Antoni Jałowiczor (1915-1971)

Antoni Jałowiczor – around 1947.

I was born on the 15.03.1915 in Istebna, a village situated in a very picturesque part of Southern Poland. My father's name was Jan Jałowiczor and my mother's maiden name was Zuzanna Karch. My father died in 1937, whereas my mother died later in the 1960s. 1938 saw me called to serve in the 3-Pułku Strzelców Podhalańskich (3rd Regiment of Riflemen, Podhalańskich) in the town of Bielsko. When war broke out and throughout the whole of the September campaign until the 20th of September, I was still serving in this unit when I was taken prisoner by the Germans near the small town of Terespol (Poland). After three days, I escaped and returned home to my mother in Istebna where I had previously worked on my father's land. In December 1939, the Germans were collecting signatures for the Volksdeutsche list; I refused to sign, because I considered myself a Pole. Nazi thinking considered "Volksdeutsche" to mean ethnic Germans living outside the country but *without* German citizenship.

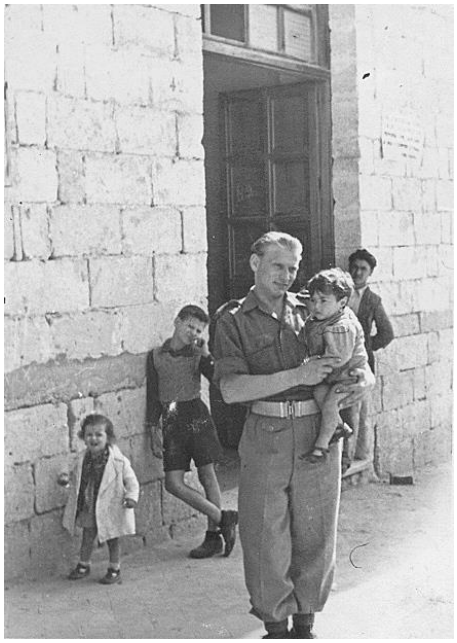
On the 5th of February 1940 at 5:00am the Gestapo came to my house and, without any reason, they arrested me. Interrogation took part in the public house in Istebna, where for the first time a member of the Gestapo hit me across the face. There were others from the neighbouring

villages and we numbered twenty-eight. After the interrogation, we were taken away in trucks to prison in the nearby town of Cieszyn, where such events took place on a daily basis with beatings on every occasion. We were threatened with hanging. On one such occasion, we were ordered out of our cells, and told that we were going to be hanged; we were escorted out to the back-yard, but no hangings actually took place. On another occasion, we had to watch the hangings of fellow prisoners while the Gestapo laughed that our turn would soon come. They referred to us as 'Polish swine'. In Cieszyn, a small cell was home for three months, crammed-in with thirty others, the extreme lack of space meant we were forced to stand up all the time. One day we were issued with clothes, and told that we were going to be taken to a place from which we would never return. From there, we were taken to the Stalag VIIIB Lamsdorf Prisoner of War Camp where I was issued with the number 8349. On arrival, I was so unwell that I asked to see the Doctor in charge of the prisoners. The diagnosis was complete exhaustion, extensive stomach problems and damaged kidneys resulting from being kicked by the Gestapo in Cieszyn. The Doctor put me in the sick hall where I stayed for a number of weeks.

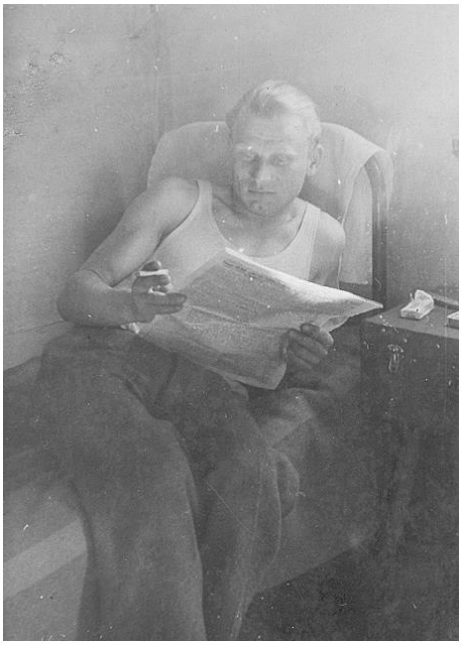
In Lamsdorf, the conditions were pitiful and we slept in a stable on bare concrete with no covers and often in wet clothing. No work clothes were issued and we wore the same clothing that we had left home in; we received clogs after our shoes had been completely worn out. Lamsdorf was a real trial of hunger. My daily ration was 240g of bread for dinner, a bowl of watery soup with potato peelings. In Lamsdorf, we also had a long distance to walk to work, which involved regulating river flow. I stayed here for around three months. Then I was transferred to a transit camp in Trier, Germany after France was taken. Colmar penal camp in Alsace, France was our next destination. The 1940-41 winter was a particularly hard one and we carried out many duties such as digging up the corpses of German soldiers who had fallen during the invasion of France. The bodies had been temporarily buried in a field in Sélestat near René (about 169km from Paris). My other duties involved working briefly in Hausmanfabrik, a textile factory, and clearing the roads of snow. We suffered hunger, cold, had no overalls, no footwear and the lice were awful. The soldiers in charge were very cruel and punished the frozen, hungry and emaciated prisoners for the slightest shortcomings in their work. Our time in Colmar was spent in an old five-storey factory where we slept on plank bunk-beds. We had one blanket each and suffered greatly from the cold. There were no toilets here, only a latrine in the middle of the courtyard and this could be only be used from 6:00am to 9:00pm. After these hours the soldier on sentry duty would shoot without warning. On one occasion, a prisoner went to the latrine after the permitted hours and the sentry shot him, wounding him badly. The wounded man started calling out for help in agony, so one of his fellow inmates started to creep towards him. Some machine gun fire soon stopped our hero in his tracks, and our injured colleague sank into the pit. We were only allowed to retrieve him the next day when the latrine could be used again. The soldier on sentry duty was awarded a promotion, an award and two weeks holiday. I was to remain in the Colmar camp until March 1941.

The remaining paragraphs are available in the book.

I left Italy in 1946, bound for England together with the Polish Army. October 1947 saw me demobbed and I registered for work. I became a British citizen in 1962 visiting Poland for the first time since the war in August 1963 to see my mother; it was during this visit that I married. My wife came to England in April 1964 and we had a son a year later. I worked as a miner in the Rotherham area.



Italy, 1946.



Before being demobbed in 1947.

Maria, Peter and Antoni Jałowiczor, Ferham Park, Rotherham, 1966.

Rotherham Polish community pioneers, Antoni Jałowiczor, Witold Grzesik and Walter Grabowski. Taken at the Polish Club, Rotherham in the 1960s.

This account was put together from Antoni's statements about his war years. He was very active in the Ex-servicemen's Association. He died in 1971 from a stroke at the age of 56 leaving his wife and son (the author).