

BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR

Transcript of interview with Frank Edwards (FE) • Royal Air Force

Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 23.06.2005

K: Can I begin by asking you your name?

FE: Frank Edwards.

K: And when were you born?

FE: 1921.

K: And whereabouts?

FE: I was born at Bradford Park. Flearbottom is on my birth certificate, that's Bradford Park, Darcy Lever, Bolton. Just below Fred Dibnah's house.

K: On Radcliffe Road, isn't it?

FE: It used be a tip, it was a park down there, and we lived there. Then they've tipped all over it, and built all those bungalows over it now. But underneath there, I lived there, 3 Flearbottom.

K: Flearbottom? Never heard of that.

FE: Over the river is Tonge Cemetery.

K: What did your parents do?

FE: My Father was a motor engineer, who later became, Edbro's Tippers. There were three brothers in Edbro's Tippers, and he was the middle one, Frank. He was another Frank.

K: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

FE: I had a sister, Edna. She died when she was 38, of cancer.

K: So where did you go to school?

FE: Lever Bridge, and then we moved and I went to Ridgeways. Then my Father bought Beaumont Road Garage and we went running that, and I went to Deane, St Mary's School there, and then they sold that in about 1929 and moved back to Bromwich Street, and I went back to Lever Bridge again. I was never academic. I never passed any exams or anything so I just went to Lever Bridge C of E.

K: Beaumont Road Garage, would that be where the garage is now?

FE: That's it.

K: Same place?

FE: Yes, there used to be a little bungalow, and 3 or 4 pumps with ROP Petrol, Russian Oil Products, 1/6 a gallon.

K: It was in the country then.

FE: Well right opposite, on that ground where all those houses are, one of the Lancashire Shows was on there about 1920's, it would be, no it would be just after we left, I think in the early 30's that would be.

When I left school I went working for my Father at Edbro's at Springfield. I was there for 2 years in that time I played for Lomax's football team, and we were in the final at Astley Bridge. Joe Smith of Blackpool was scouting for Blackpool, he was Manager, and I signed for Blackpool on the ground staff. I left Edbro's and went working at Blackpool (laughs) in 1937, yes 1937/38, and when War broke out I was at Blackpool on the ground staff. Lindsay Parkinson, the Blackpool Chairman announced on that morning that hostilities had started against Germany and we would all have to go home. So we all came home, Stanley Mortensen and Dick Withington, and we came to Bolton actually. I had a car and we picked that up and went to Heysham, to see my Mother and Father, then we went back to Blackpool at night and then Monday morning we packed up and came home.

K: So that was all on that Sunday you did that? Yes, so you'd be very disappointed that your football was over?

FE: Yes, well while we were at Heysham, a friend of ours who had a brick works, Taylor's Brookfield Brick Works. He said 'What are you doing Frank', and I said, 'I didn't know yet, it's so soon' you know, after War had started. So he said 'You can come and work for me' so I went and worked for him in the fitting shop at the Brick Works. On that job I was supposed to have a call up delayed until 23. Anyway, I got my calling up papers when I was 19, 18, for going in when I was

19. I got my calling up papers and then the morning we went to Padgate my Father took me in the car. Just as we were leaving, Cyril Briars, the Manager, he came on his bike waving a paper in his hand saying, 'You don't need to go!'

K: Oh, a reserve.

FE: Reserve, yes, anyway we went to Padgate and I showed the Sergeant this, and he just threw it in the waste paper basket, and my Father waited outside from half past nine in the morning. He waited until six o'clock at night for me to go outside to come home with him, and anyway they never let me go out to see him or tell him. He waited till six o'clock then he gave up and went home, and I was in.

K: Could you choose which service you went into?

FE: No, well, when I went to Great Moor Street, when I was called up, when I was 18, my brother-in-law was in the RAF and I fancied the RAF, so I put the RAF down, which I went in actually.

K: So where was your basic training?

FE: We went to Padgate, we had a week there, and then we went to Boston Stump in Lincolnshire, and it was a new place started up, all these places where we were going, where I went were pretty new because they were only just being set up. Of course War hadn't been going long, and we were at Boston Stump for 6 weeks. We passed out our square bashing and from there I went to Halton in Buckinghamshire, for about 6 months, on a course in flight mechanics. I played for the station team there, and we nearly won a cup. Unfortunately we were posted the week that the final was on and we didn't get back, so I was on leave then and shipped to Invergordon. That was in December. We had Christmas in Invergordon, and that's when I was first introduced to flying boats, Catalinas, Sunderlands, and Lerwicks which you don't hear much of, and Alness slipway. Across from Alness slipway is Evanton Gunnery School. Lysanders were there. Now, who was killed from there? One of the Royal Family, (Duke of Kent) they took off from Evanton and they crashed in the mountains, just outside Invergordon. He was killed, one of the Royal Family, they'd been to Evanton. I can't just remember whether they were took off from Evanton or whether they took off on a seaplane, but there's just a commemorative thing there about him, one of the princes. These flying boats, Catalinas, we were on servicing so on certain checks, hubs, they had to be taken out of the water, and we had to don a rubber suit right up to the neck, wade out with these big wheels and fasten them to the underside of the wing. Then they were yanked out with a tractor so you could service the holes. When we were on duty we used to have to go out to the flying boats and start the generators up, and you had to sleep on board if they were on early call, to get the generators going so that the aircraft could start up and be away on patrol.

