

WILLIAM AMANN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

Interviewee: Rev. William “Father Bill” Amann
Interviewer: Celeste Schantz Kovachi
Archival Processor: Katy Shenk
Copyeditor: Erica Fugger
Date: April 23, 2018
Location: Penfield, New York
Session Number: 1
Interview Contributor: Newark Public Library
Project: National Home Front Project
Accession Number: AmannWilliam_HFN-OH_042318

ABSTRACT

Biography

Rev. William “Father Bill” Amann was born in 1928 and experienced the war as a teenager living in Rochester, New York, where he worked for the Eastman Kodak Company during the summer. He later attended seminary, also in Rochester. Father Bill has been a priest for sixty-five years and currently works part-time at St. Joseph’s Church in Penfield, New York.

Summary

In this interview, Father Bill shares his encounter with a crew of German POW’s shoveling snow in Rochester. He also recalls hearing about the war from his brother-in-law in the service and visiting family in Austria after the war.

Keywords

teenager, Rochester, New York, Kodak, priest, German prisoners of war, Cobb's Hill, Axis Sally, radio, rationing

INDEX

00:00 – Introduction
01:26 – Describing parents and siblings; youngest boy in family
01:56 – Growing up in Rochester, New York
02:25 – Pre-war; parents’ occupations
03:01 – Working summers at Kodak during the war in Hawkeye, New York; filing blueprints
03:54 – Family members who served in the military; brother-in-law Al Jones

05:13 – Making scrapbooks from newspapers during the war; they were later lost

06:13 – Kodak’s participation in wartime photography

06:36 – Effect of rationing food during the war: meat, sugar

07:41 – Saving aluminum foil in balls for collection

08:45 – Reiterating number of siblings and role as youngest brother

09:37 – Describes itinerary of brother-in-law Al Jones from 1941 to end of war

10:18 – Showing picture of President Eisenhower addressing troops before D-Day

10:37 – Quoting President Eisenhower in above speech

11:10 – Reaction to the battle of Dunkirk: saddened but grateful

11:43 – Friends who were chaplains; made parachute jumps during the war

12:48 – Discussing poem written by a navigator in 1944 and John Gillespie poem “High Flight”

14:50 – Background around POW camps in Rochester, New York; Cobbs Hill, Hamlin

16:08 – Meeting German prisoners of war shoveling snow in Rochester

20:49 – Father’s journey from Austria to the United States

21:59 – Sending clothes/packages to family in Austria/Germany post-war

22:47 – Visiting relatives in Germany in 1966

25:15 – Treatment of Italian and German POWs in NY camps

26:15 – Attending military school at Niagara Cadet School; song about going away for a year

27:32 – Al Jones’ objects brought back from Germany-flag, arm band

28:18 – Watching Italian POWs play bocce ball

30:13 – Attitude in Rochester toward POWs-generally friendly

30:40 – Hearing about the war from radio, newsreels, and newspapers

31:18 – Story of a veteran buried at St. Joseph’s Church; meeting a girl while driving tanks in North Africa

32:48 – Praying during the war for friends and enemies

36:06 – Al Jones V-mailed wife during service

37:07 – Conclusion

STORY TRANSCRIPTS

Story 1: Encounter with a German POW

[16:10 – 18:09]

They [the Germans soldiers] were prisoners, I think in Hamlin. And the city hired them to shovel snow during the war because there were great snowstorms even as there are now in Rochester. And they were shoveling snow on the corner of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Linden Street, which was on my way to school, to the seminary.

There they were shoveling snow. And I'm walking up the street, Linden Street, to catch the streetcar—in those days, to get to the seminary, which was past downtown. And as I passed them, I saw the prisoners.

They were very evident that they were prisoners, and they was guarded by soldiers with M2, M3 rifles. And as I passed them, I was wanted to test out my German because I was studying German in high school at the same time at the seminary. So, I said to one, went passed him by and I said—.

Do you know German, yourself? Do you know any?

CSV: *I can say "Gewürztraminer."*

Oh, *Gewürztraminer*. You know, "*Guten Morgen*," or something like that. "*Guten Morgen*." I said something like that to him. I'm in all black, as I am now. Black suit, carrying a black valise of books. And I said, "Good morning," to this man. "*Guten Morgen*." Or else I said, "*Wie geht es Ihnen?*"

He said, "*Oh, wohin geht's du?*" "Where are you going?"

And I said "*Ich gehe ins Seminar, um Priester zu werden.*" "I am going to the seminary to become a priest."

"*Oh, wie alt bist du dann?*" "How old are you then?"

I was "*sechszehn*." I said, "Sixteen."

"*Oh, du musst intelligent sein.*" "You must be smart." You must be smart.

By that time, the guard saw I was conversing and he said, "Keep going, get going, sonny. Keep moving, keep moving." So, I continued to meet the bus.

Story 2: Visiting Relatives After the War
[21:59 – 23:56]

Well, my mom or my aunt got a letter from somebody in Germany—this was right after the war—asking if they could help in any way at all. So my mother started sending packages to 75—whatever it was—Wilhelmstraße, in Duisburg in Hamborn. And I know that address because my mom would make these packages and I would have to write the addresses on the outside. And I remember the address.

