

Willy Gerhard Reinhold Schuh



Born in Lauenburg, Pomerania, my Opa (grandfather) was the son of Reinhold and Alice Schuh. He grew up in Germany, fought in the Second World War, and was held in captivity as a prisoner of war in England. At the war's end, he eventually made his way back to Germany and reunited with his family. Due to the lack of employment, he then emigrated to the United States. It was in New Jersey that he made a new life for himself marrying a first generation German-American and having four children. His plans of returning to Germany were unfulfilled as his life was unexpectedly cut short.

I never met my Opa, but I have always been interested in learning more about him, especially life in Germany as a young man where he had to abandon his family not knowing if he would even survive the war. This booklet contains the transcripts taken from interviews I have had with family members within which they discuss their memories and stories about him, allowing me to piece together his life.

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Irene's Memories

(Younger sister of Willy Schuh)

What was life like before Willy joined the war?

As you know, my brother and I were 12 years apart and when he went away to do his apprenticeship, specifically to do his locksmith apprenticeship, I was 2 or 3 years old and I have no recollection. Then at 18 when he finished his apprenticeship he went to war, into the Air Force. I still don't have many memories, I just know it was 1944 and he came again to visit us for Christmas and he stayed for 14 days, and then he went back to the war again. And then 3 weeks later came the news that he had been shot down, then he was with the parachuters, and he was captured by the English.

What do you remember of Germany during the war?

I have very bad memories of the wartime because the Russians came to us in 1945 and we had to flee to Berlin where we were in a camp, and then in 1945 the end of the war came and we went to North Germany and then my mum and I... my father was taken away by the Russians and never returned from the war, and my brother was M.I.A. [missing in action].

I don't know anymore which year it was; it was 1946 or '47 when my brother came home from being an English prisoner.

I don't have a clear memory of this anymore, because I was 5, no?... how old was I then?... yes I was then 11 years old and my brother stayed for 2 years in Germany and then emigrated to America.

I experienced no real childhood with my brother, then somehow, he was always somehow a stranger to me as I was much too little and then later, I had no real memories.

What was Willy like as a young man? As a brother?

I only really know through stories from my mummy and I know that he was a very caring son and also he was very loving to me, but the time was simply too short, and the age difference was simply too big.

It also made me very sad when he went away again abroad to America.

Did you get any letters from Willy during the war?

Yes, it is definitely possible that we received letters from him but again I was much too little, and my mother most definitely got some, but I cannot answer that, I don't know 100%. I know I can only remember the letter which told us of Willy's possible capture and being M.I.A. And afterwards letters came but they have all gone missing ...when we escaped, they all went missing. So, I cannot say more.

Do you know what happened when Willy was captured? Were you informed?

Yes, we were informed und you can imagine the reaction when such terrible news comes that your son was shot down over England. He was with the parachuters and one doesn't even know if he is still alive or if he has perhaps been captured, but we didn't know for definite and we found out shortly before Christmas – the news - 1944. It was terrible news. I can remember how my parents were devastated and just

wandered around crying. I didn't really take it all in as I was not that close to my brother, but I was also sad and I also cried but it was a terrible Christmas, 1944.

And what was your reaction when you saw him again?

Yes, that was naturally a happy surprise and my mother and I were very happy and he was released fairly quickly from captivity. We had him home again and then we lived in Oldenburg.

And how was the farewell when Willy went to America?

Yes, it was sad when the farewell came, I hadn't had so much contact with Willy but despite this he was my brother and when he went away, I was sad and my mother was even more so.

Did you write each other letters?

Yes, naturally my mother wrote letters with Willy, I less so, but we had telephone contact and shortly before his death he wanted to visit us in Germany.

Did you ever talk to him about what happened during the war and his time as a P.O.W.
[prisoner of war]?

Hmm, during the war those were definitely not nice times for him, then he was with the parachuters and went into the air and always had the fear of being shot down. He was held in captivity for a while, firstly he was in a camp in England, where that was

exactly I don't know, I just know from being told which is what I am relating – he didn't have it very good in the camp but then they were divided up and he went to a farmer, where they had to work and there he had it much better. They had enough to eat and the people were very friendly, and it was good there until the time he was released.

