

**MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

**‘TIME TO REMEMBER’**

**Interviewee:** Mr Syd Cringle

**Date of birth:** 28<sup>th</sup> July 1924

**Place of birth:**

**Interviewer:** David Callister

**Recorded by:** David Callister

**Date recorded:** 6<sup>th</sup> July 2005

**Topic(s):** WWII and training  
Joining 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of Border Regiment  
Glider training  
Battle at Arnhem  
Prisoner of War in Stalag 11B  
Relocation to working camp in Pad Grund  
Living conditions  
Levelling train lines  
Escaping and joining women’s working camp  
Transported back to the UK

Syd Cringle - Mr C

David Callister - DC

**DC** Right ... umm ... interview with Syd Cringle. It is the 6<sup>th</sup> day of July 2005, we're in Castletown at 28, The Crofts. Syd, born on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1924. We're going to talk about ... umm ... well, mainly about Arnhem and also about being a prisoner of war. You'd be 18, or thereabouts, like many of the other lads, of course, who went into the forces. And ... umm ... some call-up papers would land through the letterbox, would they?

**Mr C** Yes, that was in November 1942, and ... umm ... they were my call-up papers, but fortunately, or unfortunately, I developed jaundice and I was not cleared to go to join up until March 1943.

**DC** Right. So '42 you got the papers and March – that was quite a long time, really, before you got in?

**Mr C** Yes.

**DC** But anyway, the war was well on at that point. You got called up into the army, in fact, did you?

**Mr C** Yes, I was called up to the army and I reported for preliminary training – primary training at Formby.

**DC** Right. Well you did all this basic training and you finished up in an infantry regiment – is that what you wanted?

**Mr C** No ... I ... when asked my preference, I suggested I should be in the RAOC [Royal Army Ordnance Corps] – the Ordnance Corp – because my eldest brother was serving in it ...

**DC** Yea.

**Mr C** ... but I was told I was too young for that and the infantry was the place for me.

**DC** Oh, I see, right. (*laughter*) You had no choice after that, then. So then you went – you had specialist training with 4<sup>th</sup> East Lancashire and battalion training and so on. But after that you were issued with tropical kit, so that meant 'Far East,' did it?

**Mr C** Yes, it meant, by the sound of things, that we were due to go to Burma. I didn't fancy that, and so I volunteered for the Airborne ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... and ... umm ... subsequently I joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Border Regiment which was in the first Air Landing Brigade of the First Division of the Airborne.

**DC** Right. So this would be round about '44, by now, I suppose.

**Mr C** Yes, this was the beginning of 1944.

**DC** Where were you based at that time then?

**Mr C** We were told to report to Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire, which was the HQ of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Border Regiment, and it was from there that I did most of my airborne training ... umm ...

**DC** What would that consist of then?

**Mr C** Well, they were basically getting fit and ... umm ... doing schemes which lasted five days and ... umm ... also we tried to get training on the actual ...

**DC** Sorry – war conditions, was it?

**Mr C** War conditions, yes.

**DC** Yes, yes. Did you have to do parachute training, or what?

**Mr C** No, we didn't do parachute training – this was a glider borne unit and ... umm ... for the actual glider flights we did two practise flights, one from – well, both from Harwell Airport, which is – Harwell is now the centre of the atomic energy, of course, but not in those days ... it was an RAF station, peace-time station.

**DC** Well, it was later in '44 that you found yourself on the way to Arnhem?

**Mr C** Yes, it was in September 1944 ... umm ... we flew from an airport called

Broadwell in Oxfordshire, and it was part of an air armada, because not only was the British Airborne on the way, there was two divisions of the American airborne Division also flying that day ... one to the Eindhoven area and one to Nijmegen.

**DC** What sort of aircraft would you be in then?

**Mr C** We were in gliders. The British used the *Horsa* glider, basically, which would carry 28 to 30 fully armed soldiers ...

**DC** Right.

**Mr C** ... and the Americans flew in *Waco*, or *Waco* as some people call them ... gliders ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... they carried about 12 to 16 fully armed soldiers.

**DC** When you say fully armed then, what would you be carrying at that time?

**Mr C** Well, actually, with me being in the three inch mortar platoon, we had handcarts to carry the mortars, and ourselves, we'd have a rifle ...

