





# TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: this is tape one, side one of an interview with Reg Loft about child evacuees recorded on 25 October 1990.

Reg Loft, where and when were you born?

I was born in Moonee Ponds in Melbourne in 1926.

And what was the date?

1st December in 1926. That makes me coming up to sixty-four.

What can you tell us about your parents, what sort of people they were, and what they did for a living?

My mother was a London Cockney, and I think my father was virtually, too. They virtually grew up in their early lives in Battersea in London, of pretty poor circumstances. My mother's father was a commercial traveller who separated from his wife, and my mother can recall him joining up with some woman who was a relation of a French nobleman and she can remember horses and four coming to the house and that type of thing. My mother was of quite a large family and my father was of quite .... They lived opposite each other, and my father's parents also separated and his father took off somewhere to Canada or possibly Australia. My Dad was always looking for his father because he reckoned his father owed him twenty pounds for burying his mother, or some such story as that. So he was always looking for him. There was a man died during the war in Adelaide named Loft, in the Adelaide Hills who had a cache of money, of £100,000 in those days and Dad thought he might have been related so he got in touch with Somerset House in London. And he was related, about forty-second cousin or something, but the fortieth cousin turned up and claimed that money.

They turned out to be very fine people. My father was adopted by three aunties who really reared him and taught him a bit of culture from what I can gather, and set him on the road to a reasonable sort of a life. He knew, of course, my mother from a very early age and they married pretty young. Dad was introduced to opera and classical music and that type of thing. He learnt to play the banjo, became a very fine banjo player and played such classical pieces as 'Humoresque' and that type of thing, similar to violin playing. He went into the British Army. Fought in France during the war and played banjo to entertain the troops and that type of thing. And then after the war he .... My mother's sister married an Australian serviceman and they got into strife out here in Moonee Ponds and my mother's sister was writing home all the time to her father saying rescue me, rescue me.

And so my grandfather financed Mum and Dad to come to Australia in 1923, virtually to rescue Mum's sister, which they apparently did and sent her off to England. That's another story, I don't think that was anything to, it wasn't a rescue really. I think it was Aunty Dolly trying to get away. She led rather a hairy, scary life after that.

Who did you actually spend the early part of your childhood with then?

Well, I'll come to that. They came here in 1923 and lived in Moonee Ponds until 1928 and so we were born here. My sister and I were born here. And Dad was a draughtsman at the

Maribyrnong Munition Works, and he also played in Hoffman's dance bands in Melbourne at night time. So Mum became very lonely, not seeing very much of him, and having the two babies and hot weather and all that sort of thing, she became very homesick. And so she insisted on going back to England and in 1928 we went back to England. We were taken back to England.

(5.00) This is you and your sister?

So we were babies, yeah. So we grew up virtually in London, in pretty poor circumstances because Dad ran into the depression and was out of work for a long period of time. Mum was a bit of a - how can I term her - unsettled, not unsettled but I think she was a get-up-and-go type and she realised where we were heading in this poverty-stricken street in Battersea and she got stuck into Dad and eventually he got a job in the War Office as a draughtsman in the civil side, and Mum insisted on us getting out of this situation we were in. So he went looking for cheap houses and found a double-decker house in Bromley in Kent and bought on a very cheap rate in those days. That would be round about 1934, '35, and you could get a house for virtually a few shillings' deposit.

Was this a working-class or a middle-class area, how would you describe it?

Virtually jumping from working to middle class in this situation. It was on an estate in Bromley, virtually on the border of London. So there we virtually got, round about the age of seven to when we left England was spent in Bromley in Kent. I went to Bromley County School which was equivalent of your high schools here, and Dorothy went to Bromley High School which was a girls' school, and mine was a boys' school.

Your sister was a little older than you then?

She was eighteen months older than me, yes.

What about that early part of the primary school years? Where had you spent that?

Primary school was spent in a school not far from where we lived actually in Bromley. I can't remember a lot of that but I can remember the state school situation, just a little actually, that's fairly hazy but that's where we spent those years. Oh, the very first years, the very young years were spent in Wicks's Lane school off Lavender Hill in Battersea.

How do you recall your childhood during that early part before the war in terms of the times? Was it difficult managing or were you reasonably comfortably off? How do you recall it?

I recall it that .... The thing I can recall is during the depression in Emu Road in Battersea where my father was out of work, and a lot of other people were out of work too, we had people down the end of the road named Hardings. And Mr Harding was the only guy with a decent job in the area and everybody had to sort of cooperate in those days with passing on clothes and that type of thing to exist. But Mr Harding used to, was the only guy who could afford a joint of meat at the end of the week so he used to ask all the neighbours to come in and they virtually used to feed us on this, and that was the only time we ever got a joint of meat as far as I can remember as a child.

Sort of in return, I guess, they used to run quite large parties, which is amazing in those times, but I can remember Dad playing the banjo and Mum singing and playing the piano for those particular parties for Mr Harding and his family. From there we jumped into Bromley where, Dad having a job, and very, very cheap rent for this house, I can recall we lived fairly well because we had the normal round of meals. We were well fed and virtually well clothed. When it came to going to the high schools they insisted on school uniforms which apparently Dad could afford; we had them. The only thing I can remember was Mum dyeing clothes to make them virtually come into the uniform style; wearing prickly flannels and that type of thing which I imagine were on the cheap side. But nevertheless we were very well clothed, and I would say we led a normal middle-class life in those times, right up until wartime.

Up to that point had you begun to have any ideas about what you were going to do with your life?

(10.00) Dad, being a musician, he .... We were encouraged into the musical side. I sung in a church choir. My sister was learning the piano from my mother, and I was learning the piano from my mother. My mother kept on at my sister and she became an extremely good pianist, after the Charlie Kunz type of playing. I always wanted to go out and play with the boys outside and eventually Mum gave up and let me go, much to my disappointment, because I'm a frustrated piano player. However, I took to the drums because I adored drum, most little boys did. But I had the opportunity to stand in on the bands that Dad played in, stand next to the drummer. And he played in a couple of bands and one band the drummer took pity on me and actually gave me a drum kit. He played at the local church dances and occasionally he let me sit in and play his drums when he was out having a smoke or whatever. One thing I do remember, having got the drum kit home, we then established a family band, and we used to play for the air raid precaution dances which were held on a Saturday at the very school I went to, the state school, locally, and we played as a band. My mother playing piano, my father on saxophone and banjo and my sister on piano accordion and myself on drums.

Do you recall what sort of things you were playing?

All the old numbers. Mum and Dad, of course, had all the old numbers of the, going right back to the 1920s, all orchestrations, and heavens, I can't for the moment think of them, but they were all the very old: 'Always' and 'Tiger Rag' and 'Who's Taking You Home Tonight', those sort of songs. And of course we actually got into 'White Christmas' just before we left - Bing Crosby and those people.

Was it a happy period, do you recall, or were there tensions as well, as tends to be the case with most families, I suppose?

Mum was a very strict disciplinarian. We got beltings from Mum.

What was a belting?

Well, early in the piece it was - when she could handle us, we were small - it was a smack. I forget where, probably around the ear or the backside, or legs, or something. But later on, I can remember if I'd done something naughty as a boy - this was just before the war, we'd moved into Bromley - and I came round the corner and came in sight of the house Mum would standing in her bedroom window upstairs just with her fist up, shaking her fist at me.

And I knew I was in trouble so I didn't bother to even say hello or anything. I just walked in the back door and ran up the stairs and shut the bedroom door and got into bed and I went without my dinner. I knew I wouldn't have any dinner for the punishment of whatever I'd done. I obviously knew what I'd done. So they were the sort of punishments that were meted out by Mum. Dad was a very placid man, working hard all the time, and was virtually out of the running altogether. He didn't ever touch us or to my knowledge never said a cross word. So Mum was the organiser.

> Do you have a sense as a child before the war that there was something happening? There was some sort of trouble brewing?

Oh yes. I was very conscious of the situation in England virtually in 1938 when Hitler was mustering his forces and Germany was getting armed. Even as a small boy - well I wasn't a small boy, I suppose, I was twelve - and Dad being in the War Office, and him having fought in the first world war, I was interested in those sort of things. Dad was talking about, at that time at the dinner table, of what the hell are we doing not getting armed. We haven't got any arms of any sort against this guy in Germany who's virtually getting fully armed, and that was a worry of my father which passed on to me.

> I had asked you before if you had particular ideas about what you were going to do with your life. I take it then that you were thinking of being a musician with the background about that?

Of being a dance band drummer, yes. And I had a wonderful experience with that just before we left. The Biggin Hill fighter station was close to where we were, and Dad was playing in a band where the drummer took sick and he asked me would I play, which was really a great honour. I went out there and all the air force were dancing .... They had this dance held in a hangar. During the interval when my father and his mates went off for a smoke some guys came up and one had a clarinet and one a double bass and a pianist and they asked me would I accompany them. And it was the most wonderful experience of my life because they were the members of Morris Winneke who was a big dance band leader in London, they were the members of his band and they'd asked me to accompany them for this short spell of about twenty minutes or half an hour, and that was really first class. That sowed the seed of me becoming a dance band drummer.

