

## New Forest Remembers WWII Project

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*Could you start by telling me please, your name, your date of birth and where you were born please?*

Yes, my name is Hans Herbert Strehlau and I was born in a place called Treuvenkohl and it's quite small in area, Westpreussen and it's about 80 miles or thereabout, south of Gdansk.

*Can you tell me how you came to be at Setley Camp please?*

I was a prisoner of war. We were stationed in Belgium and round about the middle of April 1946, we went on a ferry over to England, might have been Tilbury, and from there we went onto a train. Quite strange actually. There we were sitting there and just an English soldier just walking up and down, it was quite ordinary, and we ended up in Scotland somewhere. I'm not quite sure where it was, but we were there a fortnight, and primarily we didn't have anything to do. We were given good food because we were all pretty run down and sort of bring us back up to better health. We then moved to England in the Midlands and I think it was a place called Morton-in-the-Marsh, and from there we were sorted out in groups to different camps across southern England as far as I can remember. I ended up at Brockenhurst, at Setley Camp. Somewhere in the middle of May 1946.

**End: 00-02-02**

**Keywords:** POW, Setley Camp, Brockenhurst

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CHAIRMAN JULIAN JOHNSON CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

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*So you were just telling me you went out to work at Exbury farm.*

Yes. Somewhere in the middle of June 1947 the farmer, Mr Honey, asked me if I knew somebody else would like to come out on the farm, but preferably a dairyman. I knew somebody in our barrack who was the first one every morning - he was the first one up, 5 o'clock, very early bird - and I asked him and he said (chuckling) "you don't need to ask, you know, get out of here, that's alright" and we found out we were actually born both on the same day, the same year and everything else. We could have been twins I suppose. (chuckle) Yes, he did the dairying and I did all the general farm work that was necessary to do there.

*So initially you were taken out every day to the farm?*

Yes, by lorry, picked up somewhere about 8 o'clock I believe, something like that, and several of us distributed at different places, and we used to be the last one because Exbury, or Lepe Farm, was the last station. In the afternoon, somewhere about half past 4, 5 o'clock, we were picked up and went back again. Occasionally in Exbury there was a bakery and on occasion we used to get a loaf and by time we got back to the camp there was no loaf left. (chuckle)

*What other places were other people dropped off to work at? [Sorry?] Which other places did you drop people off on your route?*

That I can't really remember. It must have been at Beaulieu and also at Hill Top somewhere, I don't really remember, no.

*So, after a while you actually moved out of the camp did you, to go and live on the farm?*

Yeah, in June 1947, Rudi and I had been moved onto Lepe Farm and we were looked after by - well, were billeted at the farm. On the end of the farmhouse, there were two rooms and a separate entrance, so we could go and come as we pleased. We had our meals with the family.

**00-02-53**

*How was food? Your food would be rationed. Did you eat with the family?*

We had whatever the family had, yeah. We didn't eat together because as I said, there was

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too many but also – yes, we had a separate room and we did our own washing and drying. Well, there was no problem, we were quite used to it, we had to do it in the army, so that was no problem at all. The one thing I can remember. Mrs Honey got quite upset. We were doing the washing-up and there was water in the washing bowl and I tipped it away to get some hot water. That water was sugar ready for the bees. She had quite a few hives and she got quite upset. On the other hand, we didn't know and that was it.

Also, on the first time we had a Sunday lunch we had Yorkshire pudding. Well, we didn't quite know what to make of this, so we left it 'til last and put jam on it, (laughter) and ate it with jam and it was quite nice. I've learnt since (chuckling) – different since. (laughter) Things come back when you start talking.

*You got on well with the family?*

Yes, very well, very well indeed. Over the years we've been keeping in touch, yes. But not anymore, I don't know, they left. The children are still about, but I think they might be in Wales, they moved away for a long time.

#### **00-04-42**

*When did you leave the farm?*

After Mr Honey, there was several farm managers and we were still living there. I think it was in 1948 for about a fortnight, there was a Mr Johnson. I was there for a fortnight. He was going to move from there to Blackfield and I just helped him to move more or less. And then I went to Lepe – billeted at Lepe House. There was a gardener, and I moved there and I was looked after by wife's mother.

Let me explain a little bit more. When my wife Jean, she was looking after or help Mrs Honey with the children over the weekend while she was – otherwise she went to Hardly school. And that's how we got to know. And sometime late '48, I'm not quite sure, then I moved over to Lepe House. There was what had been a stable but was changed into living accommodation. I lived there and had my meals with my wife's mother, Mrs Stacey. And that's it, in 1950 we got married.