**DC** What, an *Enfield*?

**Mr C** Yes, *Enfield 303*, and with two or three bombs and a couple of phosphorous bombs and all our kit, sort of thing.

**DC** You had a dangerous cargo to get around. (*laughter*)

**Mr C** Well yes. We had six handcarts in the glider, and I forget how many men – I've got a very bad memory of this flight ...

**DC** Yes?

**Mr C** ... because I can only remember one person being with me ...

**DC** Oh right. (*laughter*)

**Mr C** ... by name ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... anyway, we flew – we were towed by a *Dakota* and we had a pretty uneventful flight, but unfortunately I'm not a good traveller, and two or three occasions I felt a bit squeamish, because flying in a glider is not the best form of flying, (*laughter*) however, we survived that and ... umm ...

**DC** Where did you land?

**Mr C** We landed ... umm ... nine miles to the west of Arnhem, outside a place called Oosterbeek, the name of the landing zone ... we landed at pla ... [place] ... on Renkum Heath.

**DC** Oh, right – so you'd be in a field, of course?

**Mr C** It's a large field we landed in, and, funnily enough, because we were one of the first gliders in, it was the best to be down the first. I always thought it would be better not to be in the first lot, but I found out afterwards that it was better to land first because you had all of the landing zone to pick from ...

**DC** Of course, yes.

**Mr C** ... 'cos once you were committed, you had to go.

**DC** Yes. Did these gliders always land smoothly or not?

**Mr C** No, they – there were very bumpy landings sometimes, and there ...

**DC** That would be very dangerous with all this armoury as well, wouldn't it?

**Mr C** Oh yes, it was very dangerous because ... umm ... the *Waco* in particular had a habit of standing on its nose, (*laughter*) consequently any cargo in it came forward ...

**DC** Really?

**Mr C** ... there was lots of people killed that way.

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... but flying in the *Horsa* was slightly better, but even so you – the front wheel had a bad habit of coming up through ... umm ... between the two pilots (*laughter*)...

**DC** (*laughter*) Oh really?!

**Mr C** ... but I must say, on our flight, it was just – I've had a lot worse flights coming to Ronaldsway (*laughter*) and ... umm ... we were very fortunate, we landed exactly where we were supposed to land. But there were two brigades of paratroopers to land at Arnhem as well.

**DC** Oh aye.

**Mr C** Now the order of landing was that the pathfinders of the parachute regiment – the 21<sup>st</sup> Independent Parachute Company, they were to land first, and they landed at half past twelve, set out beacons to guide the planes in and also they marked out the ground so that it could be seen from the air with long banners on the ground forming letters – ours was the letter 'S', so we were landing, in other words, at landing zone 'S' ...

**DC** Hmmm Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... umm ... we went in and, as I said before, we had a perfect landing, and from there our duty was to ... umm ... protect and form a perimeter around the landing zone as far as possible to protect it for when the paratroops [paratroopers] start to land about three quarters of an hour to an hour after us.

**DC** That's the picture that people see today, isn't it, these masses of parachutes coming down?

**Mr C** Yes, yes, that's ... umm ... what happened then. By this time we'd moved off away from the landing zone because you can always defend a place better from

outside than from inside fighting out ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... and we'd taken up position behind some trees in like a glade in the woods – trees on both sides. And from there we were able to fire onto any movement that was approaching the landing zone. And we were called upon almost immediately to open fire. We were given a target by direction and range. What it was, I don't know to this day, but ... umm ... we opened fire and after about half an hour we were told to cease firing and, reading a book afterwards, called the 'By Air to Battle' which was the official document by the Ministry of Defence, they said that the mortars of 23 Platoon under Lieutenant Ullman was well fought. Well, that was us, so that was a bit of commendation ... umm ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... after the paratroops [paratroopers] had landed, it was getting on for late afternoon, we moved into the woods where we laid up for the night, and it was there that we got (*laughter*) quite a fright, to be quite honest, because the – all the inmates of a mental asylum had broken out due to the bombing of the RAF (*laughter*) and we were – we could hear these screams in the night and see people in white nightdresses running through the woods (*laughter*) and it was quite unnerving.

