

## **Gordon Prime**

### ***Bash on regardless***

Extracts from interview dated 15/8/2020

Edited By Gordon Prime

I was born on the seventh of February 1924...at a small village called Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, in the West Midlands. We lived in a beautiful old farmhouse. It had outbuildings, fields, a wonderful place for a young lad to grow up in. We didn't use the farm, my Dad rented one of the stables out to two of the local lads who lived across the road and they were both keen motor cyclists. One used to race a bike at Donnington, pre-war Donnington. And , I was always round there, talking to them and messing about and that's when I got the bug for motorcycling. Anyway, when I was about eleven or twelve years old I managed to pick up an old motorcycle.

It was a Radco... Birmingham built. A two-fifty, two stroke machine, no gear box, direct drive, belt drive onto the back wheel.

I used to ride this thing round the fields, day and night. I used to go out and buy petrol at the local garage, in a can. I used to get a can of petrol for eleven pence ha'penny a gallon. It was called Cleveland Commercial. I started first on the better fuel which was Shell-Mex and BP. That was one and tuppence and one and thruppence a gallon.

Anyway... my father was working in Birmingham, so he had to commute every day - it was quite a distance to go everyday from Sutton Coldfield. He decided to move over to a place called Sheldon near Birmingham airport, it is now. We moved there in 1938. By that time, I'd finished my schooling, at 14..... I couldn't take my motorcycle so all I had was a pushbike.

...1938... my father said, 'about time we got you a job'. I was always keen on electronics, always messing about with electrics and so he got me an apprenticeship as an electrician. It was a local radio and electrical shop. I was there for about twelve months I suppose. I was more or less serving in the shop, rather than learning much of the trade.

Anyway, 1939 came along and war was declared. I remember .... sitting, listening to the radio, eleven o'clock, the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlin came on..... 'we're now at war with Germany'.

I think we didn't know much about it, you know, a fourteen year old. Anyway my mother was all upset, my father he went to the First World War, of course.... Things carried on as normal actually, living not far from the city of Birmingham of course, we had loads and loads of barrage balloons going up all round the place. They bought loads of anti-aircraft guns; big ones, small ones, because near to us was the big Rover car factory and as soon as the war started, or after the war, they started building aircraft engines for Halifax Bombers, a radial engine, I think it was the radial engine, and not far again was the big Castle Bromwich factory where they were building the Spitfires and loads more industry. We were perched between Coventry and Birmingham.

And in 1940, we had a few air raids... dropping a few bombs around Birmingham and, nothing too close to us you know, a mile or two away. In the meantime we had an Anderson Shelter delivered. This is a big corrugated shelter thing. My Dad and myself, we dug this great hole in the back garden and dropped the shelter in, piled all the earth on top - made quite a good shelter. And in 1940 and later in 41 the air raids got a bit more, more raids, so anyway, we could watch the activity every

night, the Ack-Ack guns, searchlights, and in May/June 1940 we heard on the radio that the Germans were advancing to Holland, Belgium, into France, and our British Expeditionary Force was stranded on the beaches at Dunkirk. That's when all the little ships, the big ships went across to Dunkirk to bring the British and Allies soldiers back to England from the German advance. I think it was 338,266 rescued altogether, I'm not really sure.

Anyway, things were pretty bad after that, talking about the Germans were going to invade. There again, it came on the radio one evening "Would all young men from the age of seventeen and older men up to the age of "I think it was 55 or 65" would volunteer to join the Local Defence Volunteers, the "LDV". My Dad being an ex-soldier from the first World War and myself, we went up to the local police station and volunteered.

.....he came to me and said to me "how old are you?" I said "seventeen" - I was only sixteen but he said "ok". So, from then on we used to report to the little village just beyond Birmingham Airport as it is now, a place called Bickenhill and it had a church. We set a guard room up in the school and the church tower was the watchtower and did guard duty. I think it started off with about maybe 14 of us. We used to report every night and do two on four off. Two hours on top, of the church tower, with the others getting their head down in the school room. Anyway, this went on for a time. And all we had were six First World War Lee-Enfield 303 rifles, between the fourteen of us, six rounds of ammunition for each rifle and a white armband with LDV on it. The locals used to say, "Look, Duck and Vanish!" After a time we had denim overalls which was the battledress type of overalls which we wore, we had those as a uniform, and a forage cap. Then they gave us army boots and gaiters. We didn't have the webbing gaiters that they issued to the British Army, we had leather gaiters, black leather gaiters, why, I don't know, and a leather belt.

Then later on, we got proper battledress and began to look like soldiers then. In the meantime, I'd got a bit fed up of this so called apprenticeship and there was some jobs going at Birmingham Airport, or Elmdon Airport as it was those days. When the war started they turned the airport over to the Royal Air Force and, the RAF moved number 14 Elementary Flying Training School EFTS into the school. It started off with three flights of Tiger Moths, twelve in each flight. The ground staff looking after the Tiger Moths were civilians, were employed by Airwork Limited and the flying instructors were RAF officers and flight sergeants.

We operated there when the Battle of Britain was going on. In the meantime, we had an extra flight, an A, B C, D, a D flight. First of all we were training Fleet Air Arm pilots and then we changed over to RAF pilots. They used to do about 4, 6, 8 hours and then they'd go solo and then they'd do so many hours solo, cross country flights, test them and what not and then next thing, they'd gone and a new intake would come in. (Those who left) would go on to Advanced Training. The bomber boys would go on to Airspeed Oxfords, Avro Ansons, the fighter boys would go onto Harvards, Miles Masters. Prior to that the Fleet Air Arm boys, went on to , Gladiators, Fulmars, Rocs and of course, the old faithful, the 'string bag' The Swordfish.

Anyway, in the meantime we as Airport staff and LDV amalgamated into the Home Guard. We must have been about thirty members by then and we started to get a little bit mechanised. We had an old truck which we armoured plated and mounted a Lewis gun on it. We had two motorbikes and sidecar outfits delivered, though I don't know where they came from, and we mounted Lewis guns on the side cars. In the meantime, the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, was stationed in the Airport Hotel which is still there by the main gate of the airport today. And we then would report to their barracks, or the hotel every evening going on duty and we would amalgamate with them an airport defence because as we arrived they always gave us a big mug of sweet tea and a big bully beef

sandwich! Of course, food was on rationing in those days so it was very welcome of course. Oh, and by the way, when I joined the home guard the second time, I'd just had my first motorcycle - you could ride a motorcycle at sixteen in those days - and it was a KTT Velocette 350 overhead cam which I bought for ten pounds, they tell me its worth about £20,000 today, if I'd got it.

Anyway, they said, "ooh, he's got a motorcycle, he can be our company despatch rider" and I thought "ooh, marvellous" because I'd always dreamt of that, you see. Anyway, when I reported to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, they said "ok you can still carry on your duties as despatch rider" so I said "well,, what about petrol?" I think my ration for a month in those days for a 350 was two gallon a month. It was about 60 to the gallon so it didn't last long.... "oh don't worry" they said "just report to the corporal every time you come on duty, he'll fill your tank up." The old square non-returnable tins, used to fill the tank up and I might use a few pints of petrol, I'd go home that night, next morning, siphon it. I was never short of petrol, put it that way.

Anyway, this went on. We did various exercises and we became quite proficient actually, considering we were a bit of ragtag to start with. We had demonstrations by, regular Army boys... different modern weapons, and old weapons... to show us things. I remember one was a weird and wonderful contraption. It looked like a gun, a barrel on a tripod, and you fired lemonade bottles full of phosphorus. You put this damned thing into the barrel, the bottle... you put a charge behind it, closed the bridge, and fired it and this, it was a small lemonade bottle, not the big one, with the clip on cap. We were firing at old cars, we hadn't got a tank to fire at and as it burst, of course, it ignited, 'boof', terrific but occasionally the bottle would break and it would go off inside the barrel and a great flame would come out ... most dangerous.

..... I had my rifle, I thought, well, ok, "we'll go down the range tomorrow, we'll see how good you are at firing". Of course, being a young lad I'd always had air guns and what not, air rifles. I thought I was a pretty good shot, you know. .... And we got to this old quarry and they set these targets up. My turn came round..... I couldn't hit a flaming thing. I kept missing the target. I was so distraught, I was in tears almost, you know, me firing this rifle and I couldn't hit it. Anyhow, I got back and looked at the damn rifle and I looked at it again and the rear side was bent! Somebody had dropped it and of course, I was firing high all the time! Anyway, I changed it, got a new rifle and I was no problem after that.