(15.00) Incidentally, as to being born in Australia, had that left you with any particular sense as to in any way being different, or Australian, or anything?

Oh yes. I used to adore Australians. There was a guy named 'Digger' who used to come to the church, and he was bronzed and the typical Aussie face and body, and yes, I adored Australians. They came and marched during the Coronation with their slouch hat and the big feathers, and they had photographs in the paper of diggers opening the corrugated tops of drink - not cans, but bottles - with their teeth and this type of thing that really they were wonderful people to me, yes.

> Australians like to see those elements as somehow showing a certain larrikin independence that we regard as a virtue, on the other hand, did English people perhaps at times see Australians as rather undignified, lacking in manners and boorish people?

I don't think so. I think they adored them actually. The ones I ran into contact with, anyway, especially the women, adored them for their - oh, I can't - toughness, I guess. That would be about it. They were extremely strong men. They came over as extremely strong men relative to Englishmen. That's as I saw it as a child anyway.

Can you recall where you were when you heard that war had opened?

Yes, we were on the coast of Hastings with a German family, a Mr and Mrs Emerick and their children. We were facing the coast of France and we right on the clifftop. We had a house right on the clifftop. When war broke out we were all hugging the radio of course and heard the announcement made. Only a very short time after that the police came around because Mr Emerick was a German and he had a woodworking factory in Bermondsey in London and he was a huge man. My father was six foot four and seventeen stone, and he was likewise the same sort of size so they were great mates. But of course Dad worked in the War Office and Emerick was a German and he was one of these types of Germans who used to 'Heil Hitler' and throw his glass into the fireplace. And my mother used to say to him before the war, 'You'll regret not becoming a naturalised English', and he used to storm and carry on. Later on he sobbed in tears to Mum when his wife and children were taken away. But he had this factory in Bermondsey. He was apparently being blackmailed by a brother in Germany and the British government .... Oh, going back. We were on holidays and the police turned up and took away my father and Mr Emerick. My father was recalled back to the War Office and Mr Emerick was taken in by the police, where I don't know. However, he was apparently imprisoned or interned, that's right, and they found they couldn't run his factory, so they asked him in return for fixing up his brother in Germany, would he run the factory in London which he agreed to.

What sort of factory was it?

It was a factory where they made carpentry tools which apparently were required for the war effort, especially wood planes. So he went back to the factory. We were left on the coast and so we were facing France and we concocted all sorts of stories when we saw boats way out to sea, we thought they were the Germans coming and all this, as children would. However, soon we returned to our houses in Bromley and Mrs Emerick's house was sandbagged by the authorities and a guard put on them to preserve their lives and eventually they were taken away to the Isle of Man which broke Mr Emerick's heart virtually.

Was there a feeling they may have been attacked as Germans?

That's right. They were protected. My father, being in the War Office, we didn't see a lot of him from there on. So that was my introduction to the war virtually.

Was there perhaps a concern that in some way or other this German friend may have been exploiting your father's position?

That's right. I presume that's why they were separated. I don't know .... I didn't ever hear anything to that effect but I imagine him being so much of a Hitler supporter they grabbed him straight away. And Dad being in the War Office, of course.

(20.00) So when did the idea of Australia first come up that you can recall?

Of coming to Australia?

Mm.

The only thing I can recall was when the British government put out that they had a scheme going and I think it was me that brought the paperwork home, or read it in the paper, and said to Mum and Dad could we go. Mum was hesitant I think, only on the point of losing two children but Dad thought about it and knowing the situation .... This subject's brought up a lot about people who say they'd never send their children, but they must realise that at that time, I was thirteen and Dorothy was going on fifteen, and we knew what was going on. Now the ...

Incidentally, air raids had started by then?

Yes, but not in our area. They had started in some of the critical areas. We were right on the edge of the .... We had the barrage balloons over our house which virtually was the edge of the defence of London, but that hadn't started with, because the Germans used to send their bombers over and the bombers would come to the barrage balloons and then they'd drop their bombs virtually on our area and then scatter back to Germany, and say they'd dropped them on London, which they hadn't.

So at that time, Dunkirk had fallen and France had thrown in the towel and we were in a situation where they were saying over the radio for the ordinary people of the public to arm themselves with garden forks and whatever they could defend themselves against these Germans who were definitely going to come. They were virtually on their way. They had boats in France ready to make this invasion which was quite true, and it was only a matter of time before they landed on British soil and we had to fight to the death. This is what we got. My father had a revolver and he was going to shoot my mother and us two children and then defend himself to the death against these Germans.

Did you discuss that?

Oh yes, we were told that that was the intention.

How did you feel about that at that age?

Virtually terrified, as I can recall. The whole population was scared, frightened, everybody was frightened. My father was frightened. You could feel that in the air. The same as you could feel this .... It was in the air the same as you could feel when the King died, the whole of England was sad, that type of feeling in the population. And so we were scared. In that situation I think any mother and father would have to admit that if you were given the opportunity to get your children to safety you would grab it. And I think it was this situation that my father looked at and said okay, they go. So we applied and him saying that it would give the children a chance to go to, see the country where they were born because he realised that they would never be able to send us, have the money to send us here. So that was the first thing of coming to Australia, and from there on it just progressed through the government scheme.

Incidentally, for children or your age at that point, were there drills? Was there an attempt to, if there was a fight to the death feeling, was there an attempt to

give you any sort of skills and self-defence, or how to use rudimentary weapons, at all?

No, not to my knowledge. We didn't see much of .... Only the children around us, because schooling had stopped. The teachers had all been taken into the services except for the old teachers who were too old for service at that time, and I only went to school on Tuesday morning and Thursday afternoons at Bromley County School. There, I can't recall it ever being spoken of at school. I imagine we discussed it between boys but of course our imagination would run riot I imagine with that sort of thing hovering over us.

One might suppose that the possibility of being shot by your father would be even more frightening than the Germans arriving?

Oh yes, most definitely, yes.

So was your eagerness to go to Australia more to escape being shot by your father, rather than it being an adventure, or a bit of a mix?

No, my thoughts at that time was 'Whoopee, I'm getting out of this'. I wasn't doing too well at school. Mum was very strict. Things weren't too hot in England. The food situation was crook and there's a sea voyage ahead to Australia where I was born. It was a wonderful adventure coming up for me.

(25.00) Most small boys collect things and have a range of treasures that they will have gathered, do you recall having to make choices about what you could carry and having to leave things that you valued behind?

No, I can't recall ever having valuables as a child, excepting the drum kit which was particularly valuable to me. And my father, when we left, gave me the kettledrum on its stand and the sticks and brushes and the cymbal in a suitcase, which actually was a bit illegal because that wasn't in the kit that we were allowed to take. However, he said take it and get it as far as you can and keep up your playing. So virtually that was the only valuables that I can remember having, the rest I just left.

Were you able to get it to Australia?

Yes, I got it here and I played that in the Melbourne Boys' High School orchestra and quite successfully for quite some time.

Do you have a memory of the day you were leaving, of packing and leaving the home and so on?

No, funnily enough, I don't. The only thing I can really remember which ticked over in my mind at that time was on the railway station in London, which I think was Waterloo, and we were on the train and my mother and father were on the station. We thought at that time, and everybody else did, that the war would only last twelve months. So we were going for a twelve months' holiday in Australia. But I can remember thinking at the time, young and all as I was, I wonder - as Mum and Dad faded away in the distance - I thought to myself, I wonder would I ever see them again. And probably that was because of the imminent invasion of England I imagined which brought that to my mind, and I cried of course as we

left. They were crying, everyone was crying. So that was really my thoughts of going away. But actually, the actual memory of leaving home, I can't recall, no.

So from the train?

Sorry?

From the train, what happened then?

From the train we progressed up through England, all the station .... We were trying to pick out the names of the stations we were going through. My father was crazy on trains. He had an uncle who used to make model trains in where his aunties who brought him up, and they were magnificent things. They were later on taken into the British Museum as models. So Dad was mad on trains and we used to go down to Grove Park station and watch the *Hastings Express* come through in the mornings and that type of thing. He once took me down to Euston station to see the *Flying Scot* take off to Scotland, and as a very tiny boy, I'd be five or six, I can remember wondering if ever I would travel on such a wonderful train. And so we were on this train out of Waterloo actually covering the same ground as the *Flying Scot* and so I was interested in the railway stations, but we couldn't read the names because they were very well blacked-out. So we passed through most of England unaware of .... There was one station we did pick out the name but I can't recall what it was. However, we went through England to Liverpool where we were taken to a state school and bedded down for the night in the state school hall. There the air raids started and we had five raids in one night from this state school.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: this is side two of tape one of the interview with Reg Loft, recorded on 25 October 1990.