K: So this was all from Invergordon?

FE: That was Invergordon. While we were there we were up one morning at half past six to go up to the cook house, up in Invergordon from Alness, which was four mile I think, four or five mile from Invergordon, we had to do this every morning, if you didn't you didn't get any breakfast. We were on the bus and this particular morning we were going for our breakfast and we were taken to the place where you get the blankets and everything, and the bus was loaded up with blankets and we went down to Invergordon docks. These soldiers were coming back from one of the islands, they'd been on a raid to Norway and we had to look after them and get them up into the Royal Navy Base Station, up on the hill. These tanks used to be a feature of Invergordon, but I don't think they are there, I don't think they were there last time we went. We took them to the Navy Base and they were looked after there. Last year, or the year before we went down to Speen Bridge, and there's a commemoration of these soldiers there. We were on this Alness site, the week before we were there they were in tents and we got these Nissen huts, two Nissen huts, one was the NAAFI and one with 32 lads in it. In December, there was no heating or anything and some of the lads were pinching coal off the station and we used to have to wash on the station, and if you didn't go up for your breakfast you used to have to go into the station to get some warm water to wash and shave.

K: How long were you on duty at a time?

FE: It was just normal, 9 hours, 8/9 hours, there were occasions we were supposed to be paid for that, but this is before flight engineers you see, and if you went flying you'd be up like 7 hours. I only did that about twice, but we were supposed to be paid a shilling a day for that (laughs) which we never got. Never had any recording of it. They needed somebody to watch the clocks - that's all you did, watch oil pressures and that. I mean we used to sleep on the boats, on the aircraft in Moray Firth. It's what I was saying about nobody hearing much about the Lerwick, a lot of those finished up sunk, you know, the lads got off, but in the night they'd sink, you know.

Funny you know, because nobody wanted to fly on them, because they wanted more speed out of them and they cut down on the wing span, and if you cut down on wing span you can't glide. These Lerwicks they'd cut down on the wing spam and if the engine failed then were you gone. Nobody wanted to go on them. Catalinas are beautiful, lovely aircraft.

K: How many flying boats were there?

FE: There were about 10, and Sunderlands.

K: So did you have much leave when you were at Invergordon?

FE: I was there four months, and never had any.

K: Oh, you were only there four months? So where did you go then?

FE: So we went on duty one morning, and the Sergeant came and he said 'There's so many fitters and so many airframe people, they want a posting to Waddington' and I thought he said Warrington, so that was nice and easy for me at home, wasn't it. Anyway we'd stepped out then and it eventually turned out to be Waddington in Lincolnshire, and we left for there, travelled all night and all the next day. I remember going over the Forth Bridge and all down the East Coast and we got to Waddington in Lincolnshire. We were starting up the 420 Canadian Bomber Squadron, we were the first intakes, and we started this thing up and then eventually they started bringing Canadians in. There were also Rhodesians at Waddington, a Rhodesian Squadron which they bombed from. When the Scharnorst and the Gneisenau came down the channel, they were going for some sort of re-fit, and we had Hampdens which they converted to torpedoes to torpedo these things. We had six aircraft and they left early one morning, icy it was, to try and torpedo these and it was so well protected with nets and that, they had a job to do anything, to get down. The plane that I was on, an English lad, he dived his plane on it. They saw him dive it on one of the boats, and of course he didn't come back. And that morning his wife gave birth, and I was leader on the plane, and I had to go and tell his wife. They lived nearby. It was a terrible experience. I can still feel that in me.

K: Can you?

FE: You wouldn't think it, after all them years, you wouldn't, and now Waddington it was in the papers the other day, it's a leading place you know, all these air demonstrations, it's still a base.

