.
32. **Music Box** – this is a 1989 film starring Jessica Lange who uncovers some disturbing and unexpected facts about her father's wartime past.
33. **Zyklon B** – a trade name of a cyanide-based pesticide invented in Germany in the early 1920s. It became notorious due to its use by the Nazi regime during the Holocaust that led to the murders of 1.1 million people in the gas chambers installed at extermination camps. In 1946 the deputy executive of the company that produced it, Karl Weinbacher, was executed for knowingly selling it for this purpose to the SS.
34. **Thatcher, Thatcher, Milk Snatcher** – Margaret Thatcher, in her then role as Secretary of State for Education, abolished free milk for children aged 7-11 in 1971.

35. **D -Day** – Often referred to as D- Day, the Normandy landings that began on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, were an Allied invasion of Europe to overthrow the Nazi regime. It began with the liberation of France. The letter D is used in military operations to mark the start of an operation and stands for 'Day'.

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