

BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR

Transcript of interview with Ernest Marsden (EM) • Royal Air Force

Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 25.07.2005

K: Could I begin by asking you your name?

EM: Yes, Ernest Marsden.

K: When were you born Ernest?

EM: 1924.

K: And whereabouts were you born?

EM: Eagley Bank. 21 Park View.

K: Is that still there?

EM: Yes. You can see it from that window, you can see the houses, yes, they're mill houses, and they belonged to Eagley Mill. In the rambling club I was leading a walk and we went over Eagley Bank and I said 'I'm going to have a plaque put on that house there where I was born!'

K: And what did your father do?

EM: He was a stoker at the Mills.

K: At Eagley Mills?

EM: Yes, Eagley Mills, until the Mills closed down and he was thrown out of work. We then moved into Astley Bridge near the park, Baxendale Street. He invested in a chip shop so we went there.

K: Was it on Baxendale Street, the Chip Shop?

EM: Yes, 48 Baxendale Street, yes.

K: So what school did you go to?

EM: Well I went to Eagley School initially. Then to Astley Bridge Methodist in Seymour Road when we moved to the Bridge and then I went to the Municipal after, in town.

K: So when you left school what did you do?

EM: I went into the Co-op Grocery. I didn't know what to do really, but at that time the Co-op was a good job, so I went into the Co-op.

K: In Bolton? In town?

EM: Yes, in Tonge Moor, I went to one of the branches in Tonge Moor, I went round a few branches because you got moved like, but that was where I started, at Castle Hill.

K: Were you an assistant, a shop assistant there?

EM: Yes, flour lad you were called when you started, a flour lad.

K: You were adept at putting things in bags were you?

EM: Yes, weighing. Weighing the flour out and things like that, looking after the cat and yes, as I say, I went to a few, Ainsworth Lane, Crompton Way, and Belmont shops.

K: Were you working there the day War broke out?

EM: That was September?

K: You don't remember that in any particular way?

EM: No, no, no, not at that age, not at 15.

K: But later on you must have realised I suppose that you would be involved?

EM: Yes, well one of the main reasons was I belonged to Astley Bridge Methodist Church and a young fellow that was secretary there of the junior part, he went into the Air Force and he was actually killed later on. I'm not saying that he enjoyed it but he seemed quite happy with it, he was a navigator but he was killed in Italy. By volunteering you could select what you wanted to do, pilot, navigator; they gave you a chance of getting what you wanted if you volunteered. He was a navigator and as I said he seemed to enjoy - well I say the word enjoy - but it's not an enjoyable job, he seemed quite happy, so I opted towards a navigator.

K: Where did you enlist, volunteer?

EM: Great Moor Street. Yes, they said 'Oh yes, you're all right, send you home for a bit' you know, deferred you, but I was still in the cadets from school. I joined the cadets when I was at school,

ATC as they called it, and so that was it, so I was home for about 8 months I think. Padgate I went, 2nd October 1942 and it was 31st July 1943 when I actually went to London to start the career. We went to Padgate for examinations and then we went to London ACRC.

K: What does that mean?

EM: Aircraft Reception Centre.

K: Oh I see.

EM: A month later we went to Stratford upon Avon for Initial Training Wing. I was laughing at the Corporal who was square bashing type of thing, and he had to do 140 to the minute. We had this bloke called Corporal Shortus, he was a smashing bloke and he'd take us down and he'd stop us and say 'Not for my sake, not for your sake, but for Christ's sake lets get it right'. Anyway it was only a short course, about a month that was all. It was all right, we were billeted in the Shakespeare Hotel.

K: It'd be fairly intense training though, wouldn't it?

EM: Yes, although with being in the cadets I'd learned quite a lot there like aircraft recognition and all this type of stuff, so it served me in quite good stead. So I served about a month there, at Stratford, and then it was Heaton Park waiting for a boat.

K: Were you in tents or were they in sort of huts?