Anyway, the time came, my mates were all joining up.....They used to come back on leave, Army, Navy and Airforce telling me all their stories about what a wonderful time they're having, all tanned, and 100% fit, you know .....and I wanted to join up. My mother said "if you join up before your age I'll go and get you out, take your birth certificate". Anyway, I had to wait till I was eighteen and of course I always wanted to be a motorcycle despatch rider, that was my aim. I wanted to join the Royal Corps Signals. Anyway, I went along and they said well first of all you have to go into this new scheme they're running now, it was called elementary, primary training. Everyone had to go through this infantry training before they were selected to go to each unit. And it was six weeks infantry training. The time came, and my buff envelope arrived in the morning, there it was "report to Chesterfield on the 5th November 1942" Bonfire night.

....., I went off with a little suitcase, got the train from Birmingham Station, arrived at Chesterfield Railway station. One or two more lads looked a bit worried and bewildered. An Army truck pulled up and piled us in the back. We went to a place called Ashgate School - it was a reformatory school prior to the war and then turned into Army barracks, training all the recruits.... bars to the window, like shut in jail! Anyway, we arrived there, poured with rain all day, I remember, we did all our

documentation, took all day and then they took us to our billets, big long barrack room, "there's your bed", bunk beds. I had the bottom bed.

....Down to the Quartermaster's store to bag and store your kit." You get down there, your kit bag, knife, fork, spoon, all in the bag and they dumped it on the bed and I thought where the hell am I going to sleep, now?

Anyway, I, sorted myself out.... And we were all in it together you know, helping one another. In the first two days we had to report to the medical room for all these damned injections, TAT, TAB, Typhus and all sorts of stuff they were popping into us. And then we had to go on parade in our battle dress; some fitted, some didn't, and anyway, we slowly got organised. We did six weeks training, really tough infantry training it was. Parade every morning, PT at six o'clock, breakfast then drill all morning then exercise, then god knows what. Route marches, gas drill, you go in the gas chamber, and on the range. We used to go to a place near Sheffield called Totley Ranges, the whole day on the range firing, I used to love that. We fired the 303 rifles which we were issued with and the only anti-tank gun we had then - a Boys anti-tank it was about a twenty millimetre armour piercing round, supposed to penetrate a tank. We used to fire those as well. And we didn't have anything other than that .....our only anti-tank weapon at that particular point. Anyway, we used to enjoy a good day on the range.

....We had our passing out parade, we all did pretty well. No leave of course... I spent Christmas there, I remember and we had to go on this selection committee before the CO and some more officers. We were asked if we have a preference.... "Oh, yes, please, Royal Corps of Signals, I want to be a despatch rider". "Sorry" he said, "you can't, there's no vacancies in the Signals at the moment, you'll have to go in the Royal Army Service Corp as a driver". I said, "oh, well" but he said "they do have DRs (Despatch Riders) in the Service Corps you know?" I said "ok".

..... We were taken to a place called Clay Cross, Derbyshire which was not far from Chesterfield. It was number 7 Training Battalion Royal Army Service Corps - a six weeks course driver training and we drove all type of Army trucks, basic mechanics, out every day driving, all sorts of things, cross country driving, simulation breakdowns, recoveries etc etc. We passed out for that, I remember, I passed out my driving test all round the back streets of Chesterfield in a three tonne Bedford.

Anyway, I put my name down, for, a motorcycle despatch rider's course - six week training, you were given a bike, that was your bike for the six weeks. It was an old Royal Enfield, not a very nice bike really, I didn't like it. It was a civilian bike that had been commandeered and painted khaki I think. I think it had about had it before the Army had had it ....We did map reading and repairs and all sorts, across rough terrain.

I passed out on that and they sent us home for ten days leave. I thought this is marvellous, reported back and then I was posted to my Unit which I stayed with throughout the war. My unit was 89th Company, Royal Army Service Corps.

We were taken by train to Bradford, Yorkshire, taken down to a little village called Clayton outside Bradford. All us young lads, were taking the place of the unit which had come out of Dunkirk, 89 Company within the BEF 1940. And the ones that didn't get back, of course, killed and taken prisoner, we took their place and we made the unit up, the strength back up again. We spent the whole of that summer in 1943 training, mainly on the moors, Ilkley Moor, all round that, North Yorkshire moors.

Every day we were out there training..... I was doing motorcycle and driver training, did the lot, every day we were out doing something. This particular day, I'll always remember, we'd set up our headquarters miles away from anywhere. There was a little indentation in the ground and we set up the head quarters up there. That night we got back to Clayton, must have been 7 o'clock. I slung my kit on the bed and I thought, 'there's something missing off there' and suddenly thought... 'good God' by that time we'd been issued with Sten guns. I had a Sten gun and I'd lost the damn thing and you can imagine losing your weapon, it was a serious offence - twenty-eight days at least and I thought 'God!' So, I jumped back on the old motorcycle I've raced back up, must have been thirty miles and it was just getting dark. I never forgot it..... it was a miracle, I found this spot in the middle of the moors, and there was my Sten gun lying in the grass. I was so relieved. I got back. Quite an episode, that was.

....Anyway, the time came and they put us down into the First British Corps....And we were then attached to the First Canadian Army. But we didn't know that at that particular time. Anyway, for some reason they said "right, we're moving out". This was about September, 1943. We were moving to Scotland. .... We had fifty 3 tonne trucks. In the mean time, when we arrived at Clayton we still had the old Leyland trucks, 3 tonne Leyland, no cab on them, canvas, horrible things they were. So, they'd just about had it. This day they took us down to Bradford Railway station, we got on a train and we finished up at Ford's Dagenham. And there were fifty brand new 3 tonne Fordson trucks. Four wheel drive, flat fronted job. They had a Ford V8 engine. ....Good truck they were.

We got all those back to Clayton in convoy. I had to ride in front, get to a crossroads and see them through and go on, making sure they all got back.

Anyway, they said, 'ok now, we got the unit all going now, we're going to Scotland, more training'. We finished up at a place called Airdrie... between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Meantime I was in B Platoon. There were 3 platoons, A, B and C. ....A Platoon was ten tonne trucks. They had Foden trucks and some American Macks. B and C were the three tonne Fordsons.

We had a Workshop platoon - and that consisted of two workshop wagons which were technical wagons. They had lathes and welding equipment and also a crane for changing engines.

....The convoy went all the way up to Scotland. It took two days to get there. I remember we stopped at Preston on the way. There were staging camps at different places, especially arranged for convoys and you'd stay the night and they'd park up and they'd have a meal and, off the next day. When we arrived in Scotland, we left lovely weather behind in Yorkshire. Really, really horrible weather all the way, Scotch mist and cold. And nearly every day we were out training, out in the highlands of Scotland, up round the lochs.....Loch Lomond, all that area.

And we'd go out for a week at a time, living off the land . We were issued with a string vest and an extra pullover and we thought 'this is strange'. That's all we had, and a blanket and a gas cape and we were surviving like this.

We got mixed up with a lot of these Norwegians who'd had come over and joined the British Army and they had some units. I remember washing and shaving in the Scotch river there, narrow, shallow river standing two stepping stones, shaving, pretty cold....

Time came, to move back south ..... we finished up in a place called Wadhurst which was about ten miles south of Tunbridge Wells, in Sussex. This was a big wooded area with Nissen huts - first time

we'd come across the Nissen hut, which was a horrible corrugated iron thing..... condensation used to drip off the roof onto you!

We were in these Nissen huts and still doing loads of different training. Next thing they set this thing up in the wood - it was a simulated landing craft. We had to reverse in these vehicles up the ramp into this simulated landing craft. We had to get it to a fine art so we fitted all the vehicles in position,, they'd drop the ramp and we'd go down.

We spent Christmas there, I remember. Each platoon in turn would have to go all the way back up to Scotland to train, the combined operations school at a place called Inverary on Loch Fyne. I think it was called Loch Fyne and we got there, it was Nissen huts again. Bitterly cold. And it was a month's course, combined operations. We went up as a Platoon, that was twenty odd trucks, all in convoy. We moved into these Nissen huts. Every day the first week, we had to strip our engines down and waterproof them with a special compound comprising of Asbestos compound on the spark plugs and some other compound around the distributor and all the electrics, completely sealing it.