**DC** Yes. (*laughter*)

**Mr C** Anyway, we survived the night and then comes a blank in my memory, I'm afraid, because obviously we were given the order to move to a place called Weisterbien [sp ???].

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** Now Weisterbien [sp ???] is high ground just north of the River Rhine and it was the furthest west point in the perimeter ...

**DC** Right.

**Mr C** ... and the importance of it was that it overlooked the ferry to a place called

Riehl, on the other side, where the Polish parachute brigade was supposed to land on the following Thursday ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... and we were supposed – it was a very important point and we were supposed to hold this ...

**DC** Were you under attack?

**Mr C** Yes, we moved in on the Monday – not much happening then at all – on Tuesday, we'd dug in by this time and had a mortar pit built, and we had spasmodic attacks with ... from German mortars, and it was rather amusing that, until we had the mortar pit dug, and trenches for the people who were not involved in the actual firing of it, we all dived for cover under these handcarts, and when you consider each handcarts had about (*laughter*) sixty or seventy mortar bombs in them ...

**DC** It was ridiculous! (*laughter*)

**Mr C** ... but nevertheless, that's just human nature, I think.

**DC** How were these handcarts transported around, then, had they just ...?

**Mr C** We had to pull them.

**DC** Did you?

**Mr C** Yes, we were known as the 'Donkey' platoon (*laughter*) and I think it was well named. (*laughter*)

**DC** What happened after that, then Syd?

**Mr C** Well, we were there for Monday and Tuesday and the Wednesday with – apart from the spasmodic attacks by mortar – we were really doing nothing. I thought it was a bit of a holiday, but on the Thursday they decided to – when I say they, I mean the Germans decided that they wanted that piece of high ground ...

**DC** Oh aye.

**Mr C** ... and we got a right pounding with mortars first of all, and then they attacked through – it was all wooded country in this area – they attacked with their infantry through the woods and also with three tanks.

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** Funnily enough, all three tanks were put out of action.

**DC** Yes?

**Mr C** Actually I only saw one, personally, and that was set on fire, right alongside our mortar pit ...

**DC** Really?

**Mr C** ... but by that time, we'd lost the mortar and had to take cover elsewhere.

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** Things began to get a bit desperate then, and twelve of us were selected – we'd lost the mortars, so we had to be ordinary infantry ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... and we were told to try and push through the woods, round the back of where they thought the attack from the Germans was coming from. This sounded quite reasonable, (*laughter*) just talking about it, but, when we got into the woods we were met with a hail of machine gun fire, there was two or three of the fellows leading were killed, and obviously there was no way we were going – we could get through ...

**DC** No.

**Mr C** ... so after a bit of consultation, we withdrew, and the idea was to join up with the platoon who were guarding the area in the first place ...

**DC** Yea.

**Mr C** ... but we couldn't get across an open – well, a fairly open piece of ground with just a few trees in it, because there was a tank hold down on a road overlooking this, about four hundred yards away ...

**DC** Yea.

**Mr C** ... and immediately we tried to cross it they opened fire with their main armament which was, I suppose, a six-pounder gun and also by – with the machine gun fire ...

**DC** Yes, right.

**Mr C** ... and we were caught above ground with the – only shelter we could get was behind a tree ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... or trees ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... and we held out there for about half an hour of – they were shelling us there, and eventually they had a direct hit on a chap who was using a *Bren* gun carrier at about four yards away from me, and of course he was killed instantly. The chap alongside him was killed and the machine gun was ruined, so we were only left with about five of us with rifles, so we decided that there was nothing more we could do but our chance of survival was to make a dash for it back to the platoon positions.

**DC** Hmm.

**Mr C** This was the stupid bit – when we got there they'd all retreated, so we were (*laughter*) left by ourselves. But anyway, we worked out what had happened, so we had to go down and follow them up. And we went on back down towards company headquarters and we caught them up, and joined up with them and we went into the area where the company headquarters was dug in and we occupied

slit trenches there. And it was there that I heard a direct – what I thought was a direct hit on a slit trench in front of me – or a very close hit, anyway, and I heard cries for help from the people in it, so, like a fool I stuck my head over the top to crawl out of my slit trench and unfortunately I got the full blast of a bomb ...