Irene's Memories in German

Ich eh weiß... war mein Bruder und ich zwölf Jahre aus einander. Als er fort ging in die Lehre und zwar hat er eine Schlüsselerlehre gemacht aber ich war 3 Jahre alt, da hab' ich keine Erinnerung dann mit achtzehn als er seine Lehre beendet hatte, ist in den Krieg gegangen zur Luftwaffe und da habe ich auch keine Erinnerung, ich weiß nur das war 1944 da kam er nochmal zu Besuch... zu uns... das war kurz vor Weihnachten da war er 14 Tage da und er musste er wieder zurück in den Krieg und dann kam drei Wochen später die Nachricht, dass er abgeschossen wurde, denn er war bei der Fallschirmjäger und kam in Englische Gefangenschaft.

Ja, also ich hab' eine sehr schlechte Erinnerung von der Kriegszeit den... wir sind ja dann... bei uns kam ja dann der Russe 1945 da sind wir geflüchtet... nach Berlin. Und da waren wir in so einem Auffanglager und als um '45 im Mai der Krieg verendet war, sind wir dann nach Nord Deutschland gekommen. Und haben dort, also meine Mutti und ich, denn mein Papa ist ja bei den Russen verschleppt worden... der kam nicht mehr Heim aus dem Krieg, und mein Bruder war vermisst. Ich weiß nicht mehr welches Jahr das war, das war 1946 oder '47 wo dann mein Bruder aus Englischer Gefangenschaft nach Hause gekommen ist.

Eine große Erinnerung hab' ich da auch nicht mehr, denn da war ich dann fünf, ne' ich war ja dann auch schon... wie alt war ich da?.. ja da war ich elf Jahre alt da war dann mein Bruder noch zwei Jahre in Deutschland und ist aber dann ausgewandert nach Amerika. Und ich habe ja eigentlich mit meinem Bruder überhaupt keine Kindheit erlebt, irgendwie war er für mich irgendwie immer ein Fremder gewesen, denn ich war ja viel zu klein und auch später, da habe ich keine große Erinnerung mehr.

Ich kann nur praktisch er von Erzählungen von der Mutti weiß ich, dass mein Bruder ein sehr Fürsorglicherer Sohn war und auch zu mir war sehr liebevoll nur die Zeit war einfach zu kurz und der alters Unterschied war zu groß. Es hat mich dann ja auch sehr traurig gemacht als er dann auch wieder fortgegangen ist in die Fremde und zwar nach Amerika.

Habt ihr Briefe von Willy während des Krieges bekommen?

Ja das kann schon sein, dass wir Briefe bekommen haben nur ich war viel zu klein dafür... die Omi hat ganz bestimmt welche bekommen, aber das kann ich nicht beantworten. Ich weiß es nicht 100%. Ich weiß nur, ich kann mich an den Brief erinnern, wo er vermisst war.

Weißt du was passierte als Willy gefangen genommen wurde?

Ja, ich weiß nur, dass da ein Briefe gekommen ist und... eh... wo er vermisst war... und zwar ist er in England abgeschossen worden da er bei den Fallschirmspringern war, aber mehr kann ich dazu auch nicht sagen.

Habt ihr während der Kriegszeit von Willy Briefe bekommen?

Da sind bestimmt Briefe angekommen, nur ich habe das nicht mit gekriegt, weil ich da noch viel zu jung war, und der einzige Brief, an den ich mich erinnern kann war der, wo Willy in Gefangenschaft gekommen ist und galt als vermisst. Und danach kamen Briefe, aber sie sind alle verloren gegangen, da kann ich... durch die Flucht sind sie verloren gegangen mehr kann dazu ich nicht sagen.

Weißt du was passierte als Willy gefangen genommen wurde? Wurde ihr informiert, wie habt ihr reagiert?