What do you recall of the raids, and your feelings?

We didn't hear much of those raids. We got an alarm. We got the air raid .... I remember the air raid sirens which went off well before the planes got anywhere near the joint. So we were herded out of this hall, down into the air raid shelters and virtually we would have heard nothing of what went on up above us. We didn't hear anything afterwards. I expect they kept it from us. If anything I think they were after the docks probably and the ships sitting in the docks at that time and there were probably a lot of troops around and what have you. However we didn't hear anything of the details of those raids except that they got us out of bed which was a nuisance. One child who we called 'Samson', he was very young, I think he was four and a half, and a red-headed boy. We carted Samson who was fast asleep up and down from the hall to the air raid shelters in the five air raids, and he never woke up during the whole lot. He became, he was called 'Samson, the little devil' for the rest of the trip. He has turned up since, I believe living in Australia.

Do you recall being introduced to an escort at that time?

No, I don't recall actually meeting Miss Pearson. Miss Pearson was our escort. She was a lady who was wrapped up in scouting and guiding organisation, and I had been interested in scouting, I was just starting to get into it, before war broke out, from school. Mainly because the scout camps used to go to Guernsey and the Channel Islands and those places and I thought that would be wonderful if I could get on one of those camps. But no, I can't recall actually being introduced but I can recall Miss Pearson giving us talks. She was a nice lady.

What sort of talks?

Just talks on, that she was to be in charge of us and normal hygiene, I think. She expected us to wash ourselves and look after ourselves and she would generally try and see that we didn't get sick and that sort of thing, as far as I can recall, yes.

So you spent a couple of days, was it, before you went aboard the ship?

I don't recall a couple of days. Apparently that was so. But I can't recall .... I don't think we spent a couple of days. I think we might have been on the end of .... It was all very hurried. I was reading in Michael Fethney's book how hurried it was, but I think some of them spent days coming down from Glasgow and those places, and whether they kept the boys from the girls and that type of thing, I don't know. I can only recall spending one night in that state school and then the next day going on board the *Batory*; that's what I can recall.

How close were you and your sister at that time? Did she attempt to assert herself in a motherly role? Did you resist any attempt for her to manage you and be in charge of you?

Not really. We were both fairly strong personalities. I don't think I was all that close to Dorothy. We used to fight as children, wrestle on the ground and that type of thing. We were just a normal brother and sister relationship, I think. No, I can't recall her trying to mother me at that stage, no.

It's an age where a lot of peer group attitude amongst young boys is that sisters are dumb and girls are generally fairly stupid. Do you recall what your attitudes at the time were?

(5.00) No, I didn't think that of Dorothy. I thought she was actually a slight cut above me because she went to a girls' school which was more or less verging on the public school type in England and the high school for girls was on a higher type of grade and Dorothy .... I was only interested in carpentry, and Dorothy was more into maths and that side of things, so in my eyes she was more learned than me. I suppose it was a type of admiration. I looked up to Dorothy more than anything, I'd say.

Do you have a memory of the ship and being impressed at this boat that you were about to go in?

Yes, the size of the ships in those days, they appeared enormous sitting alongside the wharf, and I've adored ships ever since, especially the *Aquitania* was berthed in Woollomooloo dock in Sydney when we went home and that was an enormous ship. The front of it came right over the road in Woollomooloo and the end of it was right up the end of the sheds and it was

an enormous ship. Yes, we thought we were going onto an enormous ship, which the *Batory* really wasn't actually but it appeared that way to us.

Were there troops preparing to go aboard, or were they already on board?

No, I can't recall that detail. I think the troops were already on board. And having since read Fethney's book, it appears we were supposed to go on the *Orion* and at the last minute the ship's surveyors told the shipping line that the *Orion's* engines would seize up if she took to sea, and so we were not allowed to go on the *Orion*, we were transferred at five minutes' notice. They were going to send us back home but they thought that wouldn't be the right thing to do, so they transferred us to the *Batory*. The crew of the *Batory* knew nothing of this and they suddenly saw this horde of children coming down the wharf and getting on to their ship, which was amazing, but that was a last-minute decision. I think the troops were already on board because we sailed, to my memory, that night.

So in what sort of quarters did you find yourself in?

We found ourselves in .... The quarters I had was the cabin right down the back at the bottom of the ship at the back because the screw, one of the screws actually went through the roof of our cabin and the cabin was shaped that you could see the shape of the screw going through the back, so we were right down the back at the bottom. And as Dorothy pointed out only the other day, if we'd have been torpedoed we probably wouldn't have survived because I read where the captain of another ship who had children on board insisted that they, during the scares, that they sleep in the first class passengers' lounge which was right on the top, right next to the lifeboats. However, how we would have got on had anything hit us I don't know because there would have been at least, anything up to half a dozen flights of stairs to go up from where I was to reach the first promenade deck where the lifeboats were.

How many were you sharing with?

Three boys. The fourth one I can't remember but I've since met Tony Smith and Paul Farquharson. Paul Farquharson was a Scot and Tony Smith, he came from Glasgow but he was really English and he .... We've since met at the Sydney reunion. That was the reason I went to the Sydney reunion was to meet those two boys who were in the cabin with me, but I can't remember the fourth. They were mostly in the tourist class. We were mostly, the girls and the boys - my sister was in a four-berth as I remember - mostly in the tourist class accommodation of the *Batory*. I think she was carrying a few first class passengers. I wondered at the time why the ship was so empty to take 477 children but I presume it was because tourist class passengers just weren't travelling in those days. They wouldn't be game to, so it was travelling relatively empty. The troops were billeted in sleeping accommodation which was fabricated out of piping on the decks. So they weren't taking up cabins at all. I presume their officers were in the first class accommodation of the *Batory*.

Do you recall leaving port, and how you felt?

No. We sailed at night time, and the only thing I can recall was casting off, because there were virtually no lights, and casting off - we would have been in bed - and the feeling of the engines starting up and then they virtually stopped because I believe we went out into mid-stream whilst the convoy got together and waited for the navy to say go. The next thing I remember was the next morning being at sea.

(10.00) Was it exciting?

Very. Yes, very exciting, up to the point that I got seasick which wasn't very long, and I was seasick for the whole ten weeks actually, of the whole trip, until we got virtually through the Bight.

> How was that feeling? Was it bad enough that you just wished you could die, or wished you'd never gone?

Yes, I wished I could throw myself off the *Batory*. I was desperate to get off it, but of course you wouldn't throw yourself into the water so you had this 'catch-22' situation where you had to stay and be ill. Being right down the bottom of the ship made it a lot worse because of the shuddering, and the shuddering of the shaft in the cabin and that type of thing. I think that might have made my situation worse anyway.

> Being sick, what would you eat? Can you recall eating?

No, I can't recall eating. I can recall being sick. One day, in the very first start, they used to parade the troops on the promenade, on the first promenade deck. Every morning they had to parade and this section of troops, I don't know who they were .... We had the Argyles, the Southern Highlanders, the Gordon Highlanders, and the Black Watch on board, and this morning I can remember I had the feeling I was going to be sick so I took to the stairs and I raced up the stairs - we were in the Bay of Biscay - and took to the stairs and just managed to burst through the door onto the promenade deck and let it go over the side, and the wind picked it up and spread it right down this parade of troops and you can imagine the language that I got. I'll never forget that. That was quite an experience, so they knew me from there on to steer well clear.

> Did you have a fear of torpedoes or submarines, or were you just too sick to even worry about it?

Too sick to worry about it. It was never brought up, naturally enough. No, we didn't .... There was never any talk of being attacked. I understand that we were, that U-boats were around in that time and that in fact we had a few scares. We were very heavily covered by destroyers all around us and at that stage no, we didn't have .... The troops had started to, they were all joking and carrying on with us kids, and me being sick, didn't think about it.

> Were there any good periods then when you weren't sick, where it was calm enough to sort of get up and about and enjoy yourself?

Oh yes, I beg your pardon. I wasn't sick all the time. I was sick for a few days when we left port. For instance we ran into quite rough weather round about Spain and I was sick through there but once we got past Spain I came good and I was perfectly all right. We got into Freetown in Sierra Leone and from there on in I was okay until we got to Capetown where we stayed a week, so we got our land legs back. And then out of Capetown I would be seasick again but only for a day or two, and out of each port, yeah.

> What about day-to-day activities and Miss Pearson's role, what can you recall of that?