**DC** Really?!

**Mr C** ... which was about four or five yards away, but I realised afterwards how fortunate I was – if it had been hard ground, I would probably have had my head blown off ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... but seeing the ground was soft ...

**DC** Oh, right.

**Mr C** ... it absorbed the shock of the bomb ...

**DC** Yes?

**Mr C** ... and apart from a – the effect of the blast from it, it hit me in the face and dazed me a bit, and another bit of shrapnel took a piece out of my cheek ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... and then I went from there to a first aid post to get a dressing on it because, although there was nothing large about the thing, it was bleeding profusely and I got that – I was sent, then, from there to a field hospital to get it bandaged and whilst I was there, the Germans took over and I became a prisoner.

**DC** Right.

**Mr C** But looking back over the incident at the top there, I have come to the conclusion, that the twelve of us who were sent into the woods was a decoy whilst the others withdrew ...

**DC** Oh right.

**Mr C** ... because I could find no other reason for us doing what we was told to do, *(laughter)* ...

**DC** No.

**Mr C** ... but anyway, that's just my own opinion.

**DC** Well, the Germans obviously found that as a strategic position as well, so, how many will have been captured, do you think then, at that time, any idea?

**Mr C** I wouldn't know then, because most of our chaps moved back out of the road ...

**DC** Hmmm, yea.

**Mr C** ... so it was after that, when the first aid place was taken prisoner, it was absolutely full of wounded, so ...

**DC** Yea.

**Mr C** ... anyway, they moved us back into the hospital in Arnhem itself, and we were then moved on from there to a place called Apeldoorn, which is in the north of Holland ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... and from there we went by train into Germany.

**DC** Right. So you were going, then, to a prisoner of war camp?

**Mr C** Yes. Now, we were put in cattle trucks, the doors were locked from the outside, we were given a sandwich which we thought was very nice, but we found out later that was to do us for the whole journey, and it took about three days to get to where we were going because of the RAF bombing, of course.

**DC** So you never got anything to eat for the rest of the journey?

**Mr C** No, we didn't eat for about three days. The worse experience I think I had in the war was on this journey because one night we pulled into the – just outside the marshalling yards at Hanover, the same time as the RAF were bombing it ...

**DC** Oh, yes.

**Mr C** ... and you could feel the train – the cattle trucks rocking on the train which felt like they were going to get blown over if not, hit and splattered all over the place.

**DC** Hmmm. Did you get anything to drink on this journey?

**Mr C** No, it – I can't remember any liquid being – or anything like that ...

**DC** Really?

**Mr C** ... but there must have been – we'd have hardly have lasted that long without, but I don't know how it happened.

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** Toilet facilities were obviously non-existent, but we did this by using the end of the truck for doing what you had to do, so you can imagine the smell on that truck by the time we got out, but there was nothing else for it.

**DC** No, no. And then, where did you finish up, then, after this journey?

**Mr C** We finished up at a place called Fallingbostel, which is the ... was the place where Stalag 11B was situated.

**DC** That's where you went to Stalag 11B?

**Mr C** Yes. It's rather amusing incident; at the start we were marching up to the camp and up towards the camp and there, inside the wire netting was a figure which, I could only describe as a person we thought was the spit image of Hitler, so we gave him the Nazi salute and things like that and taking the 'mickey' out of him completely, and we got a horrible shock when we got lined up in the camp itself and it turned out that this figure was the Camp Commandant, (*laughter*) and

although he ranted and raved in German to us, nobody understood a word of it at the time, we found out afterwards that he was threatening to have us all shot!

**DC** *(laughter)* Right, what ... I mean ... this camp itself couldn't have been all that good, could it? I mean, after the experience in the cattle trucks, what was it like?

**Mr C** Well, it was much better in some respects, but in other respects it was pretty grim. The compound we were put in was in the centre of the camp itself, and in the huts surrounding our compound, there were Russian and Polish prisoners, and the Russians in particular were in a terrible state because Russia was not a signatory of the Geneva Conventions which look after the prisoners of war, so they had very little to eat, or anything else. There was – we used to get a limited amount of food – it was not very good, but once a week we got what was supposed to be Sauerkraut which nobody could eat, it was absolutely revolting, and we decided we'd give it to the Russians, but the only way they could – they had no eating utensils or anything – the only way they could take it away was in their hats.