.... And we had this big flexible pipe which we stuck on the carburettor intake which came up through the cab. ....They said "lets see if you've done the right job" and we went down to this big ramp, back down the ramp and there were LCTs Royal Navy LCTs and we went back down the ramp to these LCTs and I think we got about 15 trucks at a time on the LCT. They went across the other side of the Loch and they did a simulated beach landing, the other side,

..... Four wheel drive, low ratio, foot to the floor, down the ramp and 'this is it' about four foot of water it was every time, about four / five foot..... He said, "you've got to get out of the cab and the boys will come down with the rescue and they'll have to hook you.....you'll have to get out to hook the tow rope on".

And we did this time and time and time again. Until we got it perfect. One particular day I was teamed up with this one pal of mine, keen motorcyclist Bert Stinchcombe . We were teamed together, two drivers to each truck. We came down the ramp and we had to turn left, follow the loch for about a mile where it became very narrow and it became a river. You crossed over a very narrow bridge back to Inverary, back again to start all over again. So, Bert was driving this day going like the clappers as we did down this road, over the bridge. Coming the other way was a Royal Navy truck and Bert slammed the brakes on but we'd just come out of the water, hadn't we? No brakes, the brakes were full of sea water, and we hit this thing smack bang. Anyway, I sprained my wrist, I was alright, nothing bad really. But poor old Bert, he was put on a charge.

We used to go down in the evenings to the beach and pick up these little winkles and stick them in these cut up petrol tins and stick them on top of the big stove, boil them up and eat them. No entertainment at all, out in the wilds it was, Inverary. Anyway, we got back to Tunbridge Wells, Wadhurst. In the meantime the others took our place and did all their training. We still carried on training, all sorts of training, god knows what and then we moved out again to a place called Lingfield in Surrey. ....,Not there too long we then moved out to...near Southend, Leigh-On-Sea. It was a housing estate, been taking over and we were all billeted in civilian houses. They chucked all the civilians out and we were in these. It took quite a few days to get them all going, my job as a despatch rider, I was going to and from Lingfield and Southend on Sea every day..... and right into the centre of London, every flipping day for about a week.

All the [road] signs had been taken down. As soon as Dunkirk happened, frightened of invasion, the first thing, they took all the signs down so we used to be totally reliant on a map or ask your way.

Anyway, I found my way across and I was doing this run everyday. I think it must have been the last day, on the Rochester bypass, I've never forgot it. Of course, we didn't hang about, I was flat out as usual about sixty-five miles an hour, I suppose..... I was overtaking this American Navy truck. The American Navy were based at Southend on Sea. They had a couple of ships there. Their mail truck was going down and I was overtaking him and of course, left hand drive he pulled out, didn't see me. My clutch lever went straight into his tyre, burst the tyre and I went off head over heels, smashed the bike to smithereens. Luckily, I'd got my crash helmet on, they were metal in those days, big dent in the back. Some land girls were picking me up and I was cussing and swearing. Anyway, they took me back to camp and I reported sick.... I'd damaged my knee a bit and next day I had to go before the CO because that was an accident. He exonerated me, it wasn't my fault. I was sick then for a week, and light duties.

Meantime, we were building up and building up. By the way, we'd been issued with lovely brand new motorcycles..... the Matchless GCL, overhead valve, 350 cc and they were the only army bike with telescopic forks. Up to then they were all girder forks.

.....Every morning we'd go on parade. The other lot with us were the 51st Highland Division, they'd just come back from the Middle East. On parade we'd have our steel helmets on, their steel helmets were all painted sandy grey because, sandy colour, because they'd just come back from the desert. I always remember, the 51st Highlanders.

Anyway, next move, we're going to Tilbury. Tilbury Docks. I got the medical officer to sign me off because I didn't want to be left behind, "no way, I'm not leaving my mates". "Ok" he said, but he gave me one of these elasticated things to go on my knee, I'll always remember. They were a terrible pain.

We got up to Tilbury..... we arrived at this tented camp, just outside the docks. We got in and it was barbed wire...just like a prisoner of war camp. Anyway we were in Bell tents and about 6 to 8 of us I suppose, to a tent and on the gate was a military policeman, "oh no, you're not going out". We couldn't go out, we were locked in! Exactly like prisoners of war!

And we were there for five days, locked in. We did have a bit of a N.A.A.F.I .... meals everyday, mess tin you know, but they took us down everyday to the docks to load the big American Liberty Ship. They were built in about three days, weren't they? Something like that....wish I'd taken the name of it, I've always forgotten.

And they took all our...trucks, loaded them on board, tanks, guns, trucks, and we had Sherman tanks, all sorts of guns and trucks. .... Three tiers, three decks, the bottom deck they put all the tanks on..... the third deck, they made like, a deck and put bunks in, for us, and we had all these bunks, and down below was all the ammunition trucks and stuff. On deck, they put like a shelter, like a, wooden, long trough, with water flowing through it. That was a toilet. Anyway we boarded the ship Sunday morning,

....We'd been briefed, we'd been paid out in French money, we thought, 'oh, good, this is it' because we'd been on so many exercises. The officers had been briefed over locations that we hadn't....., I always remember, we were going down, Sunday morning, people going to church, I always remember this, "say a prayer for us". Anyway, we got on and all went on deck and the officers got this map out and showed us. We still didn't know it was Normandy but we were showed a line, a beach, a massive long beach, mainly church steeples and we were heading for Juno beach. We had to head for these towers and steeples..... we were given all this information.

..... Sunday afternoon, we picked our balloon up - every freighter carried a balloon...about 500 foot and, went down the Thames estuary. First light we went through the Straits of Dover..... we could see the French coast, and the guns at Calais... starting firing at us, with their bloody great guns . Luckily they missed us by miles, you know, but a massive spout of water went up. Anyway, got through that, missed us thank god and that evening we got off the Isle of Wight, thousands and thousands of ships and god knows.... we sailed over that night.

Next morning.... the, RAF had bombed the beaches...all the big battle ships and crews were shelling the beaches over our heads, we were still on this Liberty ship, and the rocket firing ships, as well, they were bashing them on the beaches ....7:30 was H-Hour for the British, and we were about 9:30 with our time.

....It was pretty rough, the weather was pretty rough, I think it was four or six foot swell, and these landing craft came alongside and it wasn't a, British landing craft, it was American LCT landing craft tank, much smaller than the British. It was bobbing like a cork. We went down these rope ladders after they'd loaded all our stuff onto the landing craft. You had to wait for the thing to come up and jump otherwise you missed it!

In the meantime, while they were unloading, I was on deck. I didn't know what was going on and I heard this 'bang' and the ship went and I thought 'oh, god, we've been hit'. What had happened was the Sherman tank..... loading had been no problem, they use dockside cranes, but to unload they had to use these horrible derricks, thin derricks that freighters had and they got this Sherman, just going to go over the side..... it went straight to the bottom, 'bang'. The derrick had broke and I'll always remember, this American sailor, he said if it hadn't put, seven foot of earth at the bottom, as balance, it would have gone straight through the bottom. It went all through the planking, you know, anyway ..... the next thing, one of our three tonners, same thing happened, but that dropped on top of a landing craft. They chucked it over the side, carried on, anyway, we eventually started going ashore. It was about twenty minutes I suppose, half an hour, pretty rough. I can remember, there was two Sherman trucks in front of me, I was driving a truck then, , all our trucks were loaded with supplies, not fully loaded because of the getting up the beaches. The one I drove was 3 Ton weight of high explosive shells, 200 gallons of petrol in jerry cans and my motorcycle on the back of that. The Sergeant Major said "you're not riding them down the ramp, you're driving a truck".

Anyway these tanks went off and next thing... we'd been briefed, "when you get off the beach, or, onto the beach look...in the dunes and they'd be big markers about six, eight foot square". The beach group had set these big screens up and a white cross. If you were driving a tank that was your exit but if you were a vehicle that was your exit. And I saw this, circle and in the meantime I heard the beachmaster was calling us in on a loud haler, calling the skipper and dodging these obstacles, the mines, they'd cleared the mines, the Royal Engineers.