Ja, wir wurden informiert und du kannst es ja vorstellen, also wenn so eine böse Nachricht kommt, dass dein Sohn abgeschossen worden ist und weil der bei den Fallschirmjägern war und man weißt nicht wo, ob er noch lebt?... vermutlich ist er in Gefangenschaft gekommen das war alles offen, wir wussten nicht Bescheid und das kam kurz vor Weihnachten die Nachricht 1944. Das war 'ne schreckliche Nachricht, ich kann mich erinnern wie meine Eltern am Boden niedergeschlagen waren, sind alle nur weinend 'rumgelaufen. Ich habe das nicht ganz so mitbekommen, weil ich diesen engen Kontakt zu meinem Bruder nicht hatte. Ich... mir war's... ich war ja auch traurig und habe auch geweint aber es war ein schreckliches Weihnachten... '45... nee '44 war das.

Wie war die Reaktion als ihr ihn wieder gesehen habt?

Ja das war natürlich eine freudige Überraschung. Da haben... die Omi und ich, wir haben uns sehr gefreut und er ist ja dann auch bald aus der Gefangenschaft entlassen worden. Und wir hatten ihn wieder zu Hause. Da wohnten wir in Oldenburg.

Wie war der Abschied als Willy nach Amerika ging?

Ja der war schon traurig als der Abschied kam, ich hatte nicht so den Kontakt zum Willy gehabt aber trotzdem, er war mein Bruder als er dann gegangen ist, dann... war ich dann auch schon traurig und die Omi natürlich auch, meine Mutti natürlich viel mehr.

Habt ihr euch gegenseitige Briefe geschrieben?

Ja, natürlich die Omi hat Briefe geschrieben mit dem Willy, ich weniger aber wir hatten mal telefonischen Kontakt gehabt, das war kurz bevor er nach Deutschland... eh eh uns in Deutschland besuchen wollte.

Habt ihr jemals mit ihm darüber gesprochen wie es ihm als Gefangener ging und während der Kriegszeit?

Ja während der Kriegszeit, das war bestimmt keine schöne Zeit für ihn, denn er war ja bei den Fallschirmjägern und war er viel in der Luft und immer die Angst abgeschossen zu werden die hatte er natürlich gehabt, ne? und in der Gefangenschaft war er ja auch einiger Zeit... da war er erst im Lager in England, wo das direkt war dass kann ich... das weiß ich nicht, ich weiß aus Erzählung und von hören sagen, weiß ich nur was ich jetzt wieder gebe, dass ist im Lager nicht sehr gut hatten aber dann wurden sie aufgeteilt und kam zu Bauern, wo sie arbeiten mussten und da ist es ihm gut gegangen. Da hatten sie auch viel gut zu Essen gehabt und die Leute waren auch sehr freundlich also da ist es ihm nicht schlecht gegangen, bis dann die Entlassung kam und er wieder zurück nach Deutschland kam.

Martin's Memories

(Third son of Willy Schuh)

Did Opa ever tell you stories about his time during the war? His time in the Luftwaffe? As a foot soldier?

Papi [dad] frequently told 2 stories. One of missing a train that was supposed to bring him to a big battle. That train was blown up by the allies. He truly had a guardian angel. The other story was how his troop once snuck into a farmer's barn to gather fresh eggs. I cannot recall if they were caught by the farmer.

Did he talk about his family life before and after the war? The loss of his dad?

Papi rarely spoke of times before the war and he never returned to Germany after being released from the P.O.W. camp in England. He was very grateful to the farmer family that took him on as a farm hand in England. He was quite upset when his dad was taken away, presumably to a work camp. He never saw his dad again.

Did he say much about him being captured and being a prisoner of war in England?

Rarely did Papi speak of being captured or his time in the P.O.W. camp as I remember. He also only mentioned a few times that he was injured, shot in the ankle just missing the bones and Achilles tendon, and that his boot felt 'warm' at the time. It was filled with blood.

Do you remember him telling you anything of his youth and growing up in Nazi Germany?
And then him relocating to the U.S.?

Nothing that I can remember Papi recounting his youth. He came to the U.S.A. by ship with his German rifle, but I can't add anything else.

