

TELLING OUR STORIES, FINDING OUR ROOTS ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW SUMMARY FORM

Date of interview	14 th September 2020
Location of interview	Remote
Name of interviewee	Tony Olszowski
Name of interviewer	Jolanta Wilson & Nicole Redfern
Length of interview	00:36:18
File format, storage format	WAV, hosted on Soundcloud. Digital copy obtainable from DDE.

Tags:

Polish naval camp ; Polish Resettlement Act ; second generation story ; ancestors ; heritage; research ; identity ; family ; Poland ; World War Two ; Okehampton

Interviewee's wishes regarding use of interview

None.

Interviewer's notes / any issues on recording

None

Linked objects/photographs.

Tony discusses a photograph of his father at the Okehampton Resettlement Camp.

Key themes and topics covered in the interview

Theme / topic	Timecode on recording
Tony's father's involvement with Okehampton Camp	[01:42-02:09], [02:30-03:15] [06:41-07:39], [12:15-12:57]
Feelings about Okehampton Camp	[04:38-04:45], [05:30-05:42], [06:19-06:35]
Perception of British attitudes to Polish personnel	[04:56-05:29], [17:40-18:50]
War Record	[09:59-10:59], [28:28-28:51] [29:55-30:19], [31:08-32.19]
Research into family background	[09:37-09:59], [19:12-23:25]
Feelings of Tony's father and his compatriots about the war	[25:06-27:38]
Time in America	[10:18-10:46], [32:20-33:21]
Post-war life and career	[13:27-15:25]
Recognition for service	[34:21-35:11]

Interview highlights

Interview summary

Tony Olszowski is being interviewed to talk about his father Stanislaw's connection to Okehampton. He shows a photo taken at Okehampton Polish Resettlement Camp after the end of the Second World War [01:21-01:36]. Tony explains that his father was in the Polish Navy during the war and that at the end of the war he joined the Polish Resettlement Corps and was at Okehampton Camp to help prepare Polish Forces for civilian life [01:42-02:09]

Tony goes on to explain the two purposes of the Camp. Firstly as a 'land ship', the ORP Baltic to train Polish naval personnel and , after the war when the naval camp was dissolved, as a resettlement camp [02:30-03:12].

Tony goes on to talk about what his father told him about his time at Okehampton Camp [03:13-06:37]. He points out the barbed wire in the photo of his father and says he once referred to it as, 'almost like being in a concentration camp' [03:13-03:39]. He says he thought his father felt like this because of what was happening in Great Britain at the time, ie concerns that Poles remaining in the country would take employment from returning British Forces [04:38-05:23]. Tony explains that he believes that his father had expected to go back to a free Poland at the end of the war but that this didn't happen because of the political situation there [26:34-26:52].

When asked about training for residents of the camp, Tony says that his father had trained to be a Second Mate as though he was intending to go into the Merchant Navy, which was common among Polish personnel. Tony deduces that they were doing training for this while at the camp [08:00-09:01].

Tony talks about his research into his family background which he knows well, having visited Poland several times the first being at the age of 10 [19:25-20:36]. He knows that his father was born in Sośnica in 1920 which was then in Germany. However, in 1921 it became part of Poland and his grandfather took Polish citizenship [20:37-22:00].

Tony talks a little about his father's early life in Poland and why he joined the Navy. His father told him that it was because, 'it seemed like an exciting thing to do' [15:30-15:45]. Tony says he feels that the impending outbreak of war and the fact that his father was a spirited person were also contributing factors [15:49-16:41]. He thinks that his father had been keen to teach and taught younger students at the gymnasium. He feels this desire led him to teach in later life and specifically to his work at Okehampton Camp [16:42-17:11].

Tony talks at some length about his father's war record. He did his officer training at ORP Baltyk at Devonport before the naval training base was moved to Okehampton [11:42-12:09]. He served on a number of Polish vessels during the war, the last of which was ORP Garland [11:20-11:38]. He also served on the George V which was involved in the sinking of the Bismarck [30:01-30:20].

Tony explains that he would like to have learned more about his father's war record [30:55-31:17]. He is particularly interested in an incident when his father, in his first posting as a Navigation Officer collected a submarine from the American Navy in Connecticut and sailed it to the UK and then saw action in it escorting convoys to Russia in 1942. He was injured during this and spent some time in a Russian Hospital. Tony would like to have known more about this experience [31:18-32:19]. Tony says he would also like to have known more about his father's time in America. He is particularly interested in the will he wrote at that time leaving his possessions to his mother and to a 19 year old girl in New London, Connecticut [32:20-33:21].

Interview summary

When asked about his father's life after the war Tony explains that he married in 1946 and between his marriage and the disbanding of the Polish Resettlement Corps in 1949, he lived in the camp but went backwards and forwards to Darlington where his wife was living. There he gained employment and engineering qualifications [06:30-07:39] and eventually set up home there, training firstly as a draughtsman and taking qualifications at Constantine College (later Teeside Polytechnic). He had a successful teaching career, gaining an MPhil and becoming a principal lecturer. He continued to live in Teeside after retirement [13:28-15:24]. Tony believes that his father never returned to Okehampton but that he returned to places in Scotland where he had been based with the Northern Fleet [28:18-28:51.& 29:32-29:56]. He maintained his links with his Polish colleagues through the Polish Naval Association and wrote extensively for the Association's magazine *Nasze Sygnały* (*Our Messages*) [28:54-29:16].

Tony concluded by saying that his father's service had been recognised by awards by both the Polish Navy with the Cross of Valour and the Polish Government with the rank of Podporucznik Komandor [34:21-35:11].

Tony thought his father would be proud of the research he had done [24:28-24:50]. Tony says he is proud of his heritage and obtained Polish citizenship in 2019 [23:40-24:09].