

## New Forest Remembers WWII Project

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Audio Typist name	John Martin	Transcription Date	23-02-14
Transcription file name	S-A - Steve Antczak		- OH Transcription.doc

#### Web Pages:

Oral History article:

<https://nfknowledge.org/contributions/memories-of-my-parents>

Project information:

<https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/discover/history-culture/new-forest-remembers/>

File name	S-A	015	_0001M0.WAV	Interview date: 11-12-13
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*OK Steve, for the purposes of the machine, could you say who you are and just tell me a little bit about your background of your father.*

My name is Steven Antczak. I was born here in the New Forest. My father was Stanislaw Antczak, known as Klaus to all his friends. He was born in Hamburg in Germany and he was basically taken prisoner of war by the Americans and found his way back to England after the war where he settled, married my mother and (cough) here I am. He was born in 1914 in Hamburg. His mother died two years later when the second child was born, father remarried and he ended up with a step-mother and two unpleasant step-sisters. He couldn't wait to leave home, so as soon as he was old enough to start an apprenticeship as a tailor, he went off to Gustrow, which is now in the eastern part of Germany.

When the war broke out he was called up for service. When they discovered he was a tailor, they decided he should be a medical orderly, as he put it, to stitch up the wounded. He never really talked about his life after he left Hamburg and he never talked about any action he saw during the war. Most of the stories he tells are humorous stories. For example, when he was in the south of France he never mentioned the action, even though he had some horrendous scars, which were clearly shrapnel scars, bullet wounds and so on. He never spoke a word about those. Instead, he would say how he watched the French fishermen go out in small boats and catch octopus, which they would then prepare, chop up

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and put into used lobster shells which they served to German officers in the restaurants. He found that most amusing. Told that story many times.

**00-02-16**

He was taken prisoner by the Americans in the south of France, shipped across to Africa where he spent some time. In 1944 he was taken across to Norfolk, Virginia, as a prisoner of war. Ended up in Maryland, in a POW camp and stayed there until 1946 when they started to repatriate the Germans.

**00-02-42**

He told a few stories about that time in America, when he first landed in America. He was surprised that the Americans turned out in their hundreds to see the Germans being unloaded from the trains, and they were staring very quietly and suspiciously at the Germans. When my father asked someone what they were looking at, he pointed to a poster – a propaganda poster on the wall – which shows some German storm troopers with small devilish horns growing out of their foreheads and they thought the Americans were wondering why they couldn't see any horns.

**00-03-14**

And another story he told about his time in the prisoner of war camp where he was a tailor. They presented him with a beautiful pair of US army scissors which he used for his tailoring almost until the day he died.

They saved rations to make Christmas cakes. They saved bags of sugar, bags of flour, eggs and so on, and just shortly before Christmas the Americans raided the camp to see what was there, they found all this stored food, took it outside, broke open the bags, hosed it down the drains and when they were told they were just saving it to make Christmas cakes, the Americans just replaced the whole lot, which my father found absolutely bizarre. He used to tell this story with looks of complete incredulity on his face.

**00-04-07**

He, again, he didn't talk much about anything except the humorous side of things. 1946 they decided to send him home. As I remember, he said they took him across to Scotland, and then by train and bus down to the south coast. He went across to Belgium and got as far as Brussels when they decided that they wouldn't send him back to East Germany because the Russians were apparently shooting prisoners of war that were sent back. So they brought him back to England. He ended up in Setley Plain prisoner of war camp. At some stage he was part of what they called the Hursley Pack, and it was in Hursley on a

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bus that he met my mum. Asked her out. He wanted to stay, and the only way he could really stay in England was if he were to be – if he were to volunteer for bomb disposal. Which he did, and spent the next few years, well I don't know whether he actually disposed of any bombs, he never said, but his paperwork suggests that he was a tailor in the camp, which was what his trade was.

**00-05-28**

*So Steve, tell me about exactly how your father did meet your mother.*

Well, at the time he was prisoner of war in Setley Camp, but I get the impression they weren't locked up, they were able to go out to local dances and so on for the evening, and essentially he was on a bus with one of his mates, and he saw these girls, and he took a shine to my mum. He didn't speak hardly any English at all then, so he asked his mate to ask her out on a date, and that was that. Before you know it they were married. They got married in 1950 in fact.

**00-06-07**

After the war was over, he really didn't want to know anything about Germany. He cut all connection with Germany. We suspect that was because he didn't want to go back to the east of Germany. He never had very much of a happy childhood in Germany. He had a family now in England and that's where he wanted to stay. So, he literally cut all connections. He wouldn't speak the language. We could easily – the children – be bilingual, but not one of us can speak a word of German. All connections were completely cut.

**00-06-46**

*Just talking about your mother. What did you mother do during the war?*

Well, before the war she wanted to be a hairdresser but they couldn't afford the apprenticeship, so she ended up in service, which she didn't really like, although she did learn to become a fantastic cook. But when the war broke out, she decided to volunteer for the transport corps. She went home and told her mother that she'd been called up, which was the only lie she says she's ever told in her life, but she basically spent the war driving 3ton trucks around the south of England.

She told some wonderful stories about how all the road signs had been taken down and so they had to navigate by the pubs. So to find your way from Hampshire up to London, you followed the pubs, and if you didn't know you'd ask someone directions from one pub to the other. She never actually went into a pub, but she knew every pub in the south of England by name, and she could even tell us as we were coming up to a bend, she'd say "Oh

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there's the so and so pub around the corner", and sure enough, there it was.

**00-08-00**

About 1943, an American general needed a driver, and one wasn't available, so they called on my mum to say "Can you drive a car as well as a truck?" and she said "Well I'll give it a go". Apparently she gave this general such a smooth ride that he wanted her to permanently be his driver, which she was. So she actually visited quite a lot of American bases, and she had a very, very low opinion of Americans.

**00-08-30**

She tells a couple of stories. One of which was, she went to one base and she couldn't believe the food that she was offered, but they only had one large plate. So she had her steak and potatoes and beans and gravy on one side of the plate, and peaches and cream on the other. And she just found that astonishingly disgusting. She told that story so many times (laughter) when we were children, I just can't remember when she didn't tell that story.

And on another occasion she was there when they were decamping, and she was horrified by the waste. Instead of giving food that they didn't want to take with them to the local people, they simply dug a big hole, tipped the food in, punctured the cans as they went in and buried it. And she found that as she put it "sinful". So again, my mother had a very low opinion of the Americans during the war.

**End: 00-09-28**

**Keywords:**

Hamburg, Germany, Americans, England, tailor, Gustrow, wartime stories, prisoner of war, Setley POW Camp, Hursley Pack, bomb disposal, transport corps, navigate by pubs, American camps, disgusting waste of food.

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