What is your fondest memory of him?

Listening to him play his BASS-48 accordion. I believe Uncle Bobby has it now. Also, I was enamoured watching him disassemble and reassemble his rifle occasionally at the kitchen table in under 30 seconds. Uncle Bobby has that rifle. I believe it to be a German Mouser.

The other memory is when he and Mutti [mum] recounted the story of moving Campbell Plastics, where he worked, from Springfield N.J. to Schenectady N.Y. Papi supervised the disassembly of the machinery, mostly laminating, printing and extruding machinery for the auto business, and boxing it up with only machine number and box number. Once shipped and reassembled in Schenectady under his guidance it took little to get the machines back up and running. Papi was very mechanical.

What was he like as a dad? As a husband?

Papi was loving but strict and sometimes short fused.

Did he ever talk about going back to Germany? Wanting to see his family?

Yes. The kids gave them a trip to Germany for their 25th anniversary, May 3rd, 1978.

Papi was very excited about going and even got an international driver's license.

Sadly, Papi passed away, June 10th, 1978, prior to the trip. Your mom went with Mutti to Germany instead.

Papi only saw his mom once after coming to the states. I believe it was in 1957 or 1958 shortly after I was born.

Robert's Memories

(Second son of Willy Schuh)

When he was younger, before the war, he was in the Hitler Jugend. He was in the Hitler Youth, which was kind of like boy scouts, but of course in Germany. He was old enough to drive a motorcycle because that's where he learned to drive a motorcycle, in fact one of the reasons he went into the Hitler Jugend was to be able to ride motorcycles. I think he chose it [to be in the Hitler Youth] because I didn't hear that he was pushed into it. But then there might have been other peer pressure and other pressures too because you're a young man in Germany, and the war is coming, you kind of better join or not, so I'm sure there was probably some kind of pressure from other outside sources and not from parents.

After that, he didn't sign up to the war, did he?

Yes, he enlisted in the Air Force, in the Luftwaffe, and again enlisting and getting drafted with the pressures... but being in the Hitler Jugend it was kind of maybe understood or automatic that you would probably go into the army or the military. But he went into the Luftwaffe because he was on the Russian Front, he was sent out to the Russian Front with the Luftwaffe because he told me a story that when he was out there it was colder than hell and they had used an old grain field like a farmer's field to land in as their airport. He was up for promotion to become a corporal from a private, and it was cold, and he started a mini campfire and the wind was blowing and it spread through this dry grain and it almost burned down half the damn airfield! He did not get promoted after that. He was out on the Russian Front; he didn't talk a whole lot about it, and I remember asking him as a youngster,

“did you kill anyone when you were in the war?”

And he didn't want to answer that.

Do you think he did?

Yeah, I think he did. Being in the Air Force, he was on a fighter bomber, he was dropping bombs when they still had fuel, mostly on the Russian Front, so I'm sure there was some death associated there. And then after the allies were bombing all of the refineries, they started running out of fuels for the planes. Then he went into the infantry and became a foot soldier. He couldn't be in the Air Force anymore because they had no fuel left so he was put into the infantry and my understanding was that he was on his way to help reinforce the French coast in Normandy, and when he was on his way, there was some action, some fighting, and he got wounded, shot in the ankle or the foot and then he became a prisoner of the British.

Do you know how long he was a prisoner?

Well it was just before D-day up until the end of the war. He was a prisoner for at least that long, but he ended up staying on in England, don't know where in England he was imprisoned, but he was on a work-release programme because he worked for a farmer in England, and he used to smuggle eggs so that he could take them back to the camp and eat them.

Was he still imprisoned in a work camp then?

Yes, well it was a work-release, I don't know where in England the camp was, but they weren't going anywhere because they had to swim across the channel so they were basically stuck on your island. From what I understand he wasn't a bad prisoner, and he was able to go on this work-release programme.

Meanwhile back in Germany were his family told he was M.I.A.?

