

## **My Father Kurt, came to England as a prisoner of War in WWII**

My Father, Kurt came from a family of farmers who lived in a small village called Panknin in Pomerania, Germany. Today the village is part of Poland and is named Pekanino. It lies between Stettin and Kozsalin and is 20 minutes from the Ostsee (Baltic).

This photo might possibly be the last day he ever saw his mother and grandparents again.



Kurt's ambition was to join the police and to get out of farming. However with World War II underway life took a different turn. When Kurt turned 16, he signed up to be a tank driver. At 17, he had three months training and entered the war around the time of D Day in June 1944. He fought first in Caen and around 21st August 1944 he was wounded in the battle for Falaise (the Falaise Gap). This is where the Germans were encircled by the allies. Fortunately, he was rescued by the Red Cross, became a Prisoner of War and was transferred to a hospital ship and to Southampton.

Kurt became a prisoner of War at a camp called Sandbeds near Selby and ended up back in farm work again. He was eventually taken on by a farming family in Lindley near Otley and attended the local dances held in Leathley, which is where he met our mother. They married in 1952.



During this time Dad had no idea whether his parents and sister had survived the war.

In 1953 my grandad Emil, managed to locate Dad through the Red Cross.

He wrote to tell Dad that he should stay in England or go to Sweden where some of his cousins were now living, rather than return to Germany.

### **What happened to my father's family after the war.**

The book 'Flucht und Vertreibung' describes what happened to the people living in Pomerania during the Winter of 1944 onwards. In 1945 at Cecilienhof, in Potsdam, Presidents Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill held a conference to re draw the boundaries of Germany.

My Father's homeland in Pomerania had been ceded to Poland. The Poles were sent to live in the German houses and take over their farms. Many families were given merely 20 minutes notice to collect their possessions, leave the keys in the lock and head west. Many died on the way in the disorganised treks that started in the Winter of 1944, even before the actual conference had taken place.

My Grandad ended up in a labour camp for some time digging graves. In that camp he got to know a lady who he fell in love with and after the war in 1951 they had a daughter, Helga (my half auntie).

Grandad Emil eventually started a new life in Thüringen in East Germany.

In 1976, Kurt became a British citizen. This enabled him to get a passport and travel with his family to see his father, sister and half-sister who he had last seen in 1944.

Photo of Grandad Emil, Mum and us two daughters.

This was the one and only time he ever saw his own father and sister again.



Kurt never wished to return to his place of birth since it was no longer Germany, but his eldest daughter wanted to see the area he had come from.

In 2017, she and her husband travelled to Pekanino (formerly Panknin) to try to identify the farm he had lived in.



With no ability to speak Polish and no address, she took some photos of derelict farmhouses, now surrounded by modern Polish dwellings and decided that this building or one similar may have been the family farmstead.

She also took photos of storks which Kurt told her always returned to the same chimney every year.



**Kurt with his seven grandchildren**



Karen Oxtoby (Nee Marczinke)