Yes, well when we were there it was only grass, you know. It's concrete now I believe. Sometimes I feel like going back to these places. It's not very well known, but there were 10,000 Canadians. I was on a Canadian Squadron and then, you know there was only two of us, two English lads, and you got all this about they won't let us go and all that, and they decided that they were going to raid France. We all went down to near Folkestone. There are two Lympne down there and we went on to one Lympne. I've been back there actually, and it's all a commercial site now, but we went back there and it had all been bombed with this Big Bertha that they had in France. It was all an aerodrome (laughs) but there weren't much left, and we went there with the Eagle, the Eagle Squadron and the Americans. We went down there, travelled all night, didn't know where we were going, slept on the garry like, the wagon, and we found out that we'd gone through Tunbridge Wells and we were heading for the coast. We got to this Lympne and we got all of our gear out and that, and the next day the Canadians raided France. It was good that, they had it on radio, all the dog fights and that, it was quite a day that, and then of course, they only were going in for four hours, everybody thought it was a second front, but they were only going in and they went in and they came out. They lost a lot of men did the Canadians but with being on a Canadian squad you got involved more, you got to know more, because there was only two of us, on the whole Squadron like who were English.

I was a bit of an expert on boost and that on aircraft, and one time when we were back at Biggin Hill and they had the mauling with the Messerschmitts at a certain number of feet, a thousand feet, the Squadron Leader, the Canadian said 'Can you do anything about this?' Well, my Dad used to have beeswax for his car, to polish his car, and I said 'Well there's beeswax that we could do. This was 1942 and the Battle of Britain wasn't over but it was almost over so all the camouflage on the aircraft was coming off a bit and you know, they weren't doing it as much. They were all dull paint, so this beeswax shined them up, and I rode home to get some beeswax and they gave me a pass to come home and pick it up. And another thing that I said to him, I said 'Where the aerial sticks up behind the cupola - the cockpit, put that at the bottom', and that's what they did, and they put that upwards to the tail and all these things gave extra speed.

K: I see. So the polish just made it go faster.

FE: Yes, I mean we'd been doing that, when you see them firing the guns, out through the front of the wings, they'd show you the sticky tape, the gun firing through that, you know, and bursting it open, well we were sticking sticky tape on ours long before that. I mean, you couldn't let RAF

Boscombe Down know these things and I suppose the Squadron Leader would have got in trouble. On our aircraft, it took about two hundred horse power boost, when the booster came in it took two hundred horse power off the engine and of course that slowed the Spit down and I altered the aneroids to alter when the booster came in. I mean I was frightened to death of getting in trouble but the Squadron Leader tried it on his aircraft first and then I altered all two of the flights, A and B Flight, I was on B Flight. When I had my course, I really went for this for this boost and carburation.

K: Sounds like it was a really good thing.

FE: Well you see it in the paper, in some readings now about these Messerschmitts, you get various things in War that certain things take over, like tanks took over, then somebody brought something else in, you see these things had to go back to Boscombe Down and be tried out. Well this Squadron Leader took it on his own back really. Now the thing is I can't remember their names, this Squadron Leader. He was on B Flight, and that was at Kenley. We were at Biggin Hill, and the H block got bombed at Biggin Hill so then we went to Kenley. Now Group Captain Aitcheson or something, there were two Group Captains, English, and they were both brothers and one of them was at Kenley, well I was at Kenley, but on this Canadian Squadron and we used to get Canadian parcels with there being just two of us on the Squadron. We were adopted by the Canadians, somebody in Canada, and we used to get a big box every, every month, well not every month, but we used to get a load of papers, newspapers, all comics. I used to give mine away, Sweet Caporal Cigarettes I think were in it, razor blades, and all things like that from somebody in Canada.

And when I was at Waddington one day the Flight Sergeant in charge of the station team, who was a discip man, came over and said 'They want you on a charge, up on discip.' So I reported and I was put on a charge for carrying on business while in His Majesty's Forces. What I'd been doing when I'd come home, down Chorley Street, in Bolton, just behind there where Bolton Motor Company used to be, there was a little moulder and he'd been moulding Spitfires and Wellingtons and bits. You file them up and polish them and add the chrome or whatever, and I had one of these you see, a Spitfire when I was back in the billet. What had happened, one of the lads that had gone on charge was in discip.

K: Sorry, what does 'discip' mean?

FE: Discipline.

K: Oh, discipline. Right.

FE: He was in discip and he was in the jug like, and he was caught, so he was asked, 'Where did you get that from?' 'Oh, Frank Edwards', he said 'I could do with one of them', this was the fellow that was guarding him. Anyway I got put on a charge for that, and there was some important football matches coming up you see, and there was all this going on, and the Sergeant, Flight Sergeant said 'We've got to get you off this charge or you're going to miss...' So I just left it to them really and I went before the Wing Commander, Squadron Leader, Wing Commander, Group Captain - hat off every time you went in before him like. Anyway the Flight Sergeant had found out that on the station there was no Kings Rules and Regulations to say that you shouldn't carry on business while in His Majesty's Forces, and there wasn't one on the station in Waddington and I got off with that, but they soon had them up afterwards.