I don't know if they told them that. I never asked him, and he never said anything about his mother. But at some point in time he did go back to Germany and he met back up with his mum and Irene [his sister]. Because his father was already gone by then, the Russians or the polish had taken him away and never brought him back.

Was that before Opa enlisted or after?

I think it was before because the standing joke with them was that they had to look at the flag pole each day to see which country they were in between Poland and Germany, and because the borders kept changing and tensions and so on... that was all pre-war so that would have been pre-1939 I would imagine. It was around '39 when he was taken. After the war, I was told by Papi [dad] that he did go back to Germany and went back to his home and there was not a whole lot left with the bombings and poverty and post-war, there was really nothing there for him and then he got in contact with Uncle Willy in New Jersey, and then Uncle Willy brought him over, paid for him to come over and stay with him in Jersey and he paid him back once he got here and got a job.

Did he not ever tell anymore stories?

Not really, he told stories about when he was in New Jersey. He came over in '52 or '51? Mutti [mum] was the travel agent that ended up booking his tickets and made the comment;

"Willy what the hell kind of funny name is that?"

Little did she know she'd marry the guy on 3rd May 1953. After he was in America his first job was at Valentine Brewery in Jersey and he was a maintenance guy and he worked his way up as an apprentice on the machines and he became a mechanic and maintenance guy. I can't remember if it was before or after the war, but he was a baker's apprentice. It was probably just before the Hitler Jugend.

He wasn't very political, was he?

No. He was just a poor German caught up in all the crap.

Do you know if his mum was against Hitler or had an opinion?

I don't know for sure, when I met her, I was so young and I think she came just before we moved to New York. I don't know her political ambitions.

My mum said she tore up his enlistment papers...

His enlistment papers and whatnot? Okay maybe I do remember something like that which would then indicate she was not for the war.

So then she wouldn't have like him being in the Hitler youth then?

Right, I do remember him saying one of the reasons he went into the Hitler Youth, besides a little bit of peer pressure, was to be able to ride motorcycles.

When he got shot did he fully recover?

He had no limp, it was right around the Achilles tendon but it didn't sever the tendon. It went right through his boot. He never had any limps or complained about anything.

When they went to England could he speak English?

No, when he first went, he couldn't speak any English that I knew of, I think he learnt it there when he was a prisoner, and one little tid bit, like my Omi [grandmother], he never lost his accent. He never lost his thick German accent, even after all these years that he was in America. With some words, the way he pronounced things was always funny.

Irene never came over and I never met her. Irene was a few years younger, maybe it was 10 years? 1936, so 13 years younger.

After he came here, he lived with his uncle for a few years. Then he found Mutti and started dating her. And he played the accordion and was in a band that they would play at the weekends.

I don't know who organised the travel for him, it must have been the uncle in America. But it was through the agency that Mutti was working for.

Working-wise he also worked for a place called In Land Steel and was in the mechanic side of things. He was a jack of all trades, very handy, you could give him a task to do and he could do it, he could weld, he was a machinist, he could do carpentry, he did it all. His last job for many years was a developmental engineer in research and development for Cambal Plastics in the automotive field.

He never went back to Germany after he came over. Marty and I bought them tickets to go to Germany but then he died. He died in June 10th '78.

He was very handy and could make anything. He did a lot of home repairs and construction. Helped Marty and I with our cars when we started driving. He built a lot of things from scratch.

We were outcasts in our neighbourhood, because first of all we didn't work for General Electric, if you didn't work for General Electric then you didn't have a job. Secondly, he was German and he spoke with an accent, and we as children would get beat up if you will, or picked on for being German. Many times we were called Nazis, and my father would get picked on by the neighbours because he was German, he had the accent, he fought for the Germans in WWII, and they were threatening him with deportation.

Growing up with his history, it was not a hard childhood but we did get picked on a lot because we were proud of our heritage and we told people, there was nothing to be ashamed of, he fought for the side that he was on and unfortunately it wasn't the Americans. We lived in a Jewish neighbourhood in Springfield. I don't know whether we were persecuted in Springfield or not, being German and then having the Jewish people there I'm sure there was some tension there, but I never heard any horror stories about it.

