

## Charles G. Strasser OBE SBStJ MSc FCIM



My first contact with Rotary was as a beneficiary.

In 1938 at the age of 11, I came to England as Refugee. The British government allowed entry for unaccompanied children escaping from Nazi oppression, providing a couple could be found willing to pay a fee of £50 for an entry visa and guarantee to adopt the child up to the age of 18. In my case, such a couple was a Rotarian Gilbert Heywood from Bury in Lancashire. I quickly settled in Bury and learned to speak English and I became part of their family for one year.

My parents were fortunate to escape just before the war and settled in Stoke on Trent, where my father, a Pottery manager in Czechoslovakia, was able to find employment with the help of an American buyer and I was able to re-join them.

Fast forward to 1944 when I volunteered to join the Czech Independent Armoured Brigade, part of the British army. As a despatch rider I took part in the Czech army Victory parade in Prague in front of President Benes.

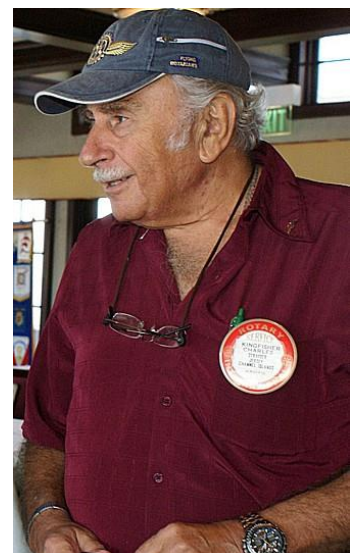
Awaiting my demob, I was part of the Czech war crimes delegation under General Ecer at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, to the end when sentences were passed.,



Demobbed in 1945 I started a photography business in Newcastle under Lyme and soon joined the local business community serving on various committees and being asked to join the local Rotary Club, went through the ranks to become President of the club. Joined IFFR one of the many Fellowships and became the first non-American world president of the Flying Rotarians. In recognition of services to IFFR I have been awarded a Paul Harris fellowship.

On changing my domicile to Jersey, I became an active member of the Jersey Club. When it was decided to form a second Rotary club in Jersey, I was delegated to become the extension officer and formed the Rotary Club de la Manche. I am now an honorary member of that club and they call me their Godfather. So, I am a regular attendee of both clubs.

I was instrumental, with my Rotary Club of Jersey, when Rotary was again allowed after the demise of the Communist regime in the Czech Republic in re-forming the Rotary Club of Znojmo and I am now on honorary member of this club also. So, with the honorary membership of the Newcastle under Lyme Rotary club I must be pretty unique in being an honorary member of three clubs.



In gratitude for my ability to enjoy the freedoms of the United Kingdom and Jersey, I founded and funded two Foundation Trusts administered by Rotarian trustees from each respective Rotary club. To date they have between them responded to worthy applications totalling just over one million pounds.

As the sole surviving soldier of the Czech Independent Armoured Brigade, I have been honoured with a visit to Jersey by Brigadier General Vratislav Beran, the Military Attaché of the Czech Embassy, to a reception at Government house and an invitation to Prague to be hosted by the Czech Minister of Defence.

PS More details of my life can be found in the 432 pages of my autobiography "From Refugee to OBE" obtainable from Amazon and Kindle.

Charles Strasser OBE  
April 2023



Charles Strasser OBE, Past President and Hon. Member of Newcastle-under-Lyme Rotary Club, was recently paid a surprise visit by the Defence Attaché of the Czech Embassy in London Brigadier General Vratislav Beran with his assistant WO Ales Feistingner and accompanied from Prague by Ministry of Defence Director General for Veteran Affairs, Colonel Robert Speychal. They went to Jersey to present to him the Czech Governments "Certificate of participation in the national liberation". This took place at Government house in the presence of the Lt. Governor Vice-Admiral Jerry Kyd CBE. At 95, Charles Strasser is the sole remaining living veteran of his unit, the Czech Independent Armoured Brigade part of the British army in the Second World War.