

The Second World War in Sząbruk

Since I was born, I have lived in Sząbruk in the commune of Gietrzwałd, in the Warmia-Masuria Voivodeship. The place is situated between two lakes - Wulpińskie and Naterskie. It is a beautiful village where you can admire, among other things, roadside Warmian chapels and a 14th century church in neo-Gothic style.

My ancestors on my mother's side were farmers who had been connected with Warmia for over 200 years, and from the information I have gathered I know that they had lived in Sząbruk since my great-great-grandparents (6 generations). My dad's parents settled in Zerbuń after World War II and were also farmers.

My grandfather Hubert Lobert continued to work on the farm inherited from his parents. He was a great community worker, the inhabitants of Sząbruk trusted him and gave him the post of village administrator for many years, and he was also a councillor for the commune of Gietrzwałd and a court juror. In his youth he was active in amateur theatre, but devoted himself primarily to farming. After his father's death, the burden of running the farm fell on his shoulders, but despite the post-war difficulties, having learned hard work and responsibility, he managed well. As an active fireman with the voluntary fire brigade in Sząbruk, he donated a plot of land free of charge for the construction of the new fire station and the Village Cultural Centre in Sząbruk. He also collected many cattle breeders' awards and medals, including the Bolesław Chomicz medal for services to fire-fighting.

Grandfather Hubert was 5 years old when the Second World War broke out, and from his stories we know that it was only in 1945 here in Sząbruk that the inhabitants felt the war most. In January, all the girls from the area were taken away, including his sister Elisabeth, who was deported to Siberia near the Urals. She never returned and died there, confirmed by other girls who managed to return. A few days later, on 4 February 1945, a great tragedy occurred in Sząbruk and the surrounding villages - many people were killed by a Russian soldier. On that day, my grandfather's father Joachim Lobert was killed.

My great-grandfather Joachim Lobert took part in the First World War. In 1922, he married Elisabeth Jablonski, daughter of a neighbouring farmer. Joachim Lobert was a civil servant and performed civil weddings in his own home in Sząbruk. He died tragically at the end of the Second World War in his own backyard. At that time, Warmia was still part of Germany. My then 11-year-old grandfather was a witness to this event. Grandfather Hubert's memories were published in the newspaper *Gazeta Gietrzwałdzka*, among others: **'I was 11 years old at the time. I remember what confusion there was. The authorities and party dignitaries were announcing to run away because the Russians were coming. There was no war here; when Olsztyn was occupied, some withdrew, others went on. At that time, the whole family, like other families in the village, fled to the forest. In the evening and in the morning, farmers went through the fields to feed the cattle. Horses were requisitioned. During this time the new five-storey school was burnt down. [...] The tragedy happened 2 weeks after the front passed. The families had returned from the forest, we were busy working on the farm. It was just Sunday morning, me and my 10-year-old brother were helping my father feed the cows. Then a Russian soldier arrived on horseback. He had a pistol in his hand. He asked my father about the horses. My father replied that they were gone, taken away, turned around and opened the stable door. Then the other man started shooting. My brother and I hid in the barn, that's how we survived, we carried father home. The man on horseback kept going around and killing whoever he came across, and later we found out that our uncle Jablonski and his daughter, who lived next door, had also been killed'**. Initially, he was buried in the garden by the house, as it was not possible to organise a funeral in the cemetery. The funeral did not take place until June of the same year. There is a whole avenue of graves in the cemetery in Sząbruk, of those who died on 4 February 1945.

My great-grandfather Joachim Lobert collected a great deal of family documents, photographs, through which we can learn about the history of generations. He kept a *Familienbuch*, a family book compiled in German, which contains birth, marriage and death certificates. Many of

his books also survived, including a number of hymn books, religious books, lexicons and books on farming, as well as his notebook kept until his last days before his tragic death.

My family's history is closely intertwined with events over the years. Both sides present a slightly different perspective, as my mother's ancestors have lived in the area of Warmia for a long time. My dad's ancestors, on the other hand, are part of a population that only settled in the region after the Second World War. Together, however, they are evidence of the remarkable way in which the current community in Warmia was formed. My roots go back to a variety of places and histories, yet they all intertwined right here in Warmia.