

# An Afternoon Chat with Andrew Sapko

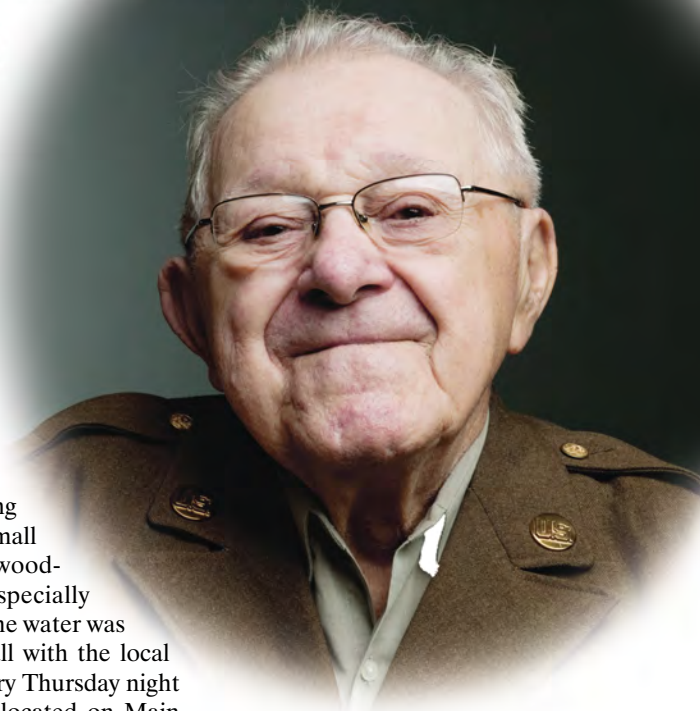
By Lisa Boser-Miller

**I**t is always great to get an envelope in the mail from the Case Collectors Club. Once you see the package you immediately know there is some other goodie besides *The Case Collector* magazine tucked inside. This mailing is no exception with the introduction of the 2012 Book 4 Summer Product Guide. If you thumb through Books 1 – 3 that you received earlier this year, you'll notice several folks representing many different occupations featured throughout each piece. This creative idea was inspired by Case's Communications Manager Fred Feightner and represents the faces of both men and women who not only use, but collect Case knives. I'd like to tell you about a very special man who is thrilled to be one of the individuals featured in the most recent product guide.

His name is Andrew (Andy) Sapko and he lives in Bradford, PA. This proud Czechoslovakian and Veteran was born in the village of Degolia, PA (for those CCC

members who have been to Bradford for a visit, this is the area near Heritage Suites lodging). Andy was born in 1920 and has many great childhood memories. Growing up he enjoyed riding his (now antique) bike along the road, hunting for small game animals like woodchuck, and fishing especially after heavy rains when the water was dirty. He played baseball with the local boys and hitchhiked every Thursday night to The Grand Theater located on Main Street to see a Cowboy Show. Seeing a movie cost \$.11 back in those days. He played in the local swimming hole (boys only) and enjoyed being a Caddie at the local golf club. His salary was \$.40 for 18 holes of golf, but some folks would actually pay him \$1.00 for 18 holes. One of these gentlemen was Mr. George G. Blaisdell, the founder of Zippo Manufacturing Company. The most money that he made in one day as a Caddie back in the late 30's was \$3.10. Although Andy spent a lot of time at the golf course, he never developed a passion for the sport.

Andy attended Custer City Elementary School where the class size was no more than 15 pupils (both boys & girls). They sat in wooden seats that were bolted to the floor. A wooden desk was in front holding an ink well in one corner and a pencil holder in the other. Andy walked to school, traveling through a creek (he stepped on big stones carefully positioned to avoid getting wet), over a bridge, and in between train cars before reaching his destination. As you can imagine, it was important to be extra careful during the icy, cold winter months. He would head to school in the early morning hours, return home between 11 am and noon for lunch, then return to school until afternoon dismissal. Andy complet-



ed school through Grade 7, when it was time for him to find a job.