*He came over on an airplane, December 9th 1951, Malsbroeck,
Brussels, port of arrival New York, airline Sabena, flight number
SN549-341-WB.*

Heidi's Memories

(Daughter of Willy Schuh)

He was born 3rd May 1923. He was the oldest by quite some, she [Irene] was a lot younger than him, about 8 years.

Tell me everything you remember about him, everything he ever told you...

He never spoke about the war if that's what you're asking, ever. That was like a chapter of life that was completely done for him, he never spoke about it, only spoke about it rarely to my mum. He never spoke about it to us kids, so all I remember is things I heard from my mum.

So basically he grew up, only when to 8th grade and became an apprentice, first he was an apprentice as a baker and eventually he worked with wrought iron and that was the bit that... when the war started, made him crucial to the war machine and was therefore not called up for the army because anyone deemed crucial with whatever they were doing as their job for the war effort...I think it was his working in machinery and wrought iron work that kept him from being directly involved in the war.

He was basically providing for his mum and his sister because his dad had been taken... this is where I get confused, because I think his dad was taken in WWI by the Russians, and sent off to a work camp and never came back, and so my dad... no that can't be right if he was born in '23, okay so his dad must have been in the war effort and then he was captured on the Russian Front, sent to a work camp and they never heard from him again. So it must have been WWII.

So he was providing basically for his mum and his sister which is one of the reasons he didn't sign up as well, but towards the end of the war, he was fed up with in his village, he told my mum that he used to be spit on by mums saying

"how dare you not risk your life for your Father country, my son's risking his life in this war, why aren't you?"

He got fed up of it basically. And so that's when he applied to go in, now I'm not sure if he applied for the SS, or who's decision that was or if they heard that he applied and they were recruiting, all I know is that he was blonde, he was blue eyed and he was as Aryan as you could get, and he was tall. And when the paperwork came to say that he was being recruited or accepted into the SS, my grandmother, his mother, ripped up the papers and said,

"You're not joining those butchers."

Those were her words, probably murderers she would have called them; Mörder. Obviously, you don't say shit like that without ramifications, so my dad, on that same day, joined the Luftwaffe in order to protect his mum from being possibly jailed or worse for treason. That was towards the end of the war because the Luftwaffe was grounded, so he trained as a tail gunner but was never in a plane because at the time he joined, the Air Force had no petrol and so were grounded, so it was really towards the end of the war, like the last year possibly? For some reason '43 sounds correct to me. Yes, because that would have made him 20, so it must have been '43, the very last part of the war.

He was in essence a foot soldier, and the first time he went out on patrol he came back, these are stories I heard from your Omi [grandmother], he came back to find his whole company decimated. They were all killed. He went out ahead to scout, and when he came back to his company, they had all been killed.

He was then assigned to another company of some description, somewhere in there he got hit by a sniper, he was out of action and then when he came back again, the company he had been with had all been killed. Omi always said you must have had a guardian angel sitting on your shoulder because he was 3 times lucky.

The third time he went out on patrol, they heard the enemy and they hid in a cellar of a farmhouse and when they heard that it was Americans and not Russians, they surrendered. They took apart all of their arms and Omi said,

“It would have been so easy for them to open the hatch, throw a grenade in there and kill you when they heard the guns being disarmed.”

And they decided that they knew they were losing the war and they'd rather give up to the Americans than to the Russians because the Russians would have just killed them. Because they knew the allies tried to feed their prisoners of war, they were pretty much starving at that point, whereas the Russians weren't great to their prisoners of war.

They were either American or British, regardless he surrendered to the Western allies, and then he was taken back to England, in the Midlands, where he was a P.O.W.

There was a story I was told, the first time he got interviewed, he came in and he saluted and the officer got really angry that he greeted him with a Heil Hitler salute, and they took him away, a day or two later the same thing happened, of course Papi didn't speak English, or very little, the third time he came in and he didn't salute at all, and the officer got really angry saying

“How dare you come in here and not salute me? I am an officer.”