EM: No, Nissen hut kind of things, and I often used to say 'You'd go to bed at night, put your socks on the bottom rail of the bed, get up in the morning and you could ring them out' You know what Heaton Park was like, good grief. Anyway I got leave from there, then went back, oh and then why we were waiting they sent us farming, we went farming at Quernmore near Lancaster, picking turnips and whatever. They got their money's worth out of us. Then I got three short leaves, three 48's, then the Mauritania came to pick us up, so that was the 15th November when we sailed for Canada, and landed at Halifax. From Halifax we went to Moncton, and then in January 1944 we were posted to a Navigation School at Malton, just on the borders of Toronto. I was lucky, my father had a cousin that emigrated to Canada and they lived in Toronto and he had a son and a daughter. They were older than me you know, about thirtyish, so I used to potter round there and they used to take me out.

K: That'd be nice.

EM: Yes, that was it. I started Navigation School from there. We had about 6 to 8 Polish lads on the same course, and they were civilian pilots at the Navigation school, they were civvies, and we flew Ansons. We went out one night and we got caught in a snowstorm and about three of the Polish lads had to bail out. The other pilots brought the aircraft back. I'll mention this now, it's nothing to do with it but one of the Polish lads was a Corporal, Corporal Nikolsky. After Navigation school we went to different OTU's and we split up and went around the world you know, and when we came back we went to a show here at St Paul's in Astley Bridge and I turned round and who was in the seat behind but Corporal Nikolsky. That was about three years later.

K: How did he end up in Bolton?

EM: I don't know how, I can't remember, because we just split up after Navigation School, and there he is sat behind me in Bolton. That's why I remember his name like, Corporal Nikolsky.

One little offshoot. While I was at Malton I was playing football one morning, and I broke my toe, so I went to the MO and he sent for me the day after. He said 'We'd better send you into Toronto and get a walking cast on'. I went into Toronto hospital for a walking cast and I'll always mention this - where did they put me in the hospital? They put me in a ward of First World War veterans. The bloke in the next bed had half his face missing, he had a mask on, so they must have been either in there or on the doorstep so they could have treatment there for twenty odd years, because I was only in a couple of days like, you know and they put this plaster on, but I've never forgotten that. Because of that I had to lose two courses. I was on course 94 originally, so I couldn't fly with that on you see, so I was put back to course 96, but I often think it might have fate, you never know. I might have been on 94, come back to England, got shot down or something like that, so there was a fortnight between courses so I went on course 96 then.

Then as I say, I came out top of the course so I was given a commission and as I say I finished up in Vancouver because they wanted Transport Command, so you had to go to Transport Command for operational training. So I got to Boundary Bay it was called, just on the edge of Vancouver and that's where we transferred onto Mitchell Aircraft, - twin engine bombers. I went onto those, and did 2/3 months on those and then we went to Abbotsford, which was another base nearby, and went onto the big ones, the Libs - the Liberators. One of the aircraft crashed

on Vancouver Island, and there was a Bolton lad in the crew, they were all killed, - Ronnie May from Lever Edge Lane. They buried the crew on the Island, and we'd been there only a couple of weeks, if that.