**DC** Really?

**Mr C** Yea, eat it with their fingers ...

**DC** Hmm.

**Mr C** ... and there were quite a few stories about them going round, but whether they were apocryphal or not, I don't know. *(laughter)* One was that one of the huts had rioted once, and the Germans, to take it over again, sent three Alsatian dogs in which never came out – they'd been killed and eaten by the inmates. *(laughter)*

**DC** Really? *(laughter)*

**Mr C** Now whether that is a true story or not I don't know, *(laughter)* the other one was that when one of the Russians died, they kept his body and held him up on roll call, so that they would get his rations.

**DC** Well, that's easily believable, isn't it?

**Mr C** Yes, yes it is, I think probably they did.

**DC** How long were you at this Stalag then?

**Mr C** We were there for several weeks – about three weeks, and then we went on to a working camp at a place called – I found out later – Pad Grund, that's P-A-D and then G-R-U-N-D.

**DC** When you say a working camp, what did that mean?

**Mr C** Well, it means that err ... you ... most of the prisoners were put to work on various jobs and things. But we were sent up to this camp – there'd been no prisoners there before, so we had a relatively clean place to start with, and we were able to keep it. In the stalags themselves the conditions were so bad that most places were suffering. You were covered in lice and things like that, so we were fortunate to get away from this. But just before going – leaving the camp, there was occasionally ... we ... immediately before going, actually, they called out a hundred names, which my name was amongst them, and we were marched off into the woods. To put this story into perspective, in the papers, before we left England, they were talking about the crematoria and gassing of Jews etc., and when we were marching into this wood, the first thing we saw was a big building with a big chimney on it, so it looked a bit forbidding, and we – when we went into it, they were trying to tell us, although we didn't understand what they were talking about, that they were – we were going for showers. So anyway we got in, and there were metal trolleys with coat hangers on, sort of thing, we had to strip off all our clothes, put them on these coat hangers, including our boots and stockings, and there were three great doors in steel – looked like oven doors, so by this time we were getting a little bit worked up ...

**DC** Yes, yes.

**Mr C** ... umm ... but they took all the clothes and they were pushed through these iron doors. We moved into another room which had roses in the ceiling which we thought were – God, this is it ...

**DC** This is it, yes, yes.

**Mr C** ... this is gas – we were getting ready to have a real go, but I think the Germans

realised that we were getting to the point where we might cause a lot of trouble – they turned the water on and we understood what was going on ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... so we had a shower, came out the other side, and were ...

**DC** This would be a de-lousing process as well, wouldn't it?

**Mr C** Yes, this was it, but at the time we didn't realise, but when we went out the other side, it was getting on for October by this time, and up in the harsh mountains, it's pretty cold, and we were standing there naked, waiting for the clothes to come out. So when they came out we grabbed our clothes, very quickly, we pulled the trousers on, forgetting there were metal buttons on, and of course, everybody was standing there afterwards with six buttons round their waist, sort of thing, where they were red hot! (*laughter*) But after that we moved on to this work camp, and ...

**DC** Which – what was the work that you were put on, then?

**Mr C** Well, first of all we went into the forestry, but then, up there it got very cold, and I got frostbite in my feet, so, for a while I was taken off that and then eventually I went onto the railway, which was slightly down from the where the forestry people were working – wasn't quite so cold for the time being. And we were working there for supposedly, the levelling of the line coming up and all the rest of it. There was one happening there which was funny afterwards, but was rather frightening at the time, because we were replacing sleepers and the prescribed way of doing it – you took the alternate sleeper out, so that the line wasn't disturbed, but one bright sparks amongst us, if we took the whole lot out at once it would probably be quicker and easier for us. So we took about six sleepers out (*laughter*) because according to the Germans, there were no trains that day, and we thought this was a good time to do it – we'll do it this way for a change. We'd no sooner got the sleepers out when we heard a train coming. (*laughter*) We had visions of the train dropping between the lines and everybody being shot for sabotage ...