CSV: *Ah. So, you committed it to memory.*

Yeah. And my mom would always include—besides clothing and food, she'd always put something religious in, a holy card, or rosary, or crucifix, or medals. or something like that, and send it.

So, when I got to Germany in 1966, it was my first trip to Germany. I was in that area, so I said, "I'm gonna see Wilhelmstraße, see if anyone is there." So I visited there, I rang the doorbell, and I was dressed as a priest because I wanted to be recognized as a priest by these people—this person, whoever answers the door. And it was an older lady that came to the door. "Ahh!" You know, like they do.

And then, I identified myself as the son who used to wrap the packages for her and send it. "Oh, thank you, thank you." So she invited me upstairs for some *pflaumenkuchen*—*pflaumenkuchen* and conversation—and we sat at the table. Coffee—homemade coffee with a coffee grinder and all that. And [we] conversed as best I could in the German I knew.

And then she went to the drawer, the dresser drawer, and brought out an invitation to *my ordination* that she had gotten. [laughs] And she saved it!

CSV: *Oh, my goodness!*

This is wonderful. This was nineteen—what'd I say?—'66? And I was ordained in '54, 1954.

CSV: *Wow.*

It was a great experience.

Story 3: "The Best World War II Story"
[31:18 – 32:29]

The best war story I've [got] coming. Do you wanna hear it?

CSV: *Absolutely.*

Well, this came from a veteran whom we buried a week ago today: ninety-eight years old he was. And it's his story. He'd rolled tanks in the tank corps and they were in the desert at North Africa in Algiers driving [Erwin] Rommel, the German general, out of North Africa. He was with [General George] Patton's army and he drove the tank.

And one night, they stopped because it's getting dark or something. He was standing by the tank and his crew was behind him. And all of a sudden, a little girl came up to him from behind, from out of the dark, and then said, "Where are you going?"

He says, "I can't tell you."

She said, "Well here, take this. It'll keep you safe." It was a medal of Saint Joan of Arc. Do you know Joan of Arc?

CSV: *I do.*

A soldier-saint. And he kept that medal all during the war, kept it. But when he turned around to look and thank her, she was gone! Like an angel! Just disappeared into the night.

But he kept that medal, and his wife now has it. I see it every time I visit his wife in the parish. It's a gold medal of Saint Joan of Arc. Yeah. He kept it all through the war.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

Portrait 1

Father Bill at St. Joseph's church in Penfield, NY (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

Portrait 2

From left to right: Father Bill's nephew, Christopher, and Father Bill (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

Artifact 1 – 2

Itinerary of 85th Ordinance Co. transport timeline (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

WILLIAM AMANN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

Interviewee: Rev. William “Father Bill” Amann

Interviewer: None

Archival Processor: Katy Shenk

Copyeditor: Erica Fugger

Date: May 14, 2018

Location: Penfield, New York

Session Number: 2

Interview Contributor: Newark Public Library

Project: National Home Front Project

Accession Number: AmannWilliam_HFN-OH_051418

ABSTRACT

Biography

William Amann was born in 1928 and experienced the war as a teenager living in Rochester, New York, where he worked for the Eastman Kodak Company during the summer. He later attended seminary, also in Rochester. Father Bill has been a priest for sixty-five years and currently works part-time at St. Joseph’s Church in Penfield, New York.

Summary

In this short follow up session, Father Bill recalls listening to the trial of Axis Sally on the radio.

Keywords

teenager, Rochester, New York, Kodak, priest, German prisoners of war, Cobb's Hill, Axis Sally, radio, rationing

INDEX

00:09 – Listening to Mildred Gillars a.k.a. “Axis Sally” on the radio

01:06 – Attending Axis Sally’s trial for treason in Washington D.C.

01:51 – Reference for friend who served as an interpreter at the Nuremburg Trials: Moritz Fuchs

03:31 – Sharing Moritz’ contact information

STORY TRANSCRIPTS

Story 1: Listening to “Axis Sally”

[00:09 – 01:40]

Yes, Father Amann calling, with information about the home front and my experiences as a teenager listening on shortwave to Sally—“Axis Sally,” a.k.a. Mildred Gillars. I used to listen on shortwave to her as she broadcast.

She was an American traitor, I guess, living in Germany during the war. As a teenager, I listened to her on shortwave. And she used to talk to the parents of American prisoners over there, who were taken during the war in Germany—telling their parents how well they’re being treated by the Nazi hospitals and wherever they were. She would describe even their wounds sometimes to the parents back home in America. She also talked to the troops, tried to demoralize them in the war.

And after the war, I was a student in Washington and was able to attend one of the sessions of her trial for treason at the district court in Washington. And I believe I remember that she was fined \$10,000 and 10 years, or something like that, in prison.

She served her sentence, or part of it, whatever. And then, after that, she went to the Middle-west somewhere and served in some charitable institution, either a Catholic hospital or a school. And, I guess, lived out her days there.