We were sat in the mess and there was some night flights on, you know you went on night flights and somebody came dashing in and said 'so and so and so and so' I've forgotten their name, they were in another crew, and they come back got out of the aircraft and instead of walking towards the back of the aircraft they were walking towards the front - cut their heads off. They should have known better, you never walked forwards; you always walked back out of the way, so that was a bit of a blow. So I finished OTU at Boundary Bay. We met a family there, and when we finished at Navigation School one of the lads had got the gen. off somebody that there was a girl in Vancouver that they knew and Win as he was called could get connected up with her like. So he asked me if I'd go and take her mate on, not that I was interested, of course she wasn't too good looking, but the family of this girl I latched on with originally came from York, the grandmother came from York, and we used to go for 48's or potter across the harbour. When I was leaving she gave me a silver fourpenny piece, I've still got it, yes a fourpenny piece. We started coming back across Canada then, we came back to Toronto, ran over a skunk at Toronto Station, didn't half smell. So we eventually came to Halifax and it was the Mauritania again that brought us back to Britain. Then we got leave. I was courting the wife then, so she got her mates and they came across to Harrogate and we had a few days in Harrogate, and this girl had a Welsh lad out of our crew, they were linked up together like, you know, so the girls came across and we had a few days in Harrogate and that kind of thing. We didn't get long there, 14 days leave we got on the 30th December, the end of 1944 and then got the recall to go back to London. Oh and then it was the catastrophe. You went to OTU to get crewed up you know, and so we got crewed up, came back to England and the Skipper, he went down with a rupture or something. We went out in flying boats as passengers to India, and of course he couldn't go. That crew got to India with no Skipper and another crew went out, and their Navigator went down ill with malaria or something so Joe Soap had to swap crews. Oh dear, dear, I lost out on that because the bomb aimer I had in Canada, you know in the original crew, a smashing lad, he came from York, Charlie, I had to leave him, I had to go into another crew. The bomb aimer in this crew was an Irish lad, Paddy, he was a dead loss. You had to work with the bomb aimer, you know, he did the map reading and all that. Oh dear, I've written somewhere the first op we ever did, we had to lay mines at a place called Victoria Point, and you had to go in low so that they wouldn't explode on contact. We were in the river mouth and there's Paddy in the nose, ack-ack on each side of the river and he was supposed to find an island in the river and then drop the mines every second. He couldn't find the island, so there we were stooging up and down the flaming river, anyway we did find it eventually, you know, but we could have been in the bottom of the river by then. So I'm afraid we had to keep him for my ops. and in the original aircraft we were both down in the nose behind the front turret then we went onto a different mark of aircraft where I was up with the Pilot and he stayed down in the nose. I always remember I said, can you take me a bearing on some star or something? He hadn't a clue, I had to go down, get past the nose wheel and do it my self, oh dear... he's a dead loss.

K: So he got through his training but he wasn't proficient at all.

EM: And he got a commission, and the other lad I trained up with, he was only a Sergeant. But Paddy, honestly, and he liked the girls. Right, so that was it, we were on our way to India, to Poole in Dorset, and as I say we were taken out as passengers in a Sunderland flying boat, but we stopped off in Tunisia. Well, we fuelled up, stopped off in Cairo and they put us up in Shepherd's Hotel, which is *the* hotel, just overnight like, you know, Shepherd's Hotel. Then we went to the Gulf area and then onto Karachi and then onto Bombay and then we had to go to a place called Kolar Gold Fields near Bangalore, and get acclimatised. We went there for a week or two, and I celebrated my 21st Birthday on the train going there.

K: Oh, what was that like, what did you do?

EM: Nothing, we were on this train you know, so we got to Bangalore and did the acclimatisation and as I say I was transferred to the other crew, Bob Williams. We left Bangalore after about 3 weeks for Calcutta, and we went to a place called Digri, that was just west of Calcutta, that was our operational station.

K: What were your impressions of India then?

EM: Well we were out in the wilds there, you know, there was a little type of village so to speak, you know, about half a mile from the station, but otherwise it was just paddy fields. Then we started on operations on 13th April 1945.

K: What was your first one like?

EM: First op, I went with another Warrant Officer, I didn't go with my own skipper, which was all right, and we were just laying mines off Kisarin. That was all right, even though I weren't with my skipper, and then after that we went with our own skipper and we did this thing where Paddy couldn't find the darn island. We did quite a bit of mine laying you see, rather than bombing. Trouble is we had to fly out over the Indian Ocean for so many hours from Calcutta. I've written here (in notebook), 'Fourth operation to Rangoon, all our ops were over ten hours, anything over ten hours, the longest op was sixteen hours, but all our operations were more that 10 hours.'

K: You don't think about that, I thought you'd be out for a couple of hours.

EM: Yes, they're all over ten hours, so that was Rangoon, and the fifth op was Bangkok, attacking shipping there, and we also went out knocking the small railway bridges down, so we had bridge busting as we called it, at Ta Kan and bridge busting at Tako.