**DC** Of course, yes.

**Mr C** ... but luckily, how, I don't know, that train crossed that gap without slipping between it!

**DC** Really?!

**Mr C** It was amazing really, it was very lucky.

**DC** You were very lucky. *(laughter)*

**Mr C** Yea.

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** Anyway, one day we were at work at the railway, right down the bottom of the line, and this is a spur line, as I say, and three of the – three of our inmates decided that it was time to make a break for it ...

**DC** Hmm.

**Mr C** ... and the guard used to go in and sit in this house and we used to continue doing whatever we had to do – under the good guidance of a railway foreman, sort of thing, and when he was in the house, they cleared off. It was very stupid, really, because there was snow on the ground – you could follow the footsteps all the way ...

**DC** Oh!!

**Mr C** ... but anyway, the guard, to clear himself, marched us all back, and as we were marching back, he fired his rifle twice, and he was coming behind – it made everybody jump ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... because what he was doing was clearing himself that he'd actually shot at the prisoners.

**DC** Oh, right.

**Mr C** I could say now that there were four guards up there. They had been on the Russian front, and they were shot to pieces – one had no eye and things like that.

**DC** Yea?

**Mr C** Yea – they'd never have been in the army in England – they'd have been discharged for it. But they were given guard duty, but though you think that that was an easy – easy meat to deal with, sort of thing, the thing was, that they were so scared of going back on the Russian Front, that they were very, very keen ...

**DC** Yea.

**Mr C** ... but, on the other hand, they weren't vicious or anything like that, you know.

**DC** No. Was there any cruelty to the British there, or what?

**Mr C** No, there was no cruelty there at all, but ...

**DC** What about your food?

**Mr C** The food was perhaps a little bit better than the ... than in the stalag.

**DC** You'd never get enough of it though?

**Mr C** No. It was basically watery soup ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... reinforced by a food parcel occasionally. I think we'd eight half parcels each by the time we'd spent the rest of the war there.

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** But there was one good laugh, really. When we were working down the mine, we came up and used to see a horse and cart coming up – it used to come up from the village with all the supplies. And every time we saw the horse, it got thinner and thinner ...

**DC** Oh?

**Mr C** ... and one day we came up, the cart was there but no horse, and we all thought the poor bugger had had it. And actually he had ...

**DC** Oh?

**Mr C** ... and we were having our – went down for our soup the following day – or two days later I think it was – and we opened the lid of the boiler, and there, looking at us, was a horse's head!

**DC** Oh no!!!

**Mr C** Yes. (*laughter*) Anyway, you might think that was enough to put you off eating, but it didn't, it give us an appetite and we enjoyed a bit of meat – or horse's brains, I think it was, for that day.

**DC** Yes, yes.

**Mr C** But generally speaking, the food was pretty grim, but we found a way of implementing it a bit, by ... we volunteered to bring the potato ration from the stores down – it was about a hundred yards away, up to the top floor above where we were ...

**DC** Hmm.

**Mr C** ... all the foreign workers were there, and they were slightly better off than we were ...

**DC** Oh!

**Mr C** ... and we used to volunteer to bring the potatoes up, and of course, we had our airborne smocks which are full of pockets ...

**DC** Right.

**Mr C** ... so lots of potatoes were smuggled into the hut.

**DC** Were these raw potatoes?

**Mr C** Raw potatoes, but ...

**DC** You wouldn't have any means to cook them, then?

**Mr C** Are, yes, but we did. (*laughter*) Fortunately, both from that point of view and from the point of heat, because it's pretty cold up, as I said before, in the harsh mountains, we had a great big stove – I've never seen anything like it since. It was about seven foot high, and round. It had vents in for letting the heat out ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... and we'd plenty of fuel for this because it was wood-burning and, as I say, we were up in forest territory ...

**DC** Yea.

**Mr C** ... and we used to have a good fire going which kept us hot, and of course, you could put your potatoes in these vents ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... and we were having baked potatoes. (*laughter*) Also, four of our chaps were employed in the ... err ... it was a dog training school for the military and they used to fill their pockets up with the grain ...