I can't recall much of her, she must have had a reasonable bunch of boys I think. I think she used us boys, the older boys, and I was an older boy at thirteen of the others .... I can't recall that we had any very young boys. I think most of us were reasonably sensible guys in her mob and we behaved pretty well. For instance Paul Farquharson and Tony Smith were all level-headed sort of fellows and I think she used the oldest ones of us to discipline anything out which was bad news. I think she used to round us up for meals, that type of thing, but no, I can't recall .... I think she was virtually recruited into the scouting organisation very early in the piece and became pretty busy in that type of work with a larger group of boys than actually concentrating on her own. I think she felt that her own were okay, let'em go, sort of thing.

> What about other escorts? Were there some that you can recall that word would get around that they were rather touchy or difficult, or whatever?

(15.00) No, they were all, as I recall .... There must have been the occasional kids versus escorts type thing. But I think they'd be kids who'd be unsettled anyway. There were bullies and kids who were howling and kids who were sick and that type of thing. No, I can't recall any escort or heads of escorts who were unpopular on that trip at all, no.

> Any particular problems that remain with you where people got into particular trouble or maybe somebody was thought to be overboard and missing?

No, the only thing I can remember was Samson one day had climbed .... They had the lifeboats lashed to the first promenade deck so that in an emergency they could just slash the ropes and the boats were free and we could get away. This was only about a day out of England and Samson had climbed on the passenger rail, and he'd stood on the rail and then let himself go and grabbed the leading part of the lifeboat and he was looking down into the sea, and that was how we found him, and everyone was hesitant to grab him, and so we called a soldier and a soldier came and grabbed him because we felt we wouldn't be able to hold onto him if he let go.

> Was he engrossed, or was he scared?

He was engrossed with the waves the ship was making. No, he couldn't care less. He was an amazing guy. But no, I can't recall any difficulties. They formed this scout troop very early in the piece and that was really first class. I believe they had cubs and guides and when we got to Capetown the crew of the *Batory* had made a flag. It was a *Batory* troop, and the women of South Africa, of Capetown, had had embossed the *Batory* name on the scarves and presented us all with scarves and it became the - I imagine, probably, the first land scout troop at sea. That was quite a memorable event.

> What about the troops, did you develop any particular friendships after you got over your embarrassing and awkward experience of being sick?

Yes. There was a guy named Bryan who was a wonderful pianist. He'd been taught in America and first class dance band pianist, and so he was used by the officers in the officers' mess and the troops at troop concerts. They got to work on concerts and entertainment very fast, and so I was used with my drum kit and asked would I play to accompany Bryan on the piano in the officers' mess at night times. I can't recall being allowed late up at night but at

least I probably went till half-past nine or ten o'clock. So I was dragged into the situation there. And the troops ran these wonderful concerts for themselves and the children. We were all invited and they were first class. That got going very early in the piece. The troops were extremely popular and they adopted the children, of course.

> Yet I understand it was supposed that the troops oughtn't fraternise, or the children oughtn't fraternise with the troops. Do you recall anybody ever saying anything that: 'Look, you must keep away, and you shouldn't be there?'.

No, that was never .... We mixed quite freely. We mixed quite freely during the day and, no, I never ran across that at all. The girls fell in love with them and to my knowledge it was all a very friendly sort of atmosphere.

> Incidentally, during the periods where you were particularly sick who would look after you? Was your sister assuming a sort of motherly role, or would Miss Pearson come and tend to you?

No, I recall Miss Pearson coming and watch, because I'd stayed in bed, and she came down. I imagine she may have brought me food 'cause I couldn't face going to the dining rooms, and she probably brought me crusts of bread and things like that, and I wasn't very interested in eating. But yes, she hovered over me and as far as I remember Dorothy occasionally came down and checked that I was still alive, that type of thing. But I didn't ever reach hospital stage or anything like that. That's as far as I remember, no.

> What about Capetown? What sort of things do you recall about Capetown?

Capetown was a wonderful place. The blacks .... The first thing we noticed was the queues. We had a ride on a double-decker bus and we noticed the queues, the black and white toilets in the street and the different queues, black queues and white queues. And we got on this bus and the blacks were upstairs and the whites downstairs, so we went upstairs and we mixed with the blacks upstairs. They were all laughing and we were all laughing and nobody separated us. I can remember walking down the street and a Jewish guy coming out of a shop, I presume it was his shop, and a crowd quickly gathered because he was kicking a white girl in - who must have stolen something from his shop or something like that - and we were horrified at the ...

(20.00) A white girl or a black girl?

A white girl, which horrified us, and we were dragged away from there by the escorts I presume. We were picked up in cars by people, I presume prominent people. The guy who picked us up was the owner of an ice cream factory in Capetown. He took us for drives all around, to Cecil Rhodes' memorial and all the various parts of Capetown, eventually finishing up in a market place where he, in amongst the blacks who had banana stores and orange stalls and peanut stalls and that type of thing. And he went to the various stalls and he said, 'These children have come from England - throw something in the boots', and food in the boot, and I can remember these blacks throwing a bag of oranges and a bag of bananas and a bag of peanuts in the boot of his car. I presume for nothing, whether he went back and paid them I don't know but I presume they gave them to us. And then back to the ship.

I can remember when we arrived in Capetown they had negro women on the roof of the Custom sheds with large crates of Jaffa oranges and we were all lining the promenade decks watching this as they tied the ship up and these women started throwing oranges which we hadn't seen in England for a while. They could throw, these women. They were big hefty women and a couple of these oranges hit the soldiers and people on the promenade deck, so the soldiers started to catch them and throw them back and a battle went on between these women and the soldiers with this orange fight. And they were laughing and the troops were laughing and of course the kids thoroughly enjoyed that. On the wharf the Gordon Highlanders got their pipe band going and they did exhibition playing on the wharf at Capetown. All in all Capetown was a wonderful place. We thoroughly enjoyed Capetown.

With that interest and apparently some media interest at the time, did it give you a sense of self-importance? Did you sort of feel, 'Oh, we're really quite special sort of people'?.

Yes. They made us special because I think they felt sorry for us as evacueés, and we were a long way from home and away from our parents and that type of thing. We were treated like royalty and probably felt like it.

You didn't feel you were being pitied and resent that element of it?

Oh no, it was just a glorious adventure for us, yeah.

And from Capetown?

From Capetown. We left Capetown .... We had a problem in Capetown because of the magnetic cable, mine cable around the *Batory* broke down and they didn't know whether to .... We were going to be transhipped to the *Stratheden* but at the last minute they decided to fix up this cable so we were in Capetown, as I remember, for four or five days. They fixed up this cable and on we went. Then we had a scare which up to this day, up till reading Michael Fethney's book I understood an Italian submarine had chased us because the *Batory* started to zigzag and revved up her engines and she was throbbing because she was flat-out, and zigzagging all over the ocean - there's knives and forks and plates going everywhere. You had to hang on to the .... To walk down a corridor you had to really hang on, and so things were really happening. That was off Madagascar.

Seasick again, or were you getting your legs by then?

As I can recall, I would have probably been violently ill with that lot, but no, I can't recall the seasickness from there. Anyway, it's since been ascertained that it was a German surface raider that was in the vicinity and we were doing a zigzag course to try and get away from this ship which apparently was a long way away. And so we went right up to Bombay and arrived in Bombay harbour.

What I can remember of Bombay was a similar thing. Everywhere we went we were taken to the zoo. Virtually first thing was a trip to the zoo where they gave us some cakes and drinks and all that sort of gunk and the local governor spoke to us and that was sort of a ritual everywhere we went. We went to the Bombay zoo and then we went to a hotel, as I remember. We weren't very long in Bombay. But I can remember the people having a sleep after lunch and laying on the railway lines of all places and sleeping and around the dockside.

(25.00)I can remember in Bombay they'd sent bottles of drink aboard in crates and these crates were sitting on the promenade deck and the sharks were surfacing for food alongside the ship. So the soldiers got these bottles and they were hurling these bottles at these sharks when they surfaced. They'd get hit by about 400 bottles, that type of thing. There was an English officer who for a £10 bet jumped overboard and swam ashore in the shark-infested waters of Bombay harbour. That's about all I can remember of Bombay. We had an electrical storm there which was pretty spectacular.

The fellow got ashore?

Yes, he got there all right. I don't know whether he collected his money or not, but I think he got into strife about it as far as I can recall.

Incidentally, it used to be not uncommon for small children to be made to have an afternoon sleep. Did they get you to sleep during the afternoons at all aboard, do you recall?

No, we didn't ever sleep. We had to lay down, that was Miss Pearson's job to see we were all in the cabins and laying down but I can never recall having an afternoon sleep. I suppose the seven-year olds and the five-year olds probably ran themselves off their feet and they probably had a sleep, but no, we were really too old for that sort of thing and probably read books and told jokes and all that sort of stuff in that time.

Do you recall any fights with children where they came to blows, or adults where tempers got frayed at all?

No, not that I can recall. They recalled in Sydney a Scot - a boy - who was a bully, the ship's bully amongst the evacueés and everyone was terrified of him. But I really don't remember him. No, I can't recall any fights. They probably went on but not anything spectacular that I can recall, no.