K: You'd have to be very accurate to do that wouldn't you?

EM: Yes. Yes, that was the bomb aimer's pigeon. Then we went to a place called Moulmein, shooting gun emplacements up. Then the shipping one, 1st June 1945, a place called Satahib Bay. It was the bay South of Bangkok, it was shipping, one or two Warships and a tanker and we bombed and sank the tanker and the skipper got the DFC for it and we got sweet Fanny Adams as I put in one report!

K: Were there Japanese planes?

EM: We didn't see many planes, no, touch wood, but we came back once and we had a big camera on board which the flight engineer would strap to himself and take photos out of the side window, and we came back from one trip and there was shell inside the camera. I'm not saying it was fighter shell, it might have been our interior shell, and it must have just been more or less dead as it hit the shell inside the camera. So that was Bangkok and as I say the skipper got the DFC. It was troop concentrations on the 10th June and we went to the briefing and the intelligence bloke said, 'It's not a specific target, but you'll find when you get there it's a jungle' so we said to them look for jungle about two miles square, just dense jungle' and he said 'you're going and bombing that, not a specific target like, you just bomb that'. Intelligence came back later on that we'd killed 10,000 Japs.

K: Yes.

EM: Yes, he said 'Just go in and bomb the jungle' and intelligence came back we'd killed 10,000. Then we did another shipping strike at Satahib Bay and then it was the Bridge on the Kwai on the 24th June.

K: Was there quite a briefing before you went?

EM: Yes, yes, I've written somewhere, I wrote an article for the Church Magazine, because I said I used to get down on my knees and pray before we went that I'd come back. We used to go for a briefing and when the op was mooted the CO would address you first, tell you what the target was and where you were going. Then the meteorological officer would come on and tell you what weather to be expected. Then the armaments bloke would come and tell you what you were carrying, bombs, mines whatever and then the intelligence officers if there was anything to report, so we had that early on in the day. Well any time because we used to go night and day you know, so you had that briefing. Then you were sent back and as the navigator you would have to get your course plotted and all that. Sometimes we did night trips and some times day trips and then an hour or two before we were due off, we were given a slap up meal. Then the garry, that was a small lorry, would come and pick us up and take us down to the airstrip and get onboard the aircraft. I'll always remember in the rambling club that we were in here, a girl once said to me, she said 'Were you never frightened'. I said no, but I was always happy when we got off the ground because there was another station not far from us and one bloke was trying to take off from there and he didn't get off the ground, he just went off the end of the runway and blew up, so I said I was always happy once we'd got off the ground.

K: You were just talking about the Kwai operation.

EM: There was another squadron on with us like, you know, we were 159 Squadron and this 355 Squadron were on the same thing and there were only two bridges there and they were the only place you could get across the river. There was the old original bridge which I suppose the POW's built and it was just a wooden bridge and then later on because this was almost at the end of the War, they'd built this concrete and steel bridge, and they were parallel to each other but that was the only place they could get across the river, Kanchanaburi.

K: So how many planes would there have been in the squadron?

EM: Well there were twelve in a squadron. And there were two squadrons this time, 355 and 159. That was the last Wartime operation that, the bridges. That was the 4th August you see.

K: This was some more bridges, the 4th August.

EM: Oh yes.

K: So by that time you'd be thinking the War was nearly ending and you'd just have to get through it?

EM: Yes, that's right. Anyway we went on to dropping supplies then, to POW camps you know, by this time we didn't fly from Calcutta always as the Japs had withdrawn from Burma and so we went on detachment to Pegu which is outside Rangoon. They just put a metal strip down in the jungle and we did one or two ops from there like, you know to save wasting time travelling over the bay. So I got to 2nd September 1945, and we still called them ops, we were allowed to call them ops for a month or two because you know, you've read since that some Japs never surrendered so if we'd come down we'd still be in for it. So that was 2nd September and we did a supply drop to a POW camp. Then I got promoted to Flying Officer after that, I was a Pilot Officer before. So that was a supply drop to the POW camp 2nd September, oh I've got Saigon here on the 10th. Yes, from Pegu to Saigon, French Indochina, that was just a supply drop.

K: 10th September, supply drop to Saigon.

EM: 14th September another supply drop, that was to the POW camp at the bridges, Kanchanaburi, a supply drop on the 20th September, another one on the 14th October, but we were allowed to count them as ops for a time while we were dropping supplies and that.

K: VE Day, you were obviously still operating but do you remember that?

EM: Yes.

K: Do you remember that particularly, whether there was any celebration?

EM: Yes, I think we were flying I think, and it came through.

K: But you knew it didn't mean the end of the War for you.

EM: No, no, I don't know whether I made a note of it, I think we were flying and it came over the RT like, you know, because we had eleven crew you see.

K: What planes were you in again?

EM: B24 Liberators, they were smashing aircraft for the distances we had to cover. The dam-busters came out to our thing after the end of the War, and we couldn't get them off the deck card, you know. The Lancaster's with being liquid fuelled engines, they came out and were stationed on our station, but you know, they'd just get them up but they'd struggle but the Libs were smashing.

K: And what facilities were on board, when you'd do that long journey?

EM: I wrote a thing for the Church you know. I said, ten hours, no toilet on board, all you had was a tube where you could get rid of your excess water, that's all, you know, you could have a piddle so to speak. While we were at operational training, one of the lads, used to get sick containers, in case you were air sick, just like an old pan shine tube, you know, cardboard, you know like if you were sick, and this lad was sick and had diarrhoea. There was nothing on board but a tube in case you wanted a wet one like. Oh dear!

K: Not the glamorous side of the RAF then?

EM: This is 232 Squadron, that's the squadron I went to after the War, that's transport squadron and that was at Poona.

K: Is this a photograph of this squadron after the War?

EM: Yes, that's 232 squadron at Poona.

K: Nice photograph isn't it?

EM: Yes, smashing photograph, yes, so I got to Transport Command eventually but it didn't last long.

K: What kind of plane is that?

EM: That's a Lib. Well it's the transport type, you know, no turret at the front. I'd just put here a total distance flown on operations as 50,400 miles, so that was the end of the War.

K: Do you remember VJ Day, or did you just carry on?

EM: We just carried on.

K: You had a special dinner anyway for VJ Day?

EM: Yes, just in the mess.

K: Was there any alcohol?

EM: Well if you wanted it, but I don't drink. I always remember when we got to Digri and we were just going onto ops, I just had orange juice you see. I was stood at the bar in the mess and one of the other lads came and said 'Oh are you only drinking orange juice?'. I said 'Yes', I said 'There are ten blokes' lives depend on me'. I don't drink anyway, I never have done, but one or two would get sozzled on camp sometimes. I always remember I think we had a concert party came and one of the lads were chasing round the camp stark naked. I think he'd been on the beer.

That's an escape map.

K: You took this with you every time?

EM: Well it was just tucked in your pocket like, you know, just in case you had to try and make your way out if you'd come down.

K: Do you think this would have been a great deal of help?

EM: It might have been, although on the same subject one or two of us have met up since and had little reunions over in Derbyshire and with parts of other crews as well. We went once and as I was coming away, Charlie my old bomb aimer, that I had at training, he arranged these, and he said 'Do you know Paul over there' he was a skipper, he was a pilot, nothing to do with our crew like, you know, he said 'He walked out of Burma' I said 'Good God!'

K: He got out?

EM: Crashed and walked, got out, honestly.

K: Is it made of silk?

EM: Yes.

These are ops photographs. They're not clever because these are what they threw onto a table at the end of the War and we could take our pick.

K: Oh, you've written on the back though, what they are.

EM: Yes, that's that tanker.

K: Is this what he got the DFC for?

EM: Yes, that's it.

K: Is that before you hit it?

EM: It's a destroyer or something.

K: A destroyer.

EM: I'm not saying that was our bomb that missed it but...

K: No, that says POW camp, Saigon.

EM: Yes, Camp Saigon.

K: This would be for dropping when you dropped supplies?

EM: Yes, that's right.

K: But it's like an airfield as well isn't it?

EM: Yes, yes it was French Indochina at that time.

K: You said when the War finished some of the men went into Saigon and stayed with French families or something but there was a sort of communist uprising anyway so you didn't feel safe.

EM: I always remember one supply drop we did at a POW camp, one chappy there he'd lost one leg, so he was balancing on one leg and waving his crutch at us.

Yes that was bridge busting.

K: Yes bridge F14 it says, they're marvellous photos aren't they?

EM: Good enough.

K: They're fascinating, those.

EM: And one or two are after the War when part of the local area was flooded so the powers that be said could we go up and take a few photographs, or something, that was after the end of the War.

K: Yes.

EM: The paddy fields were flooded.

One of the other navigators was a Scots lad lived at Kirkcudbright and we kept in touch after the War and he married a girl from Worcester so we went to Worcester first. We went to visit Johnny in Scotland straight after the War, just for a trip, but he married this girl from Worcester so they lived in Worcester and he was on the Parks Department. Then they moved to Weston Super Mare and he got the job on the Parks and the Crematorium and all that. I know I used to work at the Co-op and they used to say 'where are you going for your holidays' and I used to say Western-Super-Mare to the Crematorium. Only a year or two ago he sent me that cutting, our CO out there was a member of the Ercol Furniture family, the father had come over here and set up the factory in the 1920's and he had two sons and one of them was our CO, Wing Commander Ercolani, so he sent me that cutting about the factory.

K: That's interesting isn't it, I mean obviously everyone's heard of Ercol Furniture, but I didn't know it was of Italian origin.

EM: Yes, he was the son, he were a smashing bloke. When he sent it me, Joan and I used to pop down to Bedfordshire, to a friend of Joan's that they met when she'd gone abroad on holiday, and she used to invite us down, you know, to stay, and I thought oh it's not far from where Marion lived, I'll try and find the factory you see, and meet up, it's about 30 miles, so we went on holiday and went to, - where was the factory...

K: High Wycombe.

EM: High Wycombe, aye, that's it, so we went down. It's up on the hillside with a big Ercol sign. I left the girls on the car park and I went in and announced myself to the receptionist and she said 'Oh yes, just hang on I'll ring him at home'. So she rang up and she came back and said 'oh I'm sorry, he's just left, but he usually shops a bit on the way you see' I said, Oh well we'll go and have a bite to eat because it was about half past twelve and I said we'd come back. So I go back and I'm crossing the car park to the car and this Jag rolls in, you see, and this bloke gets out. I said, Wing Commander Ercolani I'm Flying Officer Marsden. 'Oh, come in, come in', so he took me in the factory and said the girls can go round the show room while we talk... anyway he said he couldn't stay long he had an appointment at 1 o'clock, so we went in a little room and had about 20 minutes together, and took one or two photographs. Yes, he was a smashing bloke, and anyway I thought he might have given the girls some free samples... Wing Commander Ercolani. I had to laugh, I said we were out in the bush more or less, you know a little village, and you could go in there, put your foot on a piece of paper, they'd draw round it, and you'd have a pair of mosquito boots the day after, yes, I had a pair made but I never brought them back like. You could also go in, pick some material and they'd make you a shirt up for about one and six pence, and I went in one night and I got two made and they were pink, so they christened me 'pinky' after that, and then blow me, a few days later there was Ercolani with pink shirts on.

K: You started a trend there.

EM: Yes, yes, he was a smashing bloke, no trouble, Wing Commander Ercolani.

K: So you continued in the RAF for a while did you?

EM: Well I say with the end of the War, you know they were diversifying and so they posted us to Poona.

K: Poona.

EM: To this Transport Command. One thing I must mention, during the War we were at Pegu, on detachment at Pegu, and I think it was just about the end of the War, and we had a Scots lad on squadron, he was a skipper and he'd been a farmer, in civvie life, so he got his release so he could get back to the farm and we were at Pegu. He would have to fly back to Calcutta to Digri and then fly on from there you see. We were at Pegu and he decided to go, and so his crew, there were eleven crew and one or two other aircraft ground crew, were cadging a lift back, so there was about 16 or 18 on board and he took off and we watched him take off, then he's coming back, and we thought what the heck's he doing? Anyway he came in, made a perfect landing and he hit something on the side of the runway, and he went up in flames. There was nobody left, we don't know why, we never found out why, and he was on his way home so to speak.

And he was a smashing bloke. I don't know, something must have gone on because obviously he's flew in and made a perfect landing you know, and just tipped this mound of earth or something, it was only a strip laid down in the jungle, wasn't a proper air station. So we lost about three or four crews out there like, you know, on ops. So that was the end of the War, but I say we got posted to this transport squadron at Poona, 232 Squadron.

K: What was your job there then, what did you have to do?

EM: Nothing much, just flitting about the countryside and then we came to the period when they were gathering the aircraft together to either break them up or sell them on so we had to fly from our station up to Jodhpur. One of the lads had to take the aircraft up and we had to follow them and bring the crew back because they were leaving the aircraft there on the airfield at Jodhpur, you see, then we flew up and brought them back, and we got to Jodhpur. We landed, went in the mess and some of the lads came up and said 'Hey, Lord and Lady Mountbatten are here tonight, they're having a banquet at the Palace. Do you want to go' and we said, yes we'll go. So some of the lads got some kit out, because we still had flying kit you know, because we weren't going back straight away, so the transport took us up to the Palace. They'd been building it ten years and it still wasn't finished, you know. Anyway it wasn't a sit down meal, it was just like a little orchestra in the corner over there. Anyway Lady Mountbatten came and nattered to us for I don't know how long, because she had been overlording the repatriation of the POW's, so with us going in to supply other POW's she was quite interested. So, we had a night there at the Maharaja's Palace.

K: The Maharaja's Palace?

EM: Yes.

K: And was it splendid?

EM: Oh yes, smashing, yes, I've still got a card somewhere, with the orchestra score on, I don't know where it is... and the menu, but I say it was only a buffet type thing.

We got about a bit! This one was during the War I think, there was some blokes in a Dakota dropping some supplies to some people in the Himalayas. They were starving so we had to go up to this station where they were and act as a radio station on the ground for this Dakota. The skipper of the Dakota came and said 'Anybody want to come with us?' you know, kick the bales out like, you know, so myself and other lads went up with them. Well these blokes were green because you know what it's like in the Himalayas, anyway we kicked them all out and came back but two of the lads on the crew were green, so we actually saw Everest.

K: Did you?

EM: You know, in the distance. So that was a Dakota I'd flew in, so I'd flew in an Anson flew in a Lib, flew in a Mitchell, flew in a Dakota, and flew in a Sunderland.

K: You'd not been back to Bolton in between had you?

EM: No, no.

K: No leave had you?

EM: No, well I've got it down here saying the boat came in, and I got moved from Poona 232 Squadron, and I did odd jobs, I went as a Pay Officer at one place and I went as a Briefing Officer at another place and then 13th October, I left for Bombay, that was on the way home then. On the 27th I boarded the SS Lancashire, of all names, at Bombay.

K: Good name, was it a good boat?

EM: Yes, a bit of a tub it was, and when we got to the ship it had 1000 Italian prisoners on board, taking them back to Naples because they must have been POW's in India. So they'd 1000 POW's on board and Joe Soap here, coming through the Suez Canal I was duty officer. A lot of Italian prisoners used to dive over the side there, they didn't want to go back, so I was duty officer coming back through there at night. Anyway we didn't see anybody diving over (laughs) so we came out into the Med.

K: You mean they didn't want to go back to Italy?

EM: To their own country like. We passed Mount Etna, glowing away, then we passed Stromboli, and then we went into Naples, and unloaded the POW's. Then that was it, we came back and landed at Liverpool on 19th November 1946.

K: Who was there to meet you?