And he said,

“Well every time I salute you, you throw me back into prison, the only salute I know is the Heil Hitler.”

He was then sent out to work on a farm in the Midlands, I don't know if it was one of those things where he went out during the day and came back to the prison at night, I don't know, probably, but he actually befriended the farmer and they became very good friends.

He learned English, at least much better then, of course all of this time his family knew him as M.I.A., and after the war the farmer hired him on and paid him as a farm hand so he could earn enough money to go back to Germany. So he did, and he had a fiancé but he broke it off with her, they were obviously dating, he broke up with her, and he couldn't find any work in Germany, and so his auntie and uncle lived in New Jersey and they sponsored him basically.

They had come over after WWI, and they sponsored him the money, they paid for his shipping to come over, and then he came to America. On the first day he met Omi, she was the travel agent processing his papers and because she spoke to him in German, she impressed him by using the formal 'Sie' in German, and apparently fell in love with her straight away.

For the first years he had to pay back his aunt and uncle, and then when he and Omi were married, they used to send massive care packages home to Germany to his mum and his sister because they had no way to support themselves. They were so poor in Germany after the war.

Papi [dad] and Mutti [mum] were trying to save enough money to get them to come over from Germany, but in the meantime, Irene got pregnant and Deutsche Omi [German grandmother] stayed in Germany because she didn't want to leave her daughter.

Did Opa see his mum again?

Yes, they paid for her to come over when the boys were young. They paid for deutsche omi to come over and she lived with them for half a year. So Papi did see her again. But he hadn't been back to Germany since the war. For his 25th wedding anniversary, the children paid for tickets for him, mutti and me, because of course I was still very young at the time, to go to Germany. That was their present, but he never made it. He was working loads of extra hours to make more money so we would have spending money in Germany and he ended up having a heart attack.

So since the war he never went back to Germany?

No, and he never talked about it either.

But he wanted to go back?

He wanted to see his mum and his sister...

But not particularly Germany?

I don't know. He never really yearned... I mean... I suppose he would, but he knew it wasn't going to be the Germany he knew. Having lived in the states and all the difficulty he had with some of the Americans, he had very good friends in America, but some were very judging, and he just never spoke about Germany very much. You can't, you couldn't, what could he say?

They lost the war, they did bad things, you can't say I love German traditions, we grew up with them, but you couldn't openly celebrate. We couldn't even as kids. It wasn't until I came here where I felt I could say I'm of German descent with any kind of pride to a certain extent, and even then, years ago, it wasn't like it is now where you can say I have German heritage and I don't have people saying immediately... oh war, Nazis... they now see Germany as other than just associating it with Nazis.

He saw very little action. I don't think he ever shot his gun at anyone, I think that's what omi said. He never even shot his gun, so he was shot, captured, but never really part of it, but he didn't talk about it either.

Did he have many friends that were killed?

I couldn't tell you, because he literally did not talk about it, now whether that was because it was horrendous to remember, I mean I can imagine coming twice to your company being totally wiped out must have been pretty... I mean he must have known people there, he must have been friendly with people there, so that would have been quite shocking.

And then coming out of it learning about what Germany's role was in the war, that must have been horrendous as well because I don't think he really did know, I think a lot of people didn't know. They heard rumours but I don't think they wanted to believe it. It would have all been propaganda and truth would have been scarce. Lots of people didn't want to know and were too afraid to speak up. And I would love to

think I would have been someone who stood up but with six kids I don't think I would have stood up to it, if it were putting one of my children in harm's way I would have probably tried to ignore things as well. I mean you'd like to think you'd take the moral high ground, but when it comes to it you first protect your family, that's your instinct I think.

They lived in Lauenburg, Pomerania. When they forfeited lands, that became part of Poland. They fled when the Russians were coming, but I don't know if they fled early on or later on, but I know his dad was captured, but again its vague, was he captured in the village? Or was he captured because he was in the army? I don't know, but his dad was taken away. My grandmother was raped by the Russian soldiers, I know that, and then they fled south to the Black Forest, where they still live now.