And from Bombay?

I think fights would have been very quickly put down, excepting fights that might have occurred in cabins, because there were so many people on the ship and the troops were there all the time, that I think any fighting would have been put down virtually straight away by troops and kids would have been separated. Sorry, what was that question?

And from Bombay?

From Bombay we proceeded to Colombo where the ritual was the same: a visit to the zoo and people's houses and plenty of cream buns and drink and what have you which probably made me thoroughly seasick. Bombay was a nice place, yes. A similar type of thing happened at Bombay, er, at Colombo rather. I can't recall anything other than normal happening there. The people were very nice and very welcoming and gave us a riproaring time.

How did you get on with the crew? The crew was Polish, I gather.

Yes. The crew were wonderful. The main thing I can remember was the food. The chef - whoever he was - made wonderful fruit cake. And this fruit cake was limited to one slice per child each day. We virtually had this fruit cake every day, but we loved it. We were seated at long tables, of course, and we had a waiter to two or three tables I gather, but of course we always wanted more fruit cake but the only word this guy could say was 'Tomorrow'. So when we asked for more fruit cake he would stand at the end of the table and just say, 'Tomorrow', and so that's gone on, and I even use it now. I used it with my children and I even use it now in my present house. Anything we haven't got or something, we just say, 'Tomorrow' which was evidence of these crew. No, they couldn't speak English. They were lovely guys and we mixed with them. We had ladies - girl stewardesses - in our cabin who used to come and make the beds. I can remember one of them teaching me how to make a berth bed in a ship by dividing the blankets and sheets down the middle and then folding them over at the end, all in one shot. They were nice, too. No, they couldn't speak English so it was pretty .... Not a lot of communication, but smiles.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

> Identification: this is side one of tape two of the interview with Reg Loft about child evacueés recorded on 25 October 1990.
>
> What about daily hygiene? Things like brushing your teeth and showering or bathing, did Miss Pearson attend to that fairly scrupulously, or were you left to your own devices somewhat?

No, I presume once she found out that we were fairly responsible boys she would keep an occasional check on us. And to my knowledge, no, we were left to our own devices. There were salt water baths, shocking water, but the *Batory* wasn't equipped for fresh water. She was an Atlantic steamer so fresh water was in very short supply and that's the reason why we had so many port calls, with so many people on the ship, fresh water wasn't available. So we had salt water bathing, salt water to wash your teeth, and it wouldn't lather, and I wasn't up to shaving at that time but I can remember the taste of cleaning my teeth in the lousy water that .... It sort of put a scum .... It was better not to have a bath. I think we avoided having baths for that very reason that the soap wouldn't lather. However, we did and I think she probably kept a watch on us for bathing, that type of thing. But other than that, no, we were left to our own devices with regard to that.

> As you got closer to Australia, the fact that you were born here, did it give you a sort of special sense of having some involvement, and people maybe see you as some sort of special authority on the place?

Yes, I suppose we did, being Australian-born. Dorothy and I probably may have been looked on that way.

> Did you feel excited? Did you have a sense that you were coming back to some place that had a particular place for you?

Yes, all the way from England I was looking forward to this wonderful country that Digger had told us about back in England.

Just harking back a bit on the convoys coming out of Capetown, I can recall, we were always trying to find out the names of the other ships and the only ones that we could pick out was the *Stratheden*, the names were painted out naturally enough. But the name on the *Stratheden* was quite large and she came quite close not far out of Capetown, and probably because of this zigzagging and we picked out the name *Stratheden* but that was the only one we could really pick out the name of.

After we left Colombo we headed for Singapore and Australia was starting to become very close. We left the troops .... The troops were taken off in Singapore. I've often wondered how many of them survived. Singapore meant a bit to me, because my father had done the drawings for the gun emplacements in Singapore. The guns that they couldn't turn around when the Japanese came from the other way, and Dad was pretty crooked on that, the fact that they'd messed up his ...

Strategy.

His project, yeah. So Singapore meant a bit to me. However the troops went off and that was a great disappointment to a lot of us. A lot of crying and carrying on because they were going, because they had become real friends and that was a sad occasion. However, out of Singapore they asked us older boys from the age of twelve onwards .... Up until that time, all the way from England, they had troops. The troops were used as sentries and they were stationed at the end of each corridor of where us children were billeted. I don't know about the passengers, the other passengers, but I think they just guarded us children, and I presume in an emergency it was to supply torchlight and what have you to get us out.

(5.00) So when they'd gone they asked .... There was still quite a problem with surface raiders around Australia at that time they had a knowledge of. And also the waters around Singapore were mined. So they asked us boys would we become sentries which we were very thrilled about because we were going to be sentries down the girls' end. And so we had sentry duty from Singapore to, all the way, as I remember, to Fremantle - sentry duty in the corridors. And we felt very, very important.

Did you have sticks or anything?

No, just a torch and, as far as I can recall just a torch, yeah.

What of Singapore itself?

Singapore I can't remember. Oh yes, Singapore. Singapore we were sent to .... Chinese people in Singapore opened up their homes and what happened there, I believe, was the Singapore High School for boys asked for volunteers to take the boys into their homes and the girls' school likewise to take the girls. So we were taken off at Singapore and actually went into the private homes of these people in Singapore. I can recall their highly polished wooden floors with carpets on them, and we had great fun ...

Were these English residents?

No, they were Chinese. Some of us might have got to English people, but the one that I can recall where we went to was a Chinese mother and father and a Chinese boy, who spoke

English, who took us into his home. We had great fun sliding on these mats on the highly polished floors.

Who were you with? With your sister or with other boys?

No, with other boys. I can't recall who the boys were, probably Tony and Paul .... No, I can't recall that. But I can just recall sliding on the mats. They were probably glad to get rid of us. That's all I can remember of Singapore. We probably went to the zoo again, and good food and what have you. That's as far as I can recall.

With the troops gone was there any increased concern about the possibility of falling overboard? I presume the ship wouldn't be able to stop and go back and search because of the fear of either submarines or raiders. Was that impressed upon you?

Yes, that was impressed upon us, that don't fall overboard because you probably won't get picked up, and that terrifying thought we just steered clear of passenger rails and things like that. And we older children kept a watch for any of the youngsters who went anywhere near a passenger rail, or anywhere near that type of danger, 'cause there was probably children .... The lifeboats being tied to the passenger rail of the promenade decks, there was probably a temptation for little kids to climb into those boats. They were only covered by tarpaulins, but no, we, the older children, we were terrified of falling overboard, yes.

Inevitably there would have been birthdays. Were there birthday celebrations?

Not that I can recall. There probably were, and possibly birthday cakes made by the crew. I believe that went on. The crew adopted quite a lot of children and used to get them .... Kids used to get into the cookhouse and get fed illegally and all that type of thing went on. But no, I can't recall any birthdays.

What about your first glimpse of Australia? Do you have an image in your mind of ...? Was it a morning, or evening?

No, I can't recall that. I can recall vividly the second time we came back but not the first time.

So you went to Fremantle then?

Fremantle, yes. I think we were taken into Perth. I guess to the zoo again once more. No, I can't recall Perth.

Some children evidently left the ship at Fremantle. Do you recall losing friends, saying goodbye?

No, funnily enough Paul Farquharson, in our cabin, left the ship at Perth, but I can't recall saying goodbye. Oh, I know what I'd be wrapped up in. Joyce Bryant, she was my girlfriend on the ship and she came from Ashford in Kent, and Joyce left the ship in Perth so I'd be broken-hearted at losing Joyce to have worried about anybody else I imagine.

(10.00) Was it a holding hands and kissing age?

Oh yes, as far as I can recall.

First love?

First love, yes. Oh no, I had a girlfriend in England who lived next door. We used to pass notes through the window at night time on long sticks. Yes, Eileen Attwood next door would have been my first love that I left. She was the girl I left in England. But soon forgot her and got mixed up with the *Batory* crowd. And Joyce Bryant - funnily enough, Paul Farquharson in the Sydney reunion went to the English reunion in York in August, and Joyce asked him did he know where Reg Loft was. So she remembers me, too, from those times.

Did you ever correspond?

No, we never corresponded. It's funny that situation because it appears that none of the, well very few, that I've met have ever corresponded with one another. We apparently just all went our various ways, and for fifty years a whole lot of us have just gone on our own lives and put that behind us. Not out of our memories but for some unknown reason we've never chased each other up. It's not until recently that I've found that the CORB children have been having reunions actually in Melbourne for fifty years and I didn't know any of this was going on. We found out through John Hare in Geelong, who apparently has been running these things where these people were, and that was the only way that I found Tony Smith and Paul Farquharson. I thought Tony Smith would have long been torpedoed and drowned - he wanted to be a marine engineer - and so virtually forgotten. Paul Farquharson had long gone from my memory, and here they are they surface up in Sydney and so we suddenly grabbed the chance to all see each one another again and fling ourselves into each others' arms as long-lost mates.