EM: Nobody, nobody. Then I went on leave, and I had to report back 7th January. I had to report back to London, and then they sent me to near Kirkham, it was the demob centre then. I was OC of a reception squadron there. I was in charge of a reception squadron, that was 7th January and I have got a note here, that on the 25th March I was sitting on a court martial.

K: What was that about?

EM: I don't know, I just put a note, sat on court martial, so that was it and I came home from there, demobbed from there.

K: In 1947?

EM: Yes.

K: So you'd only be 23?

EM: 23, yes.

K: You know what you've just described and then you remember how old you were, it's amazing.

EM: Yes, then we got married after that, I'd been courting about 3 months when they sent for me originally.

K: When you were 18?

EM: Yes, I was 18. I think I wrote about 500 letters to Joan and she wrote about 400 back. Honestly, we courted by letters. By letters, yes.

K: And did you go back to your job in the Co-op?

EM: Yes, I went back to the Co-op and we got married as I say, we'd been married a bit when the first child arrived. The Co-op wage wasn't much use then like, so the brother-in-law worked at De Havilland as it was then, on the shop floor, he was a foreman there, so he got me in on production control, so I was a bit better off. I went to the one at Farnworth.

K: How long were you there?

EM: I was there about ten years and I was on production control when the old foreman retired on that section so technically I was the next in line because I'd been there ten years. Anyway I didn't get anything and they sent a new bloke in, worked at Timex Watches, and you know what they do, get a new brush sweeping clean, he hadn't a clue you know, so I thought oh I'm getting out of this like. At that time there was an advert came in the Bolton Evening News for Chorley College of Education for Teaching, so I wrote and got on there. I went to Chorley College, and this bloke from Timex lasted 18 months and then they sacked him. I went to college then for 3 years and then went into teaching.

K: When you came back from the War did you find it hard to settle?

EM: No, not really, I was glad to be home after being abroad all the time. I couldn't come home on a 48 hour leave.

K: And what did you teach then?

EM: Junior children, I took maths you see as a main subject at college and you had to do a teaching practice you know, while you were there. I did one at Lever Bridge School, and the Head there was one of my old mates from the Muni. so he said 'what are you going to do after'. I said oh I'll probably go into a secondary school, they are always crying out for mathematicians. He said 'Don't. Go into a primary school' because his was a primary school you see. He said 'Go into a primary school' so I took his word and I went round. I didn't get in straight away, I went to Bolton first because they'd been paying me a grant at college, oh we've got 2/3 people for every post, so no use. So I went to Accrington I think, but no. Eventually I finished up at Heywood near Rochdale so I'd got taken on there

K: So did you continue to live in Bolton?

EM: Oh yes, it was all right, I'd got a car by then.

K: Yes.

EM: Then if it was bad snowing, I could nip down on the train to Heywood at that time, you know and take the bus and train and yes, it was an old Head Mistress that took me on, Miss Norris, and she had a steel corset on, she was like a ramrod you know, she was all right though, yes, so I went there and I stayed there till I retired. I did 20 years there.

K: Did you enjoy teaching?

EM: Yes, yes, I liked the kids, the only trouble is Miss Norris retired and we got a bloke as Head, and I don't know why, but I don't think he'd been a Head, he'd been on administration before and he was one of these do-gooders. There were quite a few girls on the staff, and a kid would do something wrong and they'd send them to the Head. She'd send them to the Head you see, and he'd be 'Oh take this little note to Miss so-and-so' wouldn't slap their legs or anything like that. I didn't get on very well because he came and he said 'can you write me a screed on mathematics'. I said, I can write it for you; I've still got a copy of it upstairs, yes, a waste of time. Oh dear, anyway he did leave, and we got another bloke. He was quite good, Barry, he was a good bloke, so I got moved up a bit, I was a Head of Department by the time I left.

K: Yes, good.

EM: Yes, so that's my life story for you.

K: Is there anything else you would like to mention?

EM: I don't know really, there are probably loads of things; I'll probably remember some more.

K: I'll switch off then now, and thank you very much indeed.

ENDS