K: So football was still important?

FE: Yes.

K: Were you posted anywhere else after that?

FE: After that I went from Waddington. All the Canadians came in and took over, like I say, there was only two of us left on the station on the Squadron, 420 Squadron, so then we were transferred to 401 Fighter Squadron at Gravesend and that was a grass runway. From there we moved to Biggin Hill where the Mark 9 Spitfire came off the line with the four bladed props and twin cannon, and 90-gallon long-distance tanks. So they were going further into France - they wanted to go further into France you see, so they needed the extra air miles, and from Kenley I went to Cosford in the Midlands on a fitter 2E course. I was there 6 months, played for the station team; I played with some very good players, the Hapgoods and Dochertys.

K: Did you?

FE: They were the physical instructors you see, PT instructors. Bert Williams was in goal. When I came home on leave, I'd been in about two years, I think, we went to call in on one of the Directors at Blackpool, we were in Blackpool, and he had a temperance bar in Waterloo Road, Mr Haslam. We were called in to see him and he played steam, I were in my uniform and he

said 'Why didn't you tell us? We could have got you here, along with Jock Dodds and Mortensen and all that.' Of course Morty was in aircrew. I were in digs with Morty when we were playing at Blackpool, well playing in the junior side of course... I was only 17.

K: He was a good player, wasn't he?

FE: Well he was an air gunner, he had a plate in his skull, but Harry Johnston and all them, and they were all PT instructors at Blackpool.

K: So in that team did you play in the same team or against them, were you against Haggood?

FE: No, I was in that side.

K: What was it a Wartime kind of side, or station side?

FE: Yes it was Cosford.

K: Cosford Station.

FE: Bert Williams was in goal. I played against Charlton Athletic's goalie, Sam Bartram when I was up at York.

K: Were there any spectators or was it just the station?

FE: Just station.

K: Because there wasn't really any football, was there?

FE: No, league football started a little bit, when I played for Blackpool against Bolton, it would be 1941. In 1940, a little bit of local league football started up and later on when Nat Lofthouse came in to prominence that would be '42, they were getting leagues going then.

K: But anyway, you were still at Cosford.

FE: Yes.

K: Did you say you played for Blackpool in the War?

FE: In the War I played against Bolton, here at Bolton. That was in the League, Wartime League.

K: What year was that in?

FE: 1940 that would be.

K: Where were you stationed then?

FE: No, that was before I joined up, I was only 17, 18 then. From there I went to Marston Moor, battle of Marston Moor, and I was on Hampdens then, and Halifaxes.

K: Did they do this so you had experience of all kinds of planes?

FE: I don't know really. I went to Marston Moor - I'd just come off a fitters course and you sort of were a sprog again, so this Flight Sergeant White, he said 'Edwards, there's an aircraft on A Flight' he said, 'It's been turned down. They can't get any boost on it'. So I got a garry, we called a wagon a garry, what we used to take you about on, and I got this garry and some flame traps and I went out to the Flight. I got the gantry round the engine, stripped all that, I'd been home you see, previous to this, I'd been home and made some tools, box spanner, little knuckle joint, 32 little nuts and bolts around these flame traps, I could have them done in no time, you see.

K: What is a flame trap?

FE: A flame trap is if an engine backfires, it's serious isn't it, you can't have an engine backfiring into a cowling else the aircraft would go up, so flame traps stops these flames banging back through your carburettor. These were down each inboard of each engine, in the middle. I'd made these, went down to the Pilot Works on Manchester Road, my cousins, and made these things you see, and later on I made quite a lot. They let me off two days to make some more, I came home and made these here things, and I could do these, so I did all this and went back to Sergeant White. I got some weights on the back of the aircraft and you could fasten them down to rings on the floor so you could put them through the boost you see. The check will be the flame trap, but if there's nothing going in, if the flame traps are blocked nothing can go in you see, so the revs won't come to the ending, so I'd done all this, put the cowlings back, and gone back to Sergeant White, because he was short of aircraft. 'I've only 4 of them and that one has no IFF on it - indicating friend of foe, radio, I can't send that up there'. There were a lot of aircraft that came even from the factory that were not serviceable because all the modifications as they come up hadn't been done and I had to check up whether they had been done. We were coming up then to a thousand bomber raids, and for a thousand bomber raids you hadn't got to have a thousand bombers had you, you had to have fifteen or two thousand for a thousand bomber raid. You had to have them serviceable, certain ones could do it, and certain ones couldn't. There's all kinds of

things that you could say 'Well they're serviceable to go to bomb Germany and get back...' but if they get lost or anything like that, they've no means of getting back. It's all done on the beams. Then there was all beams coming in, where they made for these beams and they were channelled into a beam which was all very interesting, but when you're trying to make so many aircraft fit into that, and they hadn't got this on and they haven't got that, and you hadn't got the modification to put on it, you had to put them in a different channel. We had a big graph, oh, massive, with all these aircraft on them, of all the Bomber Command, in 5 Command you see, because that covers York, Linton, I forget all the names of the places, Linton upon Ouse, and I was Corporal then, making these flame traps. I went back and I was LAC then, and I'd only been LAC about 6 months, and he said 'I'm making you up to Corporal.' That were unheard of, well you had to wait for about two years, to be made Corporal. From there I went into this big screen.