Anyway, , we were through the gap and we just bashed on, inland for about half a mile, I suppose. And we got to this, little village - and the place we'd landed was called Gray-sur-Mer, which was the right hand side of Courselles-sur-Mer. The river runs through Courselles, the estuary, and if you go today, the beach we landed on, there's a great cross, the cross of Lorraine. The double cross, that's the beach we landed, and there was they'd bulldozed the sand dunes and anyway we got to this village and we pulled in this field and of course, the first thing you do, is dig in, dig a slit trench, get down below. So, we dug in, and there was these French refugees, walking with horse and carts, and families on the move and whatnot, little kids with them, passing us.

..... We were on twenty-four hour ration packs which consisted of dehydrated tea and all sorts. We had a bar of chocolate - Nestles plain chocolate and I didn't like plain chocolate. And we'd had a



load of these and I remember giving these little French kids this chocolate - hadn't seen chocolate for years I suppose. Anyway, we sorted ourselves out and we spent the night there, where we were dug in .

During the night there was quite a bit of activity..... They only used to come over mainly at night, the German aircraft. Every bloomin civilian freighter all had Oerlikon guns.

They'd be firing them up there, and these traces were going everywhere but the trouble was, as I mentioned before, every ship had its own balloon and of course all these balloons, they were filled with hydrogen. ....They hit one..... In the end Montgomery issued an order that the only people to use Ack Ack guns were the gunners themselves.

***Our company motto was 'bash on regardless' and that's just what we did.***

.....Our assembly area now is a little village called Tailleville, which was one mile inland from Juno beach, from the little town Saint-Aubans-sur-Mer .

.... "Here's the map reference, jump on your bike and go and find this field" ....and I had to take the coast road all the way up. They'd shelled it and bombed it of course. The roads were full of craters. The Pioneer Corps were working like mad trying to fill the holes in to get our own transport along, and of course, I was riding around all over the place. I eventually got there to the little village of Tailleville. I recognised it because, believe it or not, the Germans hadn't removed any signs, not like us, they didn't remove, so we knew where we were going and as I arrived in the village there's a big water tower and its got written on it 'Tailleville'.

The field I was heading for was on the other side of the village. There was a little duck pond on the right and a driveway and I always remember, there was a gateway and that was the one so I thought 'this is it'. So then I had to go all the way back and lead the B platoon, as it was then, to this field and we set our headquarters up in this field.

Each platoon joined us as they came, because the whole idea, you didn't put all your eggs in one basket.....Anyway, we all moved in and we set our headquarters up just inside the gate, dug in and of course the first thing you do, as well, when you stop all the vehicles have to be scrimmed-up with camouflage netting. ....You weren't allowed to walk across the field, you had to stick to all round the edge, drive round, walk, because a reconnaissance aircraft could even pick up a footprint..... All the trucks moved in and being as I was messing about motor cycling and whatnot, I was the last to dig a hole, dig my slit trench. And the boys had all dug in nicely and I thought 'where the hell am I going to put my trench now?' And I moved across the field, the only place was a dead German's grave. They'd buried him the day before and I had to dig my slit trench about 3 foot away from him. His rifle stuck in the ground with his helmet on top and I thought oh, and I lay there at night thinking, 'he is 4ft away...' anyway, I wasn't squeamish luckily.

We then operated from this field for about six weeks. We set the headquarters up as I say. And my job was as a despatch rider. There was four HQ despatch riders - there was myself, Bert Stinchcombe my old mate that we shared the truck with that had the accident. Bert and I, inseparable, good mates. And we were twenty four hours on duty and twenty four hours off, two on at a time. Bert and I was always on duty together and we built a lovely slit trench.

..... My job mainly, was going around the units during the day time and whatnot, finding what were wanted in the way of ammunition, food, stores, petrol, diesel – then go back, the company clerks would sort it all out and they would detail, each vehicle, so many at a time, two, three, four, whole convoy, back to the beach to pick up this stuff and then at night, we'd go up, under cover of

darkness to the front line, deliver it all, and no lights. All we had, each truck, was a little spotlight shining on the back axle which was either painted white.

Sometimes we'd go up daylight... bit hairy at times. So many of our despatch riders were taken prisoner - got lost and they went straight into Jerry lines. And another hazard with DRs, I'll always remember, was tanks. Because, the roads were quite narrow as you can imagine. Tanks were doing about five / ten mile an hour, despatch riders were doing about thirty or forty mile an hour, you had to overtake them. And of course the dust was terrific, dust everywhere. To get past, the tank commander was always in the turret telling the driver.

I always used to wait till the tank commander had seen me - I knew his driver was going to keep a straight line but after a time it got so bad with the dust and the tanks chewing the roads up that the tanks didn't use the road. They were in the fields, beside the road. All of the vehicles on the road and there were the tanks all going up and the dust was terrific. I used to come back absolutely covered, like flour. I used to wear a mask, like a scarf, round here. Covered, covered in dust, I was.

Then D Plus, seven, eight, nine, we had the terrific storm, terrific storm it was, rained and rained and all the dust turned to mud. We were about a mile inland, we could see the sea, the great waves. They built the Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches..... made a proper landing stage. They were landing all the supplies, but of course the storm wrecked all that and it completely wrecked the one that the Americans set up, they never rebuilt it. They repaired the one at Arromanches but for days we had no supplies coming in, little did we know it, had it gone on we could have been in trouble.

.... We carried on. We took part in the battle for Goodwood. One of my daily runs was over Pegasus Bridge which was the far left of the sector, a place called Ranville. We were up there every night with convoys and this particular night, must have been about twenty trucks all loaded with ammunition and stuff and .... German aircraft, they were dropping anti-personnel bombs. They hit quite a few of our trucks. Two platoon Sergeants were killed that night, they're buried in the Ranville Cemetery near Pegasus Bridge.

Another time, we were in this field in Tailleville, we were being shelled and a shell went into the slit trench, one of my other pals Taffy Sutton from Pontypridd, Lawrence Sutton his name was, never knew he was Lawrence, he was Taffy to us, and he was killed in the slit trench. Two of his mates were injured, he's buried in the little cemetery at La Délivrande just down the road from Tailleville. And another one of the boys had an anti-personnel bomb right on his cab and he's buried in Hermanville cemetery which was just inland from Sword Beach. We lost two more.... we lost six altogether and a few wounded. We lost two taken prisoner, they drove straight in the German lines, we didn't know they were prisoner for ages after - they were just missing.

Anyway, one of my main runs was over Pegasus Bridge everyday to the Sixth Airborne division, they were holding that sector. As you know Major John Howard, with his three gliders, they captured the bridge and they were the first to liberate the first house in Normandy - the Café Gondrée, over the bridge. The first man to be killed was his number one lieutenant, John, Den Brotheridge. He was killed as he crossed the bridge, the Germans shot him and they set up a regimental aid post, first aid post, in the cafe treating the wounded. They held the bridge till daylight and, Major Howard was a good friend of mine, I met him after, used to meet him a lot, and he was telling me all about it, they heard the flippin bagpipes and it was Lord Lovat's pipers.

They came over the bridge, he said, according to the book they just marched over the bridge. He said, "that's a lie", the Gerries opened up and the scattered like rabbits he said. Anyway they eventually got over the bridge and linked up, and that's when they set up the headquarters, just

over the bridge which I used to run to every day. We were supplying them with stuff. That was one of the places I didn't like going because the Germans weren't far away and they were using these Moaning Minnies, we called them. Nebelwerfers, eight barrelled mortars.

....Dropping all over the place . This one particular afternoon I went there, headquarters and ....

"oi you can't go back yet, some orders aren't ready yet, you'll have to wait".

.....still waiting evening, no, still weren't ready, 'oh, somebody give me a blanket' I slept in one of the Horsas - there was Horsa gliders everywhere. I slept the night in one, on the blanket, on the floor, slept in this Horsa glider.

Our Commanding Officer went out, up to the frontline area, to inspect whatever, or see what's going on. There was no radio you see, so he always took a DR with him. And if it was your turn you always had to hang on to the back of his staff car and go with him. On our way back this day, his driver was driving him back. This particular road had been mortared. With these mortars, they left a hole in the road about the size of a dustbin lid and about a foot deep I suppose. It hadn't been filled in and.... dust everywhere, dust, you know, couldn't see where you were going and his staff car straddled this hole. I hit it on my motor cycle, luckily these telescopic forks, they were a miracle, they took the bump, they took it, but my back wheel hit it and threw me up in the air, however I stopped on the bike, I never know how. I got back to that night and my back wheel was all buckled and bent. I took it to the workshop and they put a new wheel in but it was a miracle I never came off.

