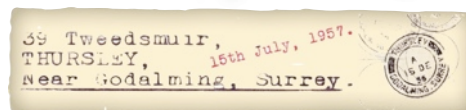

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No 6 Polish General Hospital 1947 - A Story from Jozef Goj

I was born on the 12 December 1947 in the early morning at the hospital (*Diddington*). My birth certificate doesn't mention my father only my mother's maiden name, Maria Murzyniec.

The details about my personal history are sketchy as the only information I have to hand is what my mother told me about when talking to her on my 16th birthday and on other odd occasions.

My mother as a sixteen year old was given twenty four hours to present herself at the local railway station (*in Poland*) with a suitcase. She was placed on a cattle truck and spent some three to four days in transit for an unknown destination. During this time, only water was provided and food was scarce. A girl Anna she met in that cattle truck had some bread that was going green wanted to throw it away but my mother ate it as she had run out of food and was so hungry. They became and were friends for the rest of their lives. They reached an unknown assembly point where they were stripped naked and examined by a female doctor. My mother and another girl were kept back until they had processed all the persons. The doctor then decided to allow my mother and the other girl to rejoin the others. She believed that she was held back to become either a medical experiment patient or as a prostitute in the brothels for soldiers. Her friend Anna worked in a Public house some 4 kilometres from the farm she was at and they were able to meet occasionally.

My mother spent time in Austria as slave labour on a farm during the war and travelled down through Italy to Trani where she met my father after liberation. She, I believe, was sent to the UK overland along with Polish Army troops.

From what she told me, the general maternity ward (*at No.6 Polish Hospital - Diddington*) was on one side of the parade ground that was in the centre of the camp. The baby delivery room was in a building on the opposite side of the parade ground and as mothers went into labour they were wheeled across for the final stages of delivery.

In December 1947 England had one of the worst winters in living memory and the ground was covered in deep snow as well as being very cold. Even though the walkways between the maternity wards and delivery room were under corrugated roofs, they did not prevent the snow drifting to such a depth that hospital staff were unable to use trolleys. As a consequence my mother had to walk, in labour, assisted by a nurse either side of her, from one side of the parade ground to the other through the snow. Although my mother was

taken over to delivery the previous day and was in labour till the morning of the 12th December, my birth went ahead as normal.

My mother often recalled how another woman in Diddington hospital, who gave birth to a little girl called Maria, had lost her milk to 'milk fever'. As my mother was a strong strapping healthy individual she had a surplus of milk, which she shared with the little girl. To this day I still tell people that I would have been a far stronger and bigger person if I hadn't had to share my mum. When you consider I am 5ft 11inches tall and as a sixteen year old weighed some 12 stone and in those days it was muscle you will understand that I say this with pride and jokingly. My mother did not remember the name of the family but perhaps Maria is out there and shares the story of how her own mother wasn't able to feed her and shared my mum.

My father Henryck Lucas Goj was, at the time, working in the coal mine of South Wales as were many Poles who had three choices for work. Unless they had qualifications they went to the mines or as farm labourers or into domestic service. As my father was unable to obtain any immediate transport from South Wales to Diddington in Cambridgeshire, it was not possible for him to attend my birth and consequently his name was not placed on my birth certificate.

I have the original birth certificate and a photo of me in a pram with the typical Nissan hut in the picture but I do not know where it was taken.

Like many Poles of his generation who went through WW2, my father was very reticent to speak about his experiences during the war. Although he mellowed slightly just before he died, I can only piece together snippets of information from what he told me. When he gave me his paperwork I must confess that I had never seen it before. I do have a couple of his medals but the ribbons have been stained with ink. Apparently I did this when very young as my mother gave them to me to play with.

I have a few photos of a wedding that happened, I believe, in Trani and some of my father in uniform in Italy. I do not know how long he spent there, but shortly after my father and mother married in Eastleigh, Hampshire and lived on various farms until they purchased their first home in Basingstoke before they moved to Newfound, a small village outside Basingstoke.

My parents stayed in Hampshire, UK for some 21 years until they divorced and separated. In August 1979 I decided to emigrate to Australia and my mother joined me later. My father stayed in England until he died and his ashes were taken to Poland to be buried with his mother.

This is the best I can remember of what I was told.

Jozef Goj

(NB: Editor's italics)