K: So you were constantly using your ingenuity were you?

FE: Yes.

K: Making your own tools and stuff?

FE: Yes there were things, the thing was on that job, Corporal, you have a log book really, of an aircraft, and you had to find out what modifications wanted doing and could be done in two hours or one hour, because if you put too many out the Sergeant is on those checks. They wouldn't be able to get it done you see and then, they'd have the higher ups on them, because they hadn't got so many aircraft you see, and from that they set up repair and inspection, R & I. That started up before the thousand bomber raids, because inspections were so many hours you see, but they wanted them doing, aircraft were going and coming back, they wanted them done when they came back, ready to go again, that was repair and inspection. Whereas normal servicing was 'Oh well that's got another 3 hours to go' you see and when 3 hours comes up, when the turn came up it was 3 hours to go, and they couldn't go there because it was a 7 hour trip, so that aircraft were wiped out wasn't it. So this repair and inspection, which they ran 24 hours a day was a necessity really, but the officers and that didn't like it, they just didn't like it. They tried to throw it out. So the big cheese, if this is in the records, the big cheese came from York, had us all out on Marston Moor, Tannoys and that, and he said 'This has got to work, or you' I can remember, he shouldn't have done this, I don't think, 'or you, Flying Officer Pick, will be an AC Plonk'. Oh, Flying Officer Pick - It frightened him to death, he got cracking, I've never seen a fellow shrivel, and he altered all this repair and inspection. He altered it so it was right, a little bit right for the lads and right for this, you know, and he really got it going, Flying Office Pick, it makes you wonder, parts of the War, which sometimes went and sometimes didn't go.

K: Flying Officer Pick?

FE: Flying Officer Pick.

K: So there's a lot of pressure really, wasn't there?

FE: Oh yes he had everybody and the Flight Sergeant frightened to death of losing their rank you see. Then up at Marston Moor, Group Captain Cheshire came in with his wife from America and she worked in the WVS. I used to work all hours, they used to call me '24 hours a day Edwards' (laughs) and I used to go back working, well there was always somebody 'Will you help us with this' type of thing. I suppose with engines I was a bit more than, I mean, it were born in my family, Edwards, and with that I used to go back at night and I used to call, his wife worked in the YMCA, YWCA, and she worked behind the counter his wife, she was forty odd years old then, a film star, he's married her in Canada when he went on his course and I used to get a cake and some coffee to take back with me to the hangars, Binney (Constance Binney) she was called and he's done his 26 then.

What a case he was, when they had a dance, you know, he loved to get in front on the conga, you know 'Ay, ay, ay, ay...' (laughs). He used to go outside and up and down and through places (laughs). He was a right comedian Captain Cheshire.

K: So there were plenty of social things going on?

FE: Yes.

K: Did you get home from there much?

FE: Well, the last 12 months of War wasn't very good for leave.

K: So what year, what year were you by then, when Cheshire came?

FE: That's '43, and then '45, VE Day, weren't it, '45. So I got married in '44, had time for courting and after that, I was on nights, permanent nights with this job, watching all the... I was on permanent nights, and when we puts the banns up for getting married, down Gloucester. I got 6 passes, 3 for me and 3 for the wife.

K: Did you meet your wife in Gloucester then?

FE: She was on the same station.

K: But which station was that?

FE: That's Marston Moor.

K: Oh, that's Gloucester is it?

FE: No, she lived at Gloucester.

K: She was from Gloucester but you met her at Marston Moor.

FE: I got these passes. You were only allowed from your base 24 hours, so that meant I had to get 3, 6 day passes to be filled in as required you see. That were bent, and we set off, we hitchhiked, the two of us, we hitchhiked to Gloucester, and we did it in 3 hitchhikes. Then coming back we had the passes and we had to fill them in, we hadn't used the 3 going out so we had 6 coming back, so we came back and then filled one in you see, to give us a bit more time then. 2 days we had down, you know, there and back to Gloucester, to put the banns up. (laughs)

K: Hitchhiking?

FE: Hitchhiking. We couldn't go by train you see because they hadn't paid us, we were both Corporals, that was serious, but what do you do. And then VE Day came.

K: Yes, what do you remember of that?

FE: And I was getting my clearances from the departments on Marston Moor to report to Goslin 3 at Padgate, near Padgate.

K: So there was quite a bit of celebration at Marston Moor was there?

FE: Well yes, on the day, on VE Day, they knew about it a week before like, you see, but we were all preparing for a swimming gala in the River Nidd that went through it. There was a bit of wide spot where they could have some races and one thing and another, and there were sports during the day but like I say, I couldn't partake in it because I was getting my clearances for moving on. And then we went to Gosling 3, where we learnt the new step.

K: The new step?

FE: Well, it's a slightly different step to RAF step, the marching.

K: I see.

FE: I don't know how they all go on, I've never weighed that up, how they go on, on parade because they're slightly different, it's only one or two steps, and, from Gosling we went to Weston Super Mare, RAF Locking, Weston Super Mare, and that was for fitting, and then the movement started (laughs). We moved from there, Locking, to Havant, that's right and we hadn't had any leave, I hadn't had any leave for 12 months with VE Day and all that and nobody got any leave, apart from days off once a fortnight of course. I went to Havant, and a Corporal, Corporal Airframe, well he was a Kellick then, I was a Kellick then, which is equivalent to Corporal in the fleet arm, and we put in for leave, and we got a fortnight's leave each, and me and him were strolling down, he's only a little red haired lad, we were going on leave, 14 days. We get to the gate and are told report back to your unit, you're transferred, you're posted, and so we go back, we're posted to Yeovilton where they do the helicopter training now. It was Yankee aircraft when we got there, folding wings, for aircraft for aircraft storage and I was on hangar duty one Sunday and there was an aircraft there that they wanted and it had a fault on it, starter fault. So I set the things up and started taking this starter off, and the scavenger pump, generally aircraft don't have any oil in the engine its all put in and dragged out into the wing you see, so they can do aerobatics, they can't have oil bashing about in the engine, so it's like a dry engine and this scavenger pump weren't working. This oil showered me, so I went back to the billet and had a good wash and that, a bath, and about a fortnight after, I started coming out in rashes. They gave me penicillin cream, talk about making anything worse, and they put me in hospital and I lost all my hair, hair on my face – I never had any for two years, down on my chest, all went and they drove me down in an ambulance to Stonehouse Hospital in Plymouth. I went in the skin department there, and they were putting opium on, and that didn't make it any better. I mean there were some skin ailments there I tell you, Chinese foot rot and that, one lad had it all over his body that, all dead skin, it were terrible, we used to go to it, when, I'll tell you in a minute, we used to pick this off him, I'll tell you when we used to do it. This officer / medic/ skin fellow he had me all done up in this, I looked like a mummy, little slits, and I always remember Moscow Dynamos were playing Arsenal and at the end of the ward I could see the radio, and in the ensuing days the radio went, the lights went and each window going down the ward, I couldn't

see. And then eventually I couldn't see at all. Well they were getting a bit worried for my eyesight, but he said 'We think it's only the infection' but what infection? They hadn't got a cure and this fellow got someone else in and he said try 2% silver nitrate and tubercul, well tubercul is bandage soaked in Vaseline really, so they had two days of that, and all the time I was dripping, this pus whatever was coming out, I was dripping. I had a bowl at the side of the bed and I was laid this way, and by this time I had started to realise I might be blind and I started putting, which I do now, my scissors and everything at the side of my bed so I know where it is (laugh) you know, and that's something that was done for me as a boy. This 2% silver nitrate and tubercul were on two days and then two days without and then two days with and two days without and that went on for a fortnight and the inflammation started going. I mean, it's depressing because you're seeing lads come in that had been on tankers, you know filling aircraft up with this lead in petrol, they were shocking! Certain lads it didn't effect. Then this lad came in from Singapore, a seaman, and like I say it was all over. When my eyes had started getting right, I used to go over him with tongs and get hold of this skin, and it were like, - have you ever had dead skin when you left a bandage on too long and it's gone white?

K: Yes

FE: Well he were like that all over, all round his privates and when you took that off it was all little holes (laughs) where his hairs were, and that's what we did, and that's one of my last jobs I did when I came out of there, Stonehouse. So then I came out and had 14 days leave, I hadn't had any days leave in 12 months. I came home and got back to my station, Yeovil, and signed in, get to the last place and he said 'Your ears could do with...' - this were a Friday, he said 'Your ears could do with syringing' he said, 'Come back Monday'. So in the meantime, I went back Monday. With signing in I'd come on the leave rota for Yeovil, so he said you should be on leave. I thought that would be all right, another 14 days leave and then come back and get demobbed. Anyway it got blocked that. I finished up at Taunton on the Tuesday for my demob suit.

K: So what was that feeling like?

FE: Well I'd been home you see, and picked up the car, you could buy a car then, and I'd been home and picked the car up, and I went down to Taunton in the car you see.

K: What kind of a car was it?

FE: A Ford Prefect, and then I went back to Thornbury where my wife was staying with her Mother and changed in the car, I changed my civvie suit that I'd got issued with, I went in with, because I never told the wife I was being demobbed that weekend and I turned up in my civvie suit you see, my John White shoes. I've never had one since a Crombie, not a Crombie, a Harris Tweed jacket - I sweat to pieces in that - and my mac, one of the Al Capone macs I got. They hadn't much there to give you actually.

K: No, you'd be one of the last won't you?

FE: No we were lucky, in the RAF I was group 48, I was group 48 for demob, now in the Fleet Arm we got a number that was very low, it was only about 12, and the thing was at first they started demobbing the Navy pretty quick and we were going to be demobbed very soon. Then they put a block on it, I don't know why, they just stopped and the RAF soared on and 48 come up. I was demobbed 28th February 1946. February 1946, was my demobilisation, but if we'd have got our Navy number I wouldn't have been out for another 3 months. Our RAF numbers caught up so we got demobbed under RAF numbers.

K: You were telling me at the beginning that it was Fleet Air Arm when you changed, wasn't it, after VE Day.

FE: Yes, VE Day, I was just a year, about a year in Fleet Air Arm.

K: Did you go back to Bolton then?

FE: Yes, well my Mother, they had a house that was rented out to the police in Castle Street, and they were moving. The fellow there, the officer there, was moving, and so my Father applied for the house, so lucky really I got there, our own house, and we started up a business in Halliwell.

K: Separate to your Father's business?

FE: Oh yes.

K: What was that?

FE: Repairing cars.

K: A garage?

FE: Yes, what were doing now really. A friend of ours had mills, and this was in an annex built onto the mill in about 1926 that really the Government built, and (laughs) they were just throwing money at work really, so we got this building.

K: Was it difficult to adjust afterwards?

FE: I never went abroad but plenty of times I'd been issued with overseas kit.

K: That's what I was going to ask - did you have air raids at the stations you were at, ever?

FE: Biggin Hill, at one of the H blocks. We were in the left hand one, ground floor and up the stone steps and we were in that one, and when we were on duty they were off duty, they were on duty we were off duty, so we were off duty, they were on duty and that one got bombed. We'd heard the air raid, but we didn't really know, and we came out when there was commotions outside (laughs) fire engines, and we walked, it were open air like, where they would have been, but they were on duty so there were nobody injured just loss of equipment.

K: No casualties.

FE: When we were at Gravesend of course that's the start of the V2 and all that and there were plenty of dog-fights you know, Gravesend was in the forefront you know.

K: ...and my father-in-law was a ferry pilot so he was always taking planes, picking up planes that needed repair so would you have ever...

FE: There was women doing that as well.

K: Yes, there were so...

FE: These aircraft that came to Biggin Hill, the Mark 9, new Mark 9, well we, at Biggin Hill we got these Mark 9's and 401 Squadron were the first operational Squadron with a full compliment of Mark 9s. We were the first, we got them all fitted out and ready for action and we were the first Squadron in the whole of that part of England, with them ready, which the old fellow got a commendation for.

K: So would you have ever repaired a plane then a ferry pilot would come and take it.

FE: I know the girls used to fly them in and when they had extras come in but I don't think, so, not on the fighters anyway, on bombers they'd come in and go to a compound, they wouldn't come to a Flight because they are not attached to that Flight.

K: No because they are separate.

FE: It's a separate thing from the compound. They would be distributed to each Flight.

K: What was it like adjusting back to life? I suppose you had to...

FE: Well we had to plan what we wanted to do and this friend of ours who owned this mill had this annex that had cotton waste in it but it wanted emptying, which he was doing to get money in. He didn't require it, and so we moved in and put doors in, sliding doors and one thing and another and started working from there. When I say I came out in February 1946 that was the end of your leave, because you came out, I came out on December 19th, just before Christmas, but you had 6 weeks leave. I didn't get any leave I came out on the 19th and was working on the 20th (laughs) because I had family and my eldest daughter was on the way. My wife was in the forces but she had to get a demob and then we set up house in '46, in Bromwich Street. Some lads don't settle down. Straight away Blackpool said when you come home let us know, so I let them know, and I played a couple of games, but I wasn't going to make it. I was one of the ones that wasn't going to make it, and I'd played for Bacup before, Bacup Borough, before I went in, in '41. They'd heard I was home and the local lad that did the signing on, he came down and I signed on for Bacup, which I played for for about 6 years, 7 years, and then I had 2 years at Fleetwood.

K: This is semi-professional?

FE: Yes.

K: Quite a bit of travelling then, every Saturday?

FE: Then I signed on for a local team; a friend of mine had started a local team, Lomax's. I'd played for Lomax's original team.

K: Didn't Nat Lofthouse play for Lomax's?

FE: Yes, Nat Lofthouse. We turned up on Leverhulme Park this Saturday and I was playing centre forward for them because they were short of a centre forward. I was full back, and Bert Cole who used to look after Nat, he said, er 'We've got a young lad 'ere, he's only 13, 12 or 13' - he's a few years younger than me, Nat - 'He's a promising centre forward - do you mind playing full

back?' So I went full back. Don Roberts who played full back, he was injured so I stepped in nicely there, and during the week Bacup Borough, I had played for Bacup Borough before I went in, Bacup Borough came and I signed for Bacup Borough, part time, which was a few pounds a week.

K: Did you have to train at Bacup as well?

FE: No I used to go up on Leverhulme; I didn't need anyone to train me. I was self training, I went and trained you know, and we did very well, we won the league championship, Combination cup, final of the other cup, 1947 I think that was, and then my pal and me went and moved to Fleetwood and I had two years at Fleetwood. We went to a final in there, one of the Combination finals; in the meantime we won the infirmity cup, which George Taylor who played for Bolton Wanderers presented, up on Holy Harbour.

K: Bolton Hospital Cup is that?

FE: Yes, Bolton Hospital.

K: Yes, now that's no more is it, the Holy Harbour?

FE: No, it's all built on isn't it. Well that's where Bolton Schoolboys used to play, there and Eagley. When I played for Bolton schoolboys it was always Holy Harbour or Eagley Mills, - that was a good pitch.

K: So you still have a garage and do repairs now?

FE: I work because I like working.

K: You do repairs?

FE: Yes, we do repairs and sell spares.

K: Where is it?

FE: In Gaskell Street, just below the Births, Marriages and Deaths.

K: Oh right, so you're still in Halliwell then?

FE: Next to Tower Radio actually.

K: Do you feel that you could have made it in professional football if the War hadn't come along?

FE: Yes, I would have made it, I would because Johnny Lyness the second team trainer of Blackpool, he believed that I, well he told my Father, unbeknown to me for many years, he said 'He is another Eddie Hapgood'. That annoys me watching football today they head a ball away, who do they head it to? they don't head it to one of theirs, they don't kick it to one of theirs, they kick it to the opposing side and if you do that you're setting their attack up. If they're daft like you and give it you back that's another thing, but, but that amazes me, there's so many players that just head the ball away and you might as well not head it at all. I used to, that's how I played, I mean Joe Smith had us on Bloomfield Road, two full backs, two here, two there, and that's what you did, you kicked it to the other lad, the other full back. And you tried to kick it with both feet and all, and you tried to aim it at the other fellow, and that's where Beckham must have played like that, he's a natural to it, or he's practiced that, you know. Van Nistelroy is rubbish without Beckham. I mean Beckham can play the ball, there's other things about him I don't like, but, a pass, a cross field pass, you see it's no good you giving a cross field pass if the full back is in playing distance, because the full back's going to get it isn't he, you know because the forward's always more timid than the full back. In the War I was reserve for York City a couple of times, but the main stumbling block there was I couldn't get the time off. During the week was all right you see because we played Harrogate where Sam Bartram was, and in that league, there was a league round York, Pocklington, Easingwold, Scampton, they were all in that league, you know, that standard, and it was like the third division. You know it wasn't first division, it was about third division and that was on a Wednesday, so you were all right on a Wednesday. There's so many locals got weekends off, Saturdays off, and you couldn't get Saturdays off. I couldn't get Saturdays off, and especially when VE Day came - you know the year before VE day - you couldn't get time off at all.

You'd got your day off but you couldn't have what day you wanted. Nobody ever went anywhere, they just went on their day off, they got a day off and that was it. In fact one lad, this Corporal... what was his name, he was on What's My Line, one Sunday after the War. A Corporal he were, he was Corporal Airframe and I was Corporal Fitter. He had a pub in Southampton, his wife was running it, and the pilots, you see, they could buy a case of whisky a month, at a very daft price, and he used to buy these off them, you see, and then get them down to his wife, somehow or other, but sometimes he kept a bottle back. On his day off, when he couldn't go home of course

for a month, he used to tie it to the roof (laughs) of the Nissen Hut you know, round one hook on the string and he'd lie there all day drinking. Corporal - what was his name, and after the War, he's on What's my Line, and that's what his line was, publican (laughs) down Southampton where he came from. Well he had no chance of getting home from there like, and he always used to keep a bottle back.

ENDS