Anyway, the time came, with various battles going on the battle Hill 112 which was to the right hand side of Caen. Capture Caen from the right, the high ground. One day we'd got it, the next day the Germans had got it, that's how it went on.

Caen was absolutely devastated by Allied bombing.

Before that, I think it was on the seventeenth of July, Caen was a no go, we tried and tried and tried but they just couldn't capture Caen. They just couldn't capture Caen, they went to the left, they went to the right and they decided they'd bomb it and this particular evening, I'll always remember, we heard this noise starting, roar, and as far as you could see out to sea was heavy bombers. Lancasters and Halifax's' - all four engines, lined up about five hundred yards apart came right over us. All the Ack Ack was going like mad ..... we saw the bombs on Caen, saw the dust and the smoke coming and there was five hundred of them and they came one after the other, one after another, it took about an hour and they bombed the hell out of Caen and in the end there was hardly any Ack Ack at all. I believe they did shoot one down, I never saw it but they told me. The next day we were in Caen but it was, they'd bombed hell of it, they ruined it, you know, but the Germans had pulled back by then, there were still some in Caen but that's when they bombed it, that's the only way we could have taken it.

..... Operation Goodwood was the left hand flank, I was on that, big tank battle and they've took it then, they captured Caen and the, the pincer movement to the right was Hill 112 and massive battle that was. They eventually linked up but that's when the Falaise Pocket happened, the Falaise Gap. In the meantime, General Patton, he'd taken all these tanks and come round the back of the Germans, heading towards Paris and his idea was to capture all these Germans with us in a pocket and take them prisoner. In the meantime they were trying to get out of this Falaise Gap, the Germans and we had these Typhoons, Typhoons wonderful aircraft.

The Typhoon, with eight rockets and they were not far from us, their airstrip and they were up and down all the time. These poor devil Germans were trying to get through this narrow gap they were absolutely knocking hell out of them..... blew them to pieces. I saw the aftermath, some of it.

There were dead horses and Germans. Terrible state, blew them to pieces, bits of trucks and tanks. A lot of them did escape, they got out. The Canadian and the Poles and us, we were trying to close this pocket, the Falaise, and we couldn't quite close the last gap. Poles were absolutely, they had a terrible time, they lost a hell of a lot of people. That was a pretty terrible time I remember, it happened every morning. The American bombers would come over, the flights of Liberators and Fortresses, three three three, you know, three three three, as they came over us. The Ack Ack had been bursting all round, and the German guns, 88s, they'd carry on and drop the bombs and disappear but this particular morning they were firing like mad and while looking up and they must have hit this one right, a Liberator it was, right in the bomb racks, of the fuel tank, he just whoof, absolutely nothing, just like bits of silver paper. Oh my god, it just disintegrated completely, and the two either side of me like just carried on...but I never forgot that.

One evening another Liberator, they'd been on a bombing raid and were heading back and it was over us and started to circle at about a thousand feet, circling round and round and round and round, next thing eight parachutes come out. Eight crew had jumped. I think it was eight, jumped out, they were coming down, in the meantime, by the way, in this field in Tailleville about 500 yards away was a big German radar station which was manned by the German Airforce and their Army. It was a massive concrete thing, they'd blown the mast down, it was lying flat. Well, we'd got two or three Bren Guns in the banks, you know, the banks covering it day and night in case they bobbed their heads up. "Don't bother about that lot, leave them to it, only a few of them in there, we'll deal with them later". They were there for about ten days, but little did we know, they had such a field of fire on us...I was going down this road, could have picked me off anytime.

Anyway, in the end, my orders were to go round all the units in line from the beach 'keep your heads down because' I think it was HMS Rodney, one of the big battleships, 'is going to start shelling this lot, it's the only way we're going to get them out'. They're going to start shelling at 2 o'clock, I think it was 2 o'clock, anyway we all got in our slit trenches and we could look down, out to sea, it was all flat you know and we saw a puff of smoke, a flame, and we looked up and we could actually see the shell going through the air, like a dustbin, and dropping on this strong point but actually, they were using low charge because it was short direct, you know, and we'd actually see the shells, you would never believe it. There was a puff of smoke and then they shelled it all afternoon.

Shermans..... Two of those went in, because it was mines all round, they put mines round it. And then the Marine Commandos went in, they got them out. There was a hundred and twenty Germans in there, we thought there was only a handful.

Anyway....marched them down the road. They killed one of them, he tried to come out and they shot him, and , another one was wounded but the others got out ok. Marched them back down to a landing craft, back to UK.

In the meantime, the other company to us was 290 Company, Royal Army Service Corps. They was in the next field to us, we worked together. And three of their blokes, they decided they'd capture this damned strong point then they'd be clever, they went up. It was all corn fields - they crawled through the corn fields, got through the barbed wire, kicked the door open of this place and there was this bloke with a Spandau machine gun. He killed one, another was badly wounded and they crawled back in through the corn field, they got back, and this bloke, his name was Jenkins, Driver Jenkins, they killed him, and they buried him, at night, buried him at the ground beside the strong point. When we got up there we saw his grave.

We buried the other German beside him, stuck him in the grave beside him. But they went through this German's pockets before they buried him and believe it or not, we all had a jack knife. Part of our issue was a Marlin spike and a knife, we all carried one. Army issue, and this bloke had got old Jenkins' pocket knife, in his pocket. He's the one who was killed. Its amazing isn't it.

The time came we were to move on, the Battle of Caen was over. We then moved, went up over Pegasus Bridge. We finished up at a little village called Deauville. It had been heavily shelled and bombed, and hell of a state it was in. Prior to us getting there, there was two dead Germans in the church tower. They were snipers, they'd been sniping our blokes, they'd shot them, anyway. The bodies were still up there and we dug in again and one of our boys, quite a character, Cockney, Goodman his name was, called him Benny Goodman and could play the piano, good pianist. We went out to this village and we found this piano in this bombed house and we pinched it! Stuck it in the three tonne truck and Benny used to play that piano! And we took that all the way to Germany, believe it or not. Wherever we stopped, we'd bring the piano out.

I can remember, the first or second night we were there. There was a field beyond where we were and we saw this Spitfire trailing smoke or something, losing height, getting towards us and next thing, he's still got his wheels up, did a belly landing in the field, by that time it was smoke and steam coming out. A couple of us run across to get him out in case, forgot all about mines, you know, run across to get him out, get the Sutton harness off him quick and he was ok. He was a Canadian pilot and, he's ok, he said "I've been over the Seine" and he said "I got some flack in the radiator and of course the engine started to seize up, so I had to get down quick" . I remember, we took him out and took him to the officers mess; they converted a three tonne truck where they could drink their pink gins and they gave him a drink and then next thing, some of his buddies turned up and took him back.

We moved out then from there and the next place was called Pont-l'Évêque. By this time we were waiting to cross the river Seine. The river Seine was our next obstacle and Pont-l'Évêque was a village sort of half way and we moved into this farm. We parked up. The farmer was digging a great hole beside the barn when we got there. Didn't take much notice. Anyway he said, "do you want to sleep in my farmhouse". One of our chaps could speak pretty good French, "ooh, yes please" and we, well we made some beds up in the farm but in the meantime he come back out to me, he said, beckoned me in "what's he want?" and I went in the farmhouse and beside the hole was a cow, still alive....., full of shrapnel, dying, full of maggots, still alive, you know. Terrible state. Of course they wanted to bury it you see and he wanted me to shoot it and I carried a thirty eight revolver and a Sten gun with a thirty eight, you know, so I.....I'd never shot anything in my life before so on the cow, there's a mark in the centre, bang, and it didn't kill it. Blood was rushing out of its nose and it was starting to get up and I fired again and it still didn't kill it and the old farmer "no, no, no" and he took the gun off me and shot it behind the ear. And I found out after that the skull is so thick that the thirty eight round wasn't going... anyway they buried it and it appears that the Germans had not long moved out.

..... They was telling us all about pushing wheelbarrows and stuff with the kit in to get it back out over the river Seine. I remember walking out, out the farm, down the field just to have a look, because I always used to be a moocher, just jumped over a hedge and nearly landed on this dead German.....Looking all at me, agh.....Shell all to himself, half his body was blown away. And it had split his rucksack open and all his family photographs, scattered all over the place and I looked at them and they were his family and I thought "bloody hell" children and what not" ...anyway we then moved up.

.....Bert and I, we were out on this blinkin day, we went down to the village at Pont-l'Évêque. We saw these French people in the square, crowd, shouting and jeering and they got these French girls, up against the wall and they were cutting their hair off. The girls were screaming. Bert said "oh, stop em" I said "keep out of it - they were collaborating with the Germans".

Anyway, we moved out and evening time, we got up to Rouen on the river Seine. We stopped in the town and said "we can't cross the river yet, they haven't finished the Pontoon Bridge" and the Royal Engineers were building a Pontoon Bridge, you know, all across and, I always remember, I was absolutely shattered and I was, laying in the gutter virtually and I woke up and these flippin tanks were going past my flippin ears.

Anyway, they said "ok, clear to go" and we followed the tanks over and these Sherman tanks, they found it heavy I suppose and one or two of the pontoons had gone under water a bit, and I got halfway across. The Royal Engineers saw this go "ah, come on go on"..... anyway I got over the bridge.

..... We were with the first Canadian Army you see, the First British Corps and our job was not to turn right over the Seine with everybody else and go up to Lille, and Brussels. We had to turn left and go into Le Havre because Le Havre was still occupied by the Germans, somebody said 23,000, I don't think there was that many in there, but we headed down. We stopped at a little village called Yvetot which was about seven miles short of Le Havre, and we stopped in a big Chateaux there, and parked up. I always remember because in the next field, I looked across and there's all these...girders and what not laying in the field and I thought "what the devil's that?" and it was, two big radio masts and the Germans had dynamited them and dropped them flat so we couldn't use them. And they were the ones they were using for transmitting, Lord Haw-Haw and all that lot "German calling" that propaganda to England." But prior to that I found out, you wouldn't know, but there was a commercial station called Radio Luxemburg and they used to transmit in English to Britain and children used to listen to it, children's stuff, and they also had one later called Radio Normandy and they were doing a similar thing, well that was, that particular transmitter, Radio Normandy.

Anyway, they were in the next field to us and we took this field and we were having supply the Canadians with stuff for the Battle of Le Havre, and it took at least a week, maybe longer, to get that out, but, right by us, the first one I saw, was, this big block house and there was this big ramp going up and I thought "what the hell's that?" we went over across and it was a flying bomb ramp.

The first V1 site we'd seen and luckily it hadn't started, they'd got bits and pieces there and stuff and there was no bombs there but the ramp was already to go into action so thank god we'd captured that one. But prior to that, if I can go back to V1, the V1 bomb, it must have been about D plus 8 one morning we were in this field, but, I heard this thing coming..... like a motor bike. Believe it or not it was a V1 bomb flying, coming towards us, from England heading towards the German lines and it came right across us and disappeared over the German lines. Blokes were saying "what the hell was that?".

In the meantime we used to get the daily papers a day late, believe it or not and we'd read about these "doodle bugs" they called them, and I said, "that's a flaming doodle bug" and it appears that it was one - the Tempest or the Spitfire, it was the Tempest mainly wasn't it? Used to fly alongside, tip it up and turn it round and this one.... the speed over the German lines, the first one we saw.

We saw a lot after that. Anyway we captured this place. thank god, so they couldn't use it. Then they bombed Le Havre, again, they bombed the place to hell, no need for it they reckon but .... it was a big German E boat. We went in afterwards, went into Le Havre, to their stores and, it was full of all

their gear and one of the blokes' had whisky and god knows what, because one of our blokes had a bottle of Benedictine, I'll always remember it, he was a bit, he wasn't all there, poor Enoch and he drunk it, drunk the lot himself. He was out for two days, he was, they had to cover up for him, he could have died there, in a slit trench. Anyway, I remember I had a load of cigars, I had the German cigars. I didn't smoke much but I thought, oh...yes, while we were there, this particular evening we saw this RAF two engine aircraft come over and the engine was smoking, one of his engines, and the under carriage was down, I thought "what's that?" and it was a Bristol Bombay.

They were going like the clappers, the Germans were going, we couldn't catch them. Our next stop was Dieppe, believe it or not. We went along the coast as far as Dieppe for some reason. We stopped in a barn and, we got in this hay barn. We thought it was lovely but all night long we could hear in the loft...it was mice and rats running around in the loft above us. Anyway next morning, we were on the move again, went up through Lille and Lille hadn't been liberated that long and I'll always remember, everyone was waving flags and what not and some bloke, I remember a bloke with a three wheeled bicycle or something full of beer, bottles of beer and he was handing out all this beer out to the boys . All these bottles of beer and we carried on again and we got just outside Brussels and we pulled in for the night and the Belgian people come around and want to talk to us and what not. One of our boys said, always known as Lofty, "Lofty, you come from Birmingham, don't you? Bloke here wants to talk to anybody from Birmingham". Belgian chap. I shook hands with him and he said he was an evacuee - elderly man, during the First World War, and he was in Birmingham, and he'd got quite a Brummie accent, believe it or not. He had a picture postcard, and he said "do you know that? I worked there". It was the Birmingham market, the Markethall, beautiful big old market, I used to love going there as a kid. I said "yeah, I got bad news for you, the Germans bombed it".

Next morning we moved up to a place called Lier which was going up towards Antwerp area and we pulled in to some Belgian Barracks. I was fascinated because all these Belgian civilian blokes, they'd got armbands on and they'd got all these old rifles and pistols. They'd buried them in the gardens and they'd dug them up when the Gerrys went and they were there in this place trying to clean them up and get them working again.

Only there for that night. Anyway, the next day, which would have been 17 September 1944. September seventeenth because I can remember the date exactly. We went a bit further on to a place called Katalinaarval and it was a big, all these big greenhouses you know like market garden area in Belgium, all flat on the dikes.

We pulled in, lunchtime - eating our rations parked up on the side of the road one o'clock, something like that, and believe it or not, we, first night we slept in a greenhouse, its amazing how stupid things...

It's amazing, if there were any bombs or anything it would have shattered the glass. Yes, I remember the seventeenth of September, because you know that date, don't you?

Seventeenth of September, Sunday morning, Sunday lunchtime, Arnhem, The Battle of Arnhem.

Anyways, lunchtime, we're eating our rations and we heard this noise louder and louder and we looked to our left and we could see all these dots, it was...aircraft towing gliders. Dakotas, fighter escorts, possibly Mustangs, and um, heading towards us, they went right over us and headed in to Holland and of course that was the first wave of the Battle of Arnhem. They were the American troops going in, the 82nd and the 101st Airbornes came over us, er and they were heading for bridges of Eindhoven and Nijmegen.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne, which was the British airbourne, they had the job of capturing Arnhem Bridge which was the last one but their route was different. They didn't come over us they went on the northern route. But it was all the American aircraft that came over us, anyway, we thought 'oh god, the war will be over tomorrow' it went on and on and on, aircraft after aircraft.

But of course, then we had to get to them, they called it the corridor which was a fifty mile...route, two miles wide, right up through Holland to get to the bridges to relieve the airbourne. And of course, as each tank got knocked out in front, it blocked the road and nothing could go ahead. The Germans had their anti-tank guns and god knows what knocking the tanks out and the Bren gun carriers and trucks and they bulldozed them off the road. Of course, eventually we got as far as Nijmegen.

Nijmegen, and the bridge hadn't been taken there until the Guards with their Churchill tanks eventually crossed Nijmegen Bridge, it would appear. We didn't know till after the Germans put charges on all these bridges and as the tanks were going across Nijmegen Bridge they set them off and thank god they didn't work they were duds for some reason.

We didn't know at the time. But then, of course then the battle started to try to get to Arnhem to relieve our 1<sup>st</sup> Airbourne boys which was just hopeless, and villages were absolutely...I remember a village, oh, I forget the name of it, absolutely flattened.