Is there a peculiar sort of emotional thing of gathering threads that somehow do have an importance, no matter how far back they seem to have gone?

Very much so, yes. Tony Smith had the same feelings that I had. I raced up to Sydney to see Tony, just to see him again, and to see Verna Lloyd who was a girl from Bromley in Kent, Verna and her sister. Her sister's back in England but Verna was there and we put our arms around one another like long-lost children. It was wonderful - wonderful thrill.

From Perth and through the Bight, did you get seasick again?

Yes, just for the start of the Bight as we turned the corner at the bottom of Australia, I was sick there but then I recovered very quickly. I must have been getting used to it by this time and I can remember playing football on the aft deck of the *Batory* and the ship was rocking so much we could hardly control the ball. How we never lost it, I don't know. One minute you would be looking at the sky and the next minute all you could see was the deck and no sky. She was really rolling. And thoroughly enjoyed the rest of that trip into Melbourne.

How did Melbourne look? Knowing that now you were finally going to get off the ship, was that a special time?

Yes, we got caught on a mud bank just off Station Pier and that was quite exciting. The tugs dragged us off eventually and we landed in Station Pier. They took us in buses down through Port Melbourne and my immediate thoughts were, 'Struth, we're back in London', with the small houses in close proximity and what have you. Until we ran around - I forget the name

of the street that's lined with palm trees in Albert Park - then we realised that we were at last back in Australia. That was really the first feeling that I had that I was home, was when I saw those palm trees and this was Melbourne. We were actually in Melbourne. They took us to a restaurant in Elizabeth Street which was downstairs and fed us and we went back into the People's Palace in King Street. From People's Palace - I understood from John Hare, that he was there for a couple of weeks or something - however we weren't because we were coming to guardians that we knew, friends of my father, and they came and picked us up from the Children's Welfare Department which at that time was in the upstairs offices of Flinders Street station.

(15.00) Had you felt a need to get close to your sister again? Was there a concern at all that you be together?

No, not that I can recall. We were separated, which I thought was a good thing, as far as I can remember.

Why would it be a good thing?

Well, I'd get away from her, and perhaps other exciting things might happen. I could be myself, totally independent. We were about half a mile from one another, so the access was there if we wanted to desperately see each other, with homesickness or that type of thing.

So what was the first look you had at the people who were to take you in?

The first look was in the offices at Flinders Street station, and that was Aunty Russy Alexander who was the lady who took me in. Uncle George was at work. He was in the civil side of the air force as a paymaster, and working very hard. He used to work all hours of the night, so I didn't see much of him. He wasn't there so Aunty Russy picked us up actually and, far as I recall, the Cliftons were there for Dorothy, too. And we were taken back to our respective homes in Hawthorn.

How did your foster parents look? Or did you think of them as foster parents? Did you regard them that way, or just aunt and uncle was how you saw them?

No, I regarded them as foster parents, mainly because - and here I think the thoughts of the different people separate in mine - in that I found them very cold, especially Aunty Russy, a very cold woman, who didn't put her arms around me like Mum, or give any sort of outward signs of loving; kiss me or anything like that. I've since read where these people - and it might have made a difference if I'd had that explained to me - these people were hesitant to give love to the children because of taking over from the love of the parents back in England. Now, I imagine that probably reared itself as a problem. However, over the years that I lived with the Alexanders I think they were a relatively cold family, from the point of view of showing outward signs of loving, like touching or holding hands or cuddling or any kissing, or anything like that. And so - we were very much a cuddly family and ...

Was there at all a feeling that in a way you were foisted on them, that it was a bit begrudging?

Yes, because I think it was a decision, like in those days, like the decision of my father to send us which Mum didn't want. It was a decision of George Alexander. I'm quite sure it was

him who offered to take me. I'm not sure whether he was a Mason or not but I know Neville Clifton, Dorothy's guardian, was a Mason. Whether there was a tie-up there or not .... However, I'm sure it was his decision because I'm sure Aunty Russy never wanted another boy. She already had two boys. She used to count all the articles that she washed on a Monday morning, and on Monday evening she would recite the number of socks she'd washed and the number of shirts, and she appeared to be quite bitter with regard that type of thing.

How did that affect you? Did it make you withdraw a bit?

Yes, it made me withdraw to the extent that I became a separate identity to the two boys. George Alexander - they were lovely, I'm not getting - they were lovely, wonderfully generous people. They sent me to Melbourne Boys' High School. I'm quite sure that any education I wanted I would have been put through, and they put me into scouting and into the church, and they were wonderful people, but at the same time this lack of loving sent me off to try and find it somewhere else. And so I sort of became separate to their sorts of hobbies and interests were not mine.

How old were the other boys?

The boys were, Russell I think was a fraction younger than me, by a few months, and George was older than me. George went into agricultural science. They established a bungalow for George out in the back garden and George became a distance. He was studying and we weren't allowed to make a noise, Russell and I.

(20.00)I was closer to Russell. We used to wrestle a lot and make noises and told to shut up because George had to study. So George became a separate thing. He went on to become a Rhodes scholar and now lives in Sydney. What I was going on to say was that this separation of things, sent me off to surprisingly enough to Dorothy's girlfriends, and I went into bike racing which was anti-church. It took place on a Sunday in some cases, so that was frowned on a bit. However I persisted.

Was this a church-going family?

Yes, they were church-going to St Columb's, Hawthorn. And I was in the choir of St Columb's, Hawthorn. At one stage I was going to Communion at eight o'clock in the morning, to morning service where I would sing in the choir, to bible study in the afternoon and then back to choir in the evening. So I had church really rammed into me.

How did you feel about it?

It was all right at that time because I had an interest of young people around me who .... We played tennis on a Saturday and the choir, I was quite interested in the singing. However, I went to work. The man that my sister went to, Neville Clifton, was a friend of my father's who was a draughtsman, and my father being an engineer and Neville Clifton being an engineer, and my godfather, Fred Cuthbert being an engineer, I would be an engineer. Now, I wanted to be a dance band drummer which had faded away and that was frowned on in those days if you wanted to be a dance band drummer, of all things.

> Well, the family couldn't have been thrilled to see your drum arrive, I wouldn't suppose?

That's right. And so we had to study and be something else. I wanted to be an architect. I wasn't really interested in steel. I was interested in wood, I always had been.

> Incidentally, did you start and try and practise the drums? Was there any conflict there?

Not that I can recall. I did have the drum kit set up in the front room and I think Russell took quite an interest in it because he used to belt around on it. No, I considered myself quite able, I didn't have to practise virtually. But I did play the drums accompanying the choir at St Columb's at a concert at one time. No, I didn't follow the drums after that. I became involved in bike racing, due to the fact that I went to work. As I was saying, my sister's guardian taught me engineering drawing through the Christmas holidays and then he got me a job at Reolt's, Charles Reolt's in Burnley and I became a junior draughtsman. My friend in the draughting office, Ossie Aldridge, was well up in bike racing and he introduced me to bike racing. So I became very interested in that and that fell on a Sunday, so I drifted away from church and the choir and church altogether actually due to that Sunday operation. And everyone complained including the elderly women in the choir. Anyway, the minister, Canon Wenzel, wonderful old man, he said, 'Don't you worry about it, Reg, you go on with your bike racing' and so I did. So I drew away, and funnily enough after the war, that same coldness with the Alexanders stayed, and I didn't go back to them by comparison to Dorothy who went back to her guardians. That worries me a bit because I owed so much to those people, having looked after me for the five years. I realise now, as a father, what they did, and that worries me a bit that I didn't, out of gratitude, go back to those people. But however, in defence of my own, they never stayed in touch with me either. So I don't quite know the solution to that, whether there is one.

However, a bit of it's come about in that Tony Smith, this friend of mine, married a relation by marriage to the Alexanders in London, and he now lives in Sydney and is a close friend of George Alexander. So when we were up there he said, 'You must go to see George', so George and I had a reunion and George welcomed me back. In part of the evening conversation he wondered whether there was anything the Alexanders had done which had offended me, whether that has been going on for fifty years or not, I don't know. However, we've had a reunion and I'm about to have a reunion with Russell. Their parents, Aunty Russy and Uncle George are long dead.

> Incidentally, when you started to go to school, was the fact that you had been born in Australia a matter that made a difference as to how you were seen? Some children were regarded as Pommies, or if not Pommies, at least as English and were different.

(25.00) Yeah. No, I was a Pom. I was weak, whether from lack of food or what from England, or just whether this English/Australian bit came through, but I can remember Dave Satchel, our physical training instructor at Melbourne High - we used to have to run around the oval probably several times - but I can remember him pushing me. I was a long way behind all the rest of the boys - I couldn't keep up with them. And I can remember Dave Satchel pushing me almost to the point of pushing me over, and saying, 'I'll get you up with

these guys eventually', and of course eventually I did catch up with them as I got stronger and with the Alexanders.