Andy quickly found a job working for Bryner's Oil Company. He was committed to his job and checked the rod lines along the pipelines every day. He walked for miles looking into "stuffing boxes" for potential leaks. Andy also pulled wells and helped with odd jobs, like mowing the grass.

While working for Bryner's, Andy was drafted to serve his country during World War II. He and 48 other men traveled by railway to a US Army base in Georgia. After 13 weeks of basic training, he was deployed to France, then Germany, followed by Japan when the war ended in 1945. At the close of the war, he was on a ship in the ocean (very sea sick at the time) and witnessed Japanese soldiers draping white sheets over the sides of their ships symbolizing "the surrender." Andy said, "It was amazing how calm the waters were after this announcement. Not only did my stomach feel better, but you could look down into the water and actually see fish. This had not happened for a long time." Andy found it amusing that while overseas, officers who found out that he was from Bradford, often times asked him to pick them up a Zippo lighter when he got back home.



Upon his return from the war, Andy was welcomed back to work at the oil company. He continued to work there for many years but the day came when he chose to search for a job that paid a higher salary. Lucky for him, his brother George was the Plant Superintendant at the W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery Company on Russell Boulevard. George told Andy that he'd get him a job. Andy was 48 years old when he began his career at Case Cutlery. He worked nights assembling knives. Andy described his work as "putting the blades in the knife." In the earlier days, this phase of production was referred to as "springing in" the blades. Andy enjoyed working at Case Cutlery, but he could not adjust to working nights. Shortly after announcing that he was going to leave, a job was found for him during the day shift.

Andy was a fast worker and Case Owner Russ Case took notice. Russ didn't just notice, he gave him more money. Andy knew Russ Case personally and he looked forward to attending annual employee parties at Russ's farm in Limestone, NY. Andy also worked with Case Wall of Fame members Bob Farquharson and Mary Petro. He remembers working with Case Legend Tom Hart who passed away in 1999 with 50 years of service to the company. Andy also had the pleasure of working with someone else that many collectors know, retired Case Historian Shirley Boser who retired in 2008 with over 33 years at Case.

Andy remembers the day that folks from OSHA showed up at the Russell Boulevard plant. Some type of inspection took place leading to new regulations being adopted in the hafting area of the plant. At one time, a single overhead shaft with one motor held each belt at specific work stations. The new regulation required individual motors attached to each wheel (or duo station). Another memory shared by Andy occurred the day that he was scheduled to move to the new Owens Way production facility. Andy showed up at the Russell Boulevard facility and put in a few hours of work. When the mechanics showed up, they unbolted his machine, took his equipment to Owens Way, and he was able to finish the day at the new facility. Andy could hardly believe how smooth the transition was.

Andy continued to work at Case until his retirement in 1982. He and his wife Mary (now age 89) have been married for over 60 years and have four children, Janice, MaryLou, Marty, and Gordy. At age 91, Andy still drives himself around in his little white truck. He enjoys visiting with others, watching "Judge Alex" on cable television, and attending mass on Saturday night. He proudly wears several Case hats and loves to share stories of days gone by when he worked at Case Cutlery. At one time, Andy had quite a collection of Case knives but these have all been gifted to members of his family.

Andy certainly enjoys retirement and spending time with his children and grandchildren. He begins his day at 8 am sharp at the local Senior Center as he makes his way to his special reserved seat. He told me that "an old guy comes in" and brings him toast with peanut butter and jelly, and a glass of water to take his medicine. He buys a cup of coffee for \$.25 then stays through lunch. He enjoys sitting in the hallway greeting people as they come into the building. After returning home for a little snooze, Andy heads to the mall parking lot to feed the birds. Andy shared that "the birds know my truck and they wait for me to bring them bread every day."

Andy is a kind and gentle man who cares about others. When you mention the word "Case," his eyes just light up. It was a pleasure sharing the afternoon (and stories) with my friend Andy, as he sat wearing an orange Case ball cap.