Anyway, the Dorsetshire Regiment had the job of trying to get across with the Americans as well and they got badly beaten up. What, what had happened then of course, the poor old 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne, in the meantime I had a pal, my Army pal which I joined up with, he was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, he was eventually taken prisoner, he hung out to the last day and they finished up in the 'Cauldron' at Oosterbeek. They finished up at their headquarters - its now the Airborne Museum. The Germans were all around them and they were hanging out there for about seven days and the orders came "evacuate" and the only way was to cross the river, so under darkness, in a terrific storm, thunder storm, they were detailed to leave headquarters, and go down to the woods to the riverbank. The advance party put white tapes for them to follow. They had to, put cloths and stuff round their equipment and rifles so it wouldn't make them rattle as they were walking - dead silence. Luckily with the rain and the wind and the storm the Germans didn't realise what was going on and in the meantime the Royal Engineers with their rubber boats, inflatable boats, collapsible boats with outboard motors were ferrying the boys back across over the river.

A lot got back but a lot didn't, some tried to swim and they were drowned but I think there was twelve thousand took part in the Battle and it was about, about four thousand got back, it was something like that, the rest were killed or taken prisoner. Just a disaster.

Anyway, that was it, stalemate. We went back to a place called Breda in Holland. We were there for some time, first of January 1945, remember it well. We'd spent Christmas there. New Year's Day just after breakfast we heard all this noise and banging going on and all these German aircraft overhead.

A thousand feet, 500 feet high, bombers, fighters, all heading to Belgium, towards Brussels, it appears they were bombing Brussels Airport or something, and they'd got to come back so we were waiting for them, next field to us was the Royal Airforce Regiment and they'd got anti-tank Bofor guns. They were waiting for these and we saw this Focke-Wulf 190, the only one I saw, believe it or not heading towards us and they started bashing away with this gun. Must have been 500 feet and I thought, "good god, they've shot his tail off" something flew off the back and I looked again and the thing went on smoking and flaming, and I looked again and this thing, it had come off, it started to, white stream behind it, and the pilot had actually jumped out at that, and his parachute. He must



have pulled his chute, and he hit the ground, it just started to stream out behind him, killed him stone dead. And the old Focke-Wulf 190 hit the ground, the engine flew out like a comet and caught fire. Anyway, we went over and poor devil, we wrapped him with his parachute, I'll always remember. But as I say, he jumped out at that height, why, no ejector seat in those days. But he thought he had a chance, you know? But it's like he shot the tail off, I never forgot.

Anyway, that was, the one and only time I saw a 190. I saw a 1-0-9...poked his nose one morning over, Tailleville. Come up from Carpiquet Airport. They were still holding Carpiquet by Caen, few fighters there and with no time at all, two Spitfires found him and gone, bang bang, gone in flames as quick as that, quick as that. Because we had an airstrip by us, Johnny Johnson Squadron was there, the, Spitfire Squadron, yeah.

Oh yeah, on one day we're in the field and the Typhoons used to circle over us to land on their airstrip. This particular day they're coming and we took no notice, next thing there's a great big bang and the middle of the field, and, earth went up, thought, "good god, we're shelled again" and one of the, rockets on the Typhoons had stuck, it had jammed and as he'd come round by us he'd released it and it was a rocket, hit, in the field, made quite a, small crater, because we didn't really know some of their boys turned up later, RAF lads, told us all about it.

They lost a lot of Typhoons, you know, beautiful memorial in Normandy.

Anyway, beginning of February, bitterly cold winter by the way, horrible on a motor cycle, eventually they gave us a jeep, could hardly stand up on the old bike. The office used to pinch it half the time.

Oh yes, I've got to go back, unfortunately to January..., December....Battle of Ardennes they call it the Battle of the Bulge I call it the Ardennes Battle, when von Rundstedt's broke through the Ardennes Forest and of course the Americans were very thinly placed there...and of course young rookies hadn't got a clue and they just decimated them and we sent some of our boys up there. Some of our units were up there and this particular night I'd got to go up there and take a message. I eventually got up there, terrible snow and horrible night, pitch black, and prior to that, all the yanks were so trigger happy because the Germans had been dressing in American uniforms, infiltrating in the lines.

And causing havoc. And of course, they were all trigger happy as hell and me in the pitch dark on a motorcycle coming up a lane all on my own with a helmet very similar to a German front view and these were jumping out "halt, who goes there?" . I had to explain who I was, in the end I thought "blow this" and I, I always remember, I found a big log on the side of the road and I lay on it and went to sleep with my crash helmet as a pillow. I woke up and it was just getting light. And I remember, a V1 went over ...woke me up I think.

Anyway, I was alright then, I'd, got daylight, went and found them, and I got back, I said "I was more frightened of the Yanks that night, than the Germans!" But they were all so trigger happy, you know.

Anyway, we'd got to go up to the Reichswald Forest.

....Through the Siegfried Line to into Germany. And the First Canadian Army, which I was still with the 51st Highland Division. Royal Welsh Fusiliers were there, anyway, seventh of February was my birthday, I was twenty-one.

And I think it was the sixth, the day before, was the day that the Battle started, and it was still frost and snow, snowy frost, horrible. We advanced up into the forest and within a couple of days,

everything's thawed out - mud and horrible. I tried to ride a motorcycle through all that mud and filth and that. Hell of a battle it was, they wouldn't give in, we eventually got up as far as Kleve.

The next place was called Goch and that had been bombed with these damn earthquake bombs or whatever because the roads were just impassable. It was like going round the wall of death on the motorbike. We carried on again to a place called Kevelaer, the next place and we stopped there and set up our headquarters. By this time, they'd discovered Belsen, I'll always remember a report in the newspapers.... Belsen, Dachau and all.

We were in this farmhouse we took over, chucked the Germans out, and this particular night, Bert and I were on duty and our headquarters were back at Goch about twenty miles back and the telephone lines went down. Shelled, or a tank ran over them, lost communication, one of the DRs would have to go back to headquarters to communicate. But, we didn't like that because, once you've been done your order of the day, usually finish about, twelve or one in the morning, to stay at headquarters you could put a blanket down get your head down and have a sleep till six next morning. But there you stop up all night, you know, so we tossed a coin. I lost, so I had to go back, I went back and next morning and they said "your mate copped it last night" it would have been me. Poor old Bert. Got blown up.

Anyway, eventually we were there, when, V E. day came along, and I know we went down to this village of Kevelaer with a three tonne truck, filled it with all these wooden beams and stuff, built flipping great bonfire. Celebrated with a bonfire, the lads had been saving all the booze up, they knew it was going to happen and I tell you, the lads, they were drinking like mad. Well, of course, I was on duty that nigh. I had a few drinks, I wouldn't have passed a breathalyser but I still had to go and do the rounds. The lads that didn't, they were out of their minds some of them, staggering about.

Next day, of course, big anti-climax. We stopped there sometime, a lot of our work was ferrying German prisoners, thousands of them, truckloads, we had to get about eighty of them on a three tonne truck. All standing up, and we were ferrying them to different places. They had these cages they put up to put the prisoners in, big barbed wire, you know.

I always remember, this particular day, I was leading this convoy, all these Germans and we were looking for this place, couldn't find it and I'd stopped and was talking to this Sergeant in the front, and looking at the map and this German leaned over "excuse me, sir" perfect English he said "I think you've just passed it, it was by the willow". He'd seen the place from high up in the truck, perfect English "oh, by the, you've passed it was by the willows".

Anyway we took them all, hundred of these Germans, that was our job then. We weren't allowed to speak to Germans at all, civilians and whatnot.

The time came "ok" they started, demobbing from the, older boys. All us young ones....inside the paybook is written Far East 1. Didn't know what the hell that was, and I was Group 50 which was at least two years before I was demobbed. We started training, they put us in a new unit, called 170 Company Royal Army Service Corps attached to the 34th Armoured Brigade, to train for the mainland invasion of Japan.

We went to the new unit, a place called Burgsteinfurt near Munster in Germany and we started training, getting ready, thinking about drawing our kit. We hadn't had it up till then and they sent us back to the UK ready to embark for the Far East. Those days you had to go down all the way to Calais

on the train, the old wooden fence seats, horrible things. We got the cross channel troop ship across, landed at Dover, early morning.

Dover station...I remember buying a morning newspaper and the headline was, because this was August 45, "atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima". We didn't know what it was, but thank god! And they said "ok, you can all go home" and I spent ten days at home.

We didn't have to go, thank god. I was home for VJ day and then they sent us all back again back to the same unit and we then did two years, in Germany, of army of occupation. My pal and myself, we were so fed up with bitterly cold winters and, on the bikes, frozen to death because the DR kit was rubbish. The Sergeant Major comes to us one day, a mate of mine, old, Butch, he said, "would you like a cushy job" anything to get off bikes! He said, "First Corps headquarters" a place near the Möhne dam. "They want staff car drivers, are you interested?" he said. "You both got A1 driving records" he said - "take a fifteen hundred weight and go down" interview, about thirty miles away. Butch and I went down. Went in, saw this CO, had the interview "oh" he said "yes, looks good, got a good record" he said "ok, will you accept the job?" I said "oh, yes, ah, on one condition" I said, "my mate goes with me. My mate said exactly the same thing.

So, we were posted there then and we did some time driving these officers around, First Corps officers. I had a, Humber super snipe, a four by four staff car, and then I had a Volkswagen, believe it or not, for a time. They were building these VWs, using them for staff cars, and then the time came when I was posted to Munster hospital driving this officer and they were short of drivers at Rhine Army headquarters at a place called Badenhausen which was about fifty miles up the, up the autobahn.

Anyway, my time came to be demobbed, it was May '47. Don't know the date. The boys took me down to the local railway station said cheerio, stopped a night at the staging place in Munster, next day we got a train to Cuxhaven, Germany. We came by German troop ship across to Hull. We arrived at Hull, we got on a train to York and we arrived at a big barracks in York. We were given a meal, we were packed off to different departments, one place to get your suit, another place to get your shoes, another place to get your hat, mac....anyway, a shirt, a tie, a pair of socks and a box to put it in, a cardboard box.

But when I got to the suit department, he looked at me, six foot three, "got nothing to fit you" he said, civilians they were, great it was. They said, "I tell you what, you'll have to be made to measure" he said "I'll measure you up, do you a nice suit, you'll get it in about two or three weeks". And I had a nice blue, pinstripe, I'll always remember, lovely suit. Anyway, I had my box and one or two more boys, I met there, they were Brummies, Birmingham lads, we got together and we found the train was about five or six o'clock, to Birmingham and we looked at our watches, time was going on, they paid us out our final money and whatnot. Staff sergeant, told us to get lost, anyway, we dashed out with our big boxes, and a bus was just going past "you're going to the station? Right" got on this stage, got onto the station and the train was just pulling out and we threw our boxes in the air and we finished up in the buffet. We had to wait till the next train, was about ten at night. We were drinking whisky. Anyway, we eventually got the train home and I arrived at New Street Station in Birmingham and I think they were doing volunteer cars to take the boys to their homes, or something.

I arrived home about two or three in the morning and mother...glad to see me put me back in my room in my own little bed. And I had three months paid leave. I met all my old mates who had come out of different services, used to meet up every night.

We were all suffering from post traumatic stress, believe it or not, and we didn't know it. We couldn't settle. I couldn't stay in the house, my mother used to say, "come, stay in and talk to me one night" "no, I've got to go out, down the pubs" every night. Pub crawl, all around Birmingham. Eight pints. You know, wild as hell we were. Wouldn't take orders from anybody.

Anyway, I thought, got to start settling down a bit and my other two mates, they'd both been in the Royal Marines actually, one was on HMS Howe the other was on landing craft on D Day. They both worked at the airport and they said "you're entitled to go back to the airport being as you worked there before, and there is a vacancy, if you want to come, come up have an interview with the manager" so I went up. The airport was in its infancy, of course, it had just been taken over, back by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, had taken over from the Airforce again, we'd still got the Terminal building. And we were "Crash Crew" they called, the airport fire service, marshallers, refuellers, we were doing all this work, and general dogsbodies you know. Starting aircraft and whatnot and eventually we, got a bit more organised and my main job was a marshaller.

Air France was doing a flight in from Paris everyday, a scheduled service from Paris in Dakotas. We had the old converted Dakotas, AerLingus were doing a flight in from Dublin everyday, believe it or not, converted Dakotas, and KLM were doing a, Schiphol, Amsterdam flight everyday. That was our three.

And we also had three private companies - Lees Hill Aviation. They had a Rapide aircraft, a De Havilland Rapide, and a couple of Austers. Another airline had two Airspeed Oxfords, converted consoles, called them consoles didn't they, and two Aerovans- weird looking things and a couple of Proctors, Percval Proctors, with a major engine. Anyway, they were operating as independents and we used to sort-of look after them, start them up and refuel and whatnot. This particular day I remember, the one Rapide was going over to the Isle of Man with some people from BSA motorcycle factory and they crashed into the mountain on the Isle of Man and they were all killed bar one. I remember, was missing for days, they couldn't find it in the mist on the mountain .

..... Things went on, we had the two Aero Clubs operating. We had a Midland Aero Club they had a Tiger Moth and three Austers, the Warwickshire Aero Club of which I became a member, we had three Austers two two seaters and one three seaters. I enjoyed the job. Did quite a bit flying with the flying club, I never went solo unfortunately, I ran out of money. I did loads of dual control, loads of flying, all test flights and what, went on all the different aircraft. Prior to that I mentioned that when I was at Birmingham airport, training the RAF in those days, when the pupils had gone on advanced training they'd possibly go on, have to do cross country or something and they were on these, either Avro Ansons or Oxfords and they'd come and drop in to see us and then take off again.

We had the job of starting the things up and I can remember the Swordfish.

Another time an Anson come in, and had to start the Anson with a starting handle on the side, little, in the side of the engine. Anyway, later on some Spitfires came in, and they'd got these cartridge starters, I hadn't got a clue. I had no electric starter to, start him up..... "you'll have to put the charges in, its run out" so we took it out like a chamber from a revolver or something, put these big cartridges in, and I always remember he shouted "contact"..... and the flames come out the...singd all my hair! Anyway, that was my experience starting the old aircraft.

We had a Fairey Battle come in and the same thing and a Fairey Fulmar with the gear underneath, you know, all interesting stuff.

I eventually settled down got this job at the airport as I said, enjoyed it, quite enjoyed the job, nice fresh air, and my main hobby was motorcycling, trials and scrambles, I had this bike and I used to race it weekends if I had weekend off, which was very rare, of course. We worked shift hours and I got fed up in the end so, I wanted my weekends off and I found us a job going as experimental test driver at Lucas Electrical and they gave me the job there testing motorcycles and cars, electrical stock, and experimental research. We used to fit all this experimental stuff, we enjoyed the job, really enjoyed it, weekend, every weekend off. I had a different motorcycle to go home every night, all the different test bikes and cars an whatnot. Anyway, the Suez crisis came along, oh dear, the danger that petrol would go on ration, and they stopped all testing and unfortunately, I was made redundant. Broke my heart, and I never signed on before, I went to the labour exchange and they said "oh, we've got some drivers jobs, you want a drivers job?" "anything" I said.... "got bus driving". I said "I've never driven a bus in my life. I haven't got a PSV Public Service.. "Oh we'll train you" so I went down to the local Midland Red Bus service garage.

I learned to drive a double decker bus. Week in the school, passed out on the double deckers and I spent about nine months bus driving. I hated it, long hours and whatnot. Next thing, I heard about this test drivers job at Dunlop doing a similar thing I was doing at Lucas, mainly cars and lorries . I went along "yeah" got the job, no problem, great. Testing tyres that was, we used to do endurance testing and track testing and we had this special track out near Nuneaton, called MIRA, Motor Industry Research Association. We used to do a lot of work there different types of tracks and high speed, low speed, what god knows what. I was there until 1988. Dunlop sold out to the Japanese. The Sumitomo Rubber Company. And they decided they weren't going to do any more testing and I was made redundant.

Unfortunately, that was me finished ....at the age of sixty I was made redundant but they did me a favour then I lived a life of a gentleman and retired.

I was still living Sutton Coldfield. We used to go down to Wales quite a lot, the Tenby area, our main place was the Gower Peninsula, Port Eynon We had a touring caravan and a landrover. We had three children and they were all growing up. The motorbike went by the by then - we used to go camping a lot. We decided we'd like to live down here and we came, saw these two plots of land in Jameston near Manorbier. We bought the two plots and my daughter, her husband was a bricklayer and we decided we'd do it, build two bungalows and we'd got two plots of land, got planning permission. We subcontracted all the work but he did all the bricklaying and we did all the labouring my wife, and myself and my daughter. We built two beautiful bungalows and we were there for thirty two years.