Were you bullied at all?

Not that I can recall. I was protected actually. My friend, Jack Haslam, who was a musician, recognised the .... We were in the school orchestra together, and in choirs together, and so we teamed up. And he was a beefy sort of a bloke and anyone who dared to look sideways at me got belted by Jack. And eventually I became form captain of Melbourne High School, and I did some solo singing at the speech nights and of course I played the drums and cymbal. I was extremely popular. I tell this story quite often about that cymbal that my father gave me which was quite unsteady on its tripod and if you hit it too hard it fell over. And Mr Hill, the Principal of the Melbourne High had had a stroke, all down one side he was paralysed, and this particular Monday morning there was a thousand-odd boys in the hall for Monday morning assembly, and Mr Hill used to come up with his entourage and stagger up the stairs of the stage and across the stage to his lectern or whatever it was that he spoke from. The orchestra behind him and me with my cymbal, and under the tripod of the cymbal ran the microphone cords. This particular Monday morning he tripped on the microphone cord as he came across the stage and it was almost like slow motion. As he went down, he tripped the tripod of my cymbal and the cymbal went down at the same time with this enormous crash on the wooden .... As he hit the deck, the cymbal hit the deck too, with this enormous crash, and these thousand boys reckoned that was fantastic. So 'Lofty' was very ...

Did they cheer?

No, they wouldn't be game because Mackenzie, the Vice-Principal, was a huge man. He would have belted hell out of anyone who dared laugh. But Lofty was pretty popular after that because they reckoned that Lofty did it intentionally.

The mere fact that you played the drums probably gave you a bit of status. Most boys would think anybody who could play the drums was really something, I suppose?

That's right, yes, that's right. We had also had a jazz band run by Nick Polites who is still around Melbourne. I've often been going to try and catch up with Nick but he played clarinet and 'In the Mood' was a very popular piece in those days and we sort of perfected that. So we had this jazz band going which was extremely popular. Yes, I was admired. I was admired as a boy soprano, soloist, and as a drummer, and as a Pommie evacueé.

Melbourne High School, even today, still regards itself as somewhat superior among State schools, tries in fact to compete in a way with the private schools. Was there an élitist sense about it then?

Not that I can recall. Melbourne High, we were .... It was a higher school than .... It was the highest of the high schools in that University High and - they wouldn't say that - but University High and Hampton High and all the other high schools around, we looked down on because we were Melbourne High School in that beautiful building in South Yarra and we were heart-broken when the Yanks came and took it away from us and we went out to Camberwell High School, of all places. But we weren't .... We didn't think we were any way up as near as Scotch College or Wesley. However, the boys who .... There was a continual

stream of boys being expelled from Wesley and College who used to finish up going through Melbourne High on their way out. That was the last .... They were sent after Wesley and Scotch had got rid of them - and Melbourne Grammar. They came to Melbourne High, that's really the only connection. We were in very much competition with those colleges with regard to scholarships and I think the figures show that the brains actually came out of Melbourne High and University High and the other highs, more than came out of Scotch and Melbourne Grammar and Wesley.

> Another measure of young boys might be how well they got on at football. How did you find the business of Australian Rules football?

Didn't ever get into football. I played soccer for Melbourne High. Played in the inter-school team. No, I didn't get into Australian Rules ever at any stage. I probably thought it was too rough.

> What about your knowledge of what was happening with the war and keeping in touch with the sense of how this was going to influence your future?

(30.00) We followed the war. We had the usual map on the wall at Alexanders with the flags and following the fronts of the various North African campaign and the European campaign, and the Far East and Japanese job. We were conscious of the Japs getting closer and closer and the *possible* invasion of Australia. We thought that was quite practical and a possible ...

> Did you have trenches? Were you doing drills of that sort?

No, I can't .... Whether we had an air raid shelter. I don't think we quite got around to digging an air raid shelter. There was talk of it in Melbourne, I think, and a few people had them but we didn't have one in our back garden. No, there was no .... The war came close to me where I worked in Reolt's in Burnley in that we made, built seventeen-pounder anti-tank guns and we built the short howitzers that were used in New Guinea, plus the shells, and various old men died in Reolt's due to the heat and overwork and what have you making these shells. There was one elderly gent there who made magnificent models of the guns, and who these men were I don't know, but our department suddenly grew in size. We got fed up with not being able to get into service because engineering was an essential service in those days and they had a Manpower organisation sorting out the men who were left in Australia and so being .... It was virtually a protected industry and we couldn't feel that way because we weren't virtually, we didn't seem to be madly working all night or anything like that. We were just having normal hours, and the particular department I was in was building hydraulic presses for the American Army.

The American Army used to make us work harder by bringing us all sorts of wonderful presents, and then these presents would go on once they got out into the shops and these presses were being built, they'd ply us with these cigars and presents and what have you to get these jobs done quickly. But we couldn't see that why we couldn't get into the service so a few of us went for a medical to try and get into the Australian Navy and we got through the medical okay but then we had to go through this wretched Manpower Board who said to us, 'Oh, hullo, engineering draughtsmen, why doesn't Reolt's want you?' And we said, 'Oh no, we don't think so. We're sittin' round reading newspapers.' And they said, 'Oh well, if Reolt's don't want you as draughtsmen we'll find you a job in Alice Springs'. We decided forget that, so we went straight back to Reolt's and forgot about joining the services.

I was sent a letter from England to join the Indian Army. I could join the Indian Army at seventeen and go into an officers' training course. I believe some of the boys who obviously weren't in engineering took advantage of that and got back to England that way. I've found out since that some of the girls actually got back to England into the services and some of the boys out here actually joined the Australian services, but I wasn't so lucky. I was really crooked on that because after the war I found out that boys who had joined the services out here, and actually only done a rookies' course in Ballarat had actually been eligible for a full-time, day engineering course at the technical schools, Melbourne and Caulfield, fully paid up. And I was stuck with my twenty-seven shillings a week having to pay for my own education and four nights a week at Swinburne Tech and I was really hostile about that.

> I gather there was a program of a radio connection where you could talk to people back home and you were involved in that?

I wasn't involved. My sister was involved and very early in the piece, I understand from what I've read since, that there were broadcasts available to us. Michael Fethney says after a while they died out because what do you say on these broadcasts. Also there were cables available which I was unaware of. Whether Uncle George Alexander, I think, might have sent cables on my behalf to my mother and father. I think there was some correspondence went on between guardians and parents in England which possibly us children didn't know about.

> One can imagine there would have been a terrible sameness to it all, like after you'd said, hullo, how are you a couple of times, (laughs) how's the weather.

Yes. Everything is so censored. I remember when the Americans took over our school I wrote a letter to my mother and put on it: 'Dear Mum and Dad ... and the Americans have taken our school and the Americans this and the Americans that ...'. The whole letter was about the American troops in Melbourne and all she got in England was 'Dear Mum and Dad' and 'Your ever loving son, Reg' down the bottom. The rest was cut out. That was censorship in those days so that was fairly strict.

(35.00) On the soldiering business, on the joining of the services. When I went back to England there was a two-year conscription going there and I thought, 'Whoopee, this will be a chance for me to once more get away from Mum'. We clashed fairly severely, and I thought this would be a chance to get away. So I went and did a medical in the army and got through the medical okay and thought, 'Well, I'm on my way to Egypt' because they were serving in Egypt at that time for two years. Then I got a letter a few days later from the High Commissioner in Australia House saying that we believe you are trying to join the British forces and if there are any forces you're going to fight in it would only be the Australian forces and forget it. So that was the end of my trying to get into the forces over there. How they had tracked me down, I don't know. Whether there was a Big Brother organisation in those days, but according to them I was an Australian citizen and would have to go back to Australia if I wanted to serve in any forces, which was quite interesting.

> What about correspondence otherwise? How often were you writing when you first arrived and then later on with the years slipping away, and conversely, receiving letters?

Yes, I was a shocking letter writer and most unkind to my parents. It was only at the insistence of Alexanders that I write to Mum and Dad that I even wrote at all. I wrote approximately about every six weeks, as relative to Dorothy who I think would probably have written every week, every day if she could. Dorothy was a wonderful letter writer and I think I probably left it to her to fill Mum and Dad in on what was going. But I was too busy enjoying life.

> What about letters back? Would you be a PS on Dorothy's letters from the parents, or did you get your own?

That I couldn't say. I got my own letters from Mum and Dad. The regularity of them I can't really recall. I think probably Mum and Dad would have answered letters that I wrote and probably they were busy flat-out answering all of Dorothy's letters I would say. Dorothy, I think, I read most the letters that Dorothy received. She would have passed them on to me.

> How close were you to your sister at this time? Were you sort of seeing her regularly, or occasionally?