**DC** Oh?

**Mr C** ... and with a bit of ingenuity we turned this in for porridge ...

**DC** Right.

**Mr C** ... so this kept us going, but nevertheless, it was pretty grim, as I say.

**DC** Yea.

**Mr C** Now towards the end, the beginning of May, 1944, we were joined at the camp

one night – we didn't know it was happening – that anything was happening – they were the people on the march from Poland. They were marching them back, down away from the Russians, and they'd been on the way for – oh, since January, I believe, and they stopped the night in our camp. It was crowded because a hundred was filling it pretty well, but it must have been getting on for about six hundred by the time they'd finished. And the next day we joined them, and we were marched back to the East ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... and we were on our way for ... oh, first day, I think it was, we could hear guns in the distance – the gun fire – and it was getting closer and closer and on the third, I think it was the third day I decided that I'd gone far enough, and those with me said they weren't going any further either, and we'd take a chance, and we nipped off from the column, in behind some houses ...

**DC** Yes?

**Mr C** ... and we were going to lie up there until they'd all gone, and then chance it going back to see where the gun fire was coming from. But when we came out to see what was happening, all the guards had disappeared ...

**DC** Yes – so that was it?

**Mr C** That was it there, but we'd – some of us – everybody did their own thing, sort of thing. We – quite a few of us – we went to a Belgium workers camp ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... it was mainly women that was in it, and we went in, and they raided the local food store ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** ... and these tins of corned beef and jellies done in syrup ...

**DC** Oh, right.

**Mr C** ... so, like idiots, we gorged ourselves on this ...

**DC** Oh yea.

**Mr C** ... and it had it had rather a bad effect!

**DC** (*laughter*) It would!

**Mr C** Yes, (*laughter*) we were in a bit of a mess, really. And, anyway, in the meantime, the Americans had overtaken us, and there again, we had a little bit of a fright, because when we were in the worker's hut – house – it was a house, it was, you could see these tanks coming across this field with the guns pointed towards the house – I thought we were going to get blasted out of that, but they just went through and the American Infantry came and took over the town and then they arranged accommodation for the prisoners there. Each house had clean mattresses and things like that ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... and we were all sleeping and it wasn't very hygienic because, as I say, the stomachs had been a bit upset (*laughter*) with what have you ...

**DC** Yes. (*laughter*)

**Mr C** ... anyway, after a couple of days it settled down and everybody that could be – the town baths were opened and we went to the town baths. And this was quite an amusing sight in retrospect, the baths – was a sunken bath, about a foot deep ...

**DC** Hmm.

**Mr C** ... and showers all the way round, so there's about twelve showers ...

**DC** Hmm.

**Mr C** ... and when they – everybody was standing underneath them, after the time they'd spent in captivity, they looked like 'Lowry' men, you know ...

**DC** Yea, yea.

**Mr C** ... ‘Matchstick’ men, but with an extended stomach! (*laughter*)

**DC** Oh, of course, yes, yes.

**Mr C** It was quite an amusing sight, really.

**DC** Yea, yea.

**Mr C** Anyway, we had our showers and everything and then we had to wait and then we finally got transport which took us back to Hildesheim.

**DC** Oh Hildesheim, yea.

**Mr C** Yea. And we flew from there into Brussels in *Dakotas*. We spent a night in Brussels in one of the big hotels, and then, in the morning, we flew from Brussels to High Wycombe.

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr C** I flew in a *Lancaster* ...

**DC** Yes?

**Mr C** ... it was one of the best flights I’ve ever had! ...

**DC** Really?

**Mr C** ... but it was rather funny. When we passed over Calais, the Germans hadn’t surrendered there – of course the war was still on ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... but the Germans were still in a pocket in Calais ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... we got a little bit of flak going over ...

**DC** Really?!

**Mr C** ... but no damage done, and we landed at High Wycombe. One of the things that was most embarrassing on the way back, 'cos every stop we made, we were de-loused!

**DC** Oh, yes.

**Mr C** You know – it was down your trousers, down the front of your jacket, under your hat and what have you ...

**DC** Yes.

**Mr C** ... and everywhere we went, so, when we arrived at High Wycombe, we went through it for the last time, and were issued with new kit and then we were sent on leave for six weeks.

**END OF INTERVIEW**