#### **00-06-39**

*So what other places do you remember seeing in the New Forest during the wartime?*

Well, I'm not sure about wartime, it was after the war. I can remember several times, there was somebody working on Lepe Farm – he had been in the army, an officer or something – but he was billeted at a cottage not far from Setley Camp and he had an MG car. Several

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times, I don't know how it was about – the number plate – I don't know, but he used to give me a lift back to the camp. Going along Beaulieu aerodrome doing about 70 in an MG was quite an experience. (chuckle) But also, I can still remember going past Beaulieu aerodrome still being in use. I think I'm quite right in saying, I think I saw Liberators landing and taking off, but they were really starting to dismantle then as far as I can remember. My English wasn't all that brilliant, not particularly good then, but you do pick it up.

**00-08-11**

*So thinking about the camp then, what buildings can you remember at the camp? Where did you sleep?*

There was quite a lot of barracks there, but I think it must have been Barrack 16 I was in. It was completely fenced in with barbed wire. But also on the end there was a temporary hole made, fixed up every time, but the people could go in and out. There was no problem. On weekends we were just allowed to go out, go for a walk or whatever. If you go from Setley Camp to Brockenhurst and turn right just before you get to the train gates, that's the road there still today, on a field on the right hand side there was a park and it was absolutely full of rabbits. I've never seen so many rabbits in my life. It was just nice.

*What activities did you do in the camp? Were there music or sport?*

There must have been but I can't remember to that extent but all I can remember is we had at least two concerts with prisoners, we give at the Morant Hall at Brockenhurst. I'm not sure if it's still there or not. Anyway, we used to give concerts, well at least two I can remember, and one of them I was involved as well.

We had a boxing match. One fella - I was the referee – one of them had flour in his (chuckles) gloves and the other one had soot. Now, there you are, that's the Black & White Minstrels started (laughter).

*During your free time, what did you used to do? D'you remember?*

Not really, no. I suppose reading was one of the things. Yes, reading quite a bit and walking I suppose in the Forest, but not an awful lot otherwise. Talking – exchanging - talking between ourselves, where we came from because we were from all over Germany. Several other prisoners gave me their addresses, if and when we ever got out and we needed work or something like that. I had two or three addresses I could go to, but as it was, I never needed it because in 1948, in January, everybody was discharged. I was officially discharged from the army and then I became an alien for this country and I had an alien certificate with all the particulars. That's when I ... a farm. That's when I started to get wages paid and what have you.

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**00-12-00**

*You were saying earlier, there's people of all trades in the camp. There was some wooden carvings made. D'you remember where they were positioned?*

No.

*I think they may have been over the front gate.*

Also – I can't remember – but my wife Jean, she said, what happened somebody made slippers. What they do, an old sack, take it all apart and then plaited it and made into slippers. She said I give her a pair of slippers, but I can't remember that. (laughter)

**00-12-46**

*Did you ever see any of the Italians? Had they been all moved out to the Isle of Wight, had they?*

They were already gone. I didn't see any Italians at all there, no

*D'you remember any people coming into the camp? I think some local religious people come in to give services and things, d'you remember those?*

I think there must have been because I still got a little book on the Salvation Army. Small song book I suppose it is. I've still got it up stairs. A few relics there. Yes, we must have done, but I think as things come, I just took it as it came along and carried on, that's it. I just can't remember to that extent, but yes there must have been all sorts of other things.

*Do you remember getting newspapers and seeing films and things?*

No. No, I don't think we had newspapers. We might have had a daily sheet of some sort, but I just cannot remember now.

*That's OK.*

No, no.

**00-14-20**

*In this scrapbook there are a lot of photographs. Somebody able to develop the photographs in the camp, were they?*

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No, I don't know, because that was done – every inmate if you like. (chuckles) Yes, this is a group of nine or ten. I can remember when that was done, and I think each one – now, I think that was – I don't know who that was done by but that was done quite professionally. I think that somebody must had commissioned them, but I do know who or where, or what.

**00-15-13**

*What can you remember about the camp leader, Max Mueller? Any memories?*

Max Mueller? No, not a lot. He was the leader when the – well, as far as I know – he didn't go to work. There must have been other people there in the – cooks and what have you – but I can't really remember. I think I talked to him more after we were discharged at Brockenhurst, because he was in the butcher's shop in Brockenhurst. I talked to him then once or twice but that's just about all. Otherwise I can't remember an awful lot, no.

**End: 00-16:02**

**Keywords:** Lepe Farm, Mr Honey, Exbury, Beaulieu, Hill Top, food, Yorkshire pudding, Lepe House, Setley Camp, MG car, Liberators, Barrack 16, concerts, Morant Hall, Brockenhurst, slippers, Salvation Army, photographs, Max Mueller, butcher's shop.

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