Only through her girlfriends. She worked at the Colonial Mutual and she had a large circle of girlfriends. And I was into girls in those days and so consequently palled up with suitable girlfriends of her mix. One of them, one girl that I was with for a long time was a girl named Beryl Holloway. The Holloway family, the father was in the Far East service in Hong Kong for a shipping company, and he got caught in Hong Kong at the end of the war but the wife and three children had got out and got into Australia and they lived up above Burke Road in Camberwell. And so I palled up with Beryl Holloway who was very close. Beryl and Eileen was very close with Dorothy through the church, St Mark's, Camberwell, and so we mixed quite a bit in that Dorothy had boyfriends and I had Beryl, and Eileen had boyfriends. And we all would go out as a bunch; picnics and that type of thing. But other than that the only connection I had with Dorothy would be an occasional social visit to Clifton's house.

> If things were rather cold at the foster parents' home, what about Christmas and New Year, did that seem sort of rather lonely then? Did you miss your parents and ...?

Yes. Christmas and New Year was just a normal home celebration. It was nothing startling.

> Did you get presents?

Oh yes, we got presents, quite good presents too, because Ben Alexander was the Alexander of Alexander's clothing stores and his presents were pretty good ones. He looked on me as an evacueé, and he gave me a wonderful overcoat at one time which only had a very small cigarette ash mark on it, and that was my pride and joy was that coat. And he also lent me a brand new bicycle to ride to Healesville one holidays. He was very good to the family. Yes, we had presents, but you must understand, it was wartime and the Christmases were reasonably low key.

> Were your birthdays remembered?

Yes, everything like that was quite normal, yes.

Did you move out when you started work?

No, I stayed with the Alexanders right through till we left to come home from Australia on the *Aquitania*. Funnily enough it didn't ever occur to me to move out. I think I was relatively tied in by Uncle Neville, Dorothy's guardian, and Fred Cuthbert, my godfather. I wouldn't have done anything out of the ordinary to have upset them.

(40.00) Where were you when war ended? Can you remember the moment?

Yes, I was in the drawing office at Reolt's when it ended and we all just downed tools and jumped on a tram into Melbourne and joined in with all the thousands in Swanston Street celebrating it there.

How long did that go on?

That went on till late in the afternoon. As I can recall, quite into the evening. And then I went ...

Were you drinking at that stage? Had you begun to drink at all?

No, no drinking. No smoking. I got into a drawing office where smoking was banned so I didn't ever smoke, and we weren't drinking because we were bike racing fiends, and no I didn't have any interests like that.

How were you doing with the bike racing?

Pretty good. I won a couple of races and got a .... We weren't allowed to accept money so we used the money that was the prizes; we could buy things. I bought a wristlet watch as a trophy for one of the races that I won. The Aldridge family were much better bike riders than me. They won the Melbourne-Ballarat races and Melbourne-Warrnambool, and those type of races. Yes, I did well. I enjoyed bike racing.

With the news of the war's end, when did it come to you that this meant that you could go back to England?

No, I can't recall the arrangements there. Whether it was offered to us or whether we applied, I can't recall. I think it may have .... Or whether the Alexanders perhaps investigated it and the Cliftons investigated it. Possibly that would be what they did: the guardians investigated it. Oh, what happened was, I didn't ever want to leave Australia. I wanted to stay here naturally enough, but Dorothy always says she never ever wanted to leave England and so she wanted to go home. My father, being in the War Office, they wanted to come out to Australia privately, but he couldn't get away from England because he'd been wrapped up with the .... He was a concrete emplacement expert and the Germans had had gun emplacements on the coast of France, which were a secret concrete mix and the English could never penetrate it with their bombs and things. So he was involved in finding out what this German secret concrete was at that stage and they wouldn't let him go. So he sent cable .... That's right, we received cables from Dad that we had to come home, and that must have been what initiated the move to send us home, and the Alexanders and the Cliftons must have organised the rest of that.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: this is side two of tape two of the interview with Reg Loft about child evacueés recorded on 25 October 1990.

Having got that advice from your parents was it just automatic that you had to go or did you attempt to resist by writing and saying you wanted to stay, or anything like that?

Not that I can recall. I probably resolved in my own mind to get back to Australia somehow. Dad's word was law. You had to come home and I resigned myself to the fact that that was it. I was off on another wonderful adventure again over the seas back to England and I, in the back of my mind, realised that Mum and Dad wanted to come here and realised that eventually we would all get back here by fair means or foul, to Australia. So I just resolved myself to, okay, it was going to be another holiday.

Had you saved money?

No, not to my knowledge. The Alexanders had - once I went to work - they pointed out that they were putting their boys through university and couldn't afford to give me any luxuries so I had to pay for any extra education I wanted, which I was doing at night-school, and all my clothing and anything else I wanted I had to pay for. I can remember I bought a racing bike for £27 so I wouldn't have had any money, no. Whether I sold the bike to raise a few bob to get home or not, I don't know, I can't recall that part.

I gather you went back via Singapore where you picked up British former prisoners of war?

No, we went from here to Perth.

No, it was the *Nestor* that went back that way.

No, we went back in the *Aquitania*. We had to go from Melbourne to Sydney. We were farewelled at Spencer Street station which was very traumatic because I was saying goodbye to Jack Haslam's family. Jack had been killed in New Guinea and so they were at the station. There was the Alexander family, the Clifton family and there was Beryl Holloway, my girlfriend, so there was a lot of tears on that trip. We left on the Sydney Express and went up to Sydney where the *Aquitania* was waiting for us. She already had on board the Far Eastern guys who were caught, like the Holloway father, in the Far East and hadn't been .... So they'd been, on the end of their five-year stint they became prisoners of war for five years, so they were ten years out of England and they were coming back. There was sections of the Royal Navy Reserve who'd sat in Brisbane hotels for the war having a wonderful time. Part of the aristocracy of England had been up in Brisbane and they were on board, too. She was a pretty happy ship. And quite a lot of regular troops coming out of Australia, returning to England, and they'd all assembled on the *Aquitania* in Sydney, a very big ship, the last of the four-funnel ships. And so we sailed out of Sydney down to, straight round to Perth. And from Perth to Capetown.

When you say the aristocracy, or members of the aristocracy had been in Brisbane, what do you know of that? I mean how many people ... do you have any sense as to what was involved there?

No, we only learnt from the troops who we got friendly with. We weren't allowed up on to the first class section of the *Aquitania* because the tourist section wasn't allowed up in the first class, and these aristocrats were up on the top. The troops used to point them out to us when they came within sight. I can't remember names but they were actually named: Lord somebody or other's son, and somebody else's daughter, that's the sort ...

(5.00) Did they regard them with derision?

Yes, a bit of a sneer there, but these guys were twisted up. They absolutely hated going back to England to the bowler hat and the Bramac coat and the umbrella. They said there was no way they could go back to that life of being a clerk in London after having been in Brisbane all through the war. And I would imagine a large percentage of them would have migrated out here.

But we went straight from Perth to Capetown and had a very sad part in Capetown where they all, most of them got drunk in Capetown. It was the last stop before back to their families and wives and what have you in England. So a lot of merriment went on there and they were late .... Captain Ford cast off because there was a storm running outside and he cast off and these guys were still coming down the road carrying each other and they tied them up on ropes and slung them from the *Aquitania* and dragged them on board until they were too far. They were hitting the side of the ship and getting bones broken and what have you. And so a tug took some of these guys who were prisoners of war, and brought them out to the ship outside and they put a plank from the tug to the *Aquitania* and three of these guys attempted to walk the plank and fell off and drowned. They'd been prisoners of war for five years; ten years' away from England and they drowned so close.

Was there any anger about the taking them up in a sling?

No, it was all laughing and everyone was so jolly and carefree and glad that the next stop was England. The adrenalin was running in everyone, in the whole ship, so that sort of thing was .... They were drunk and bad luck but I've never forgotten that, the fact that they were so close, those guys.

It didn't cast a pall over the rest of the journey?

No. Oh, it did for a couple of days when it was known what had happened, but we actually saw it happen.

Was there a celebratory mood aboard ship as you continued on? Were there parties and dancing and all that sort of thing?

Oh yes. Oh, wonderful. It was like a peacetime ocean liner. Like these trips they have on the liners today, I imagine, only probably more so. Yes, it was wonderful.

Did you get to playing the drums again?

No, not that I can .... I must have left the drum kit back in Australia, I think. Yes, I did. All I took was a suitcase. And thereby hangs a story. We got back to England and the trains were drawn up in Southampton to take us back to London and they said .... There was a bit of a .... There were people on the Customs sheds who hadn't seen their relations, as I say, for ten years so everything was a shambles. They eventually announced - they took our luggage off and piled it alongside the train - and then an announcement came that if you want your luggage to be with you at Waterloo it was your responsibility to get it on the train. So there was a mad scramble to get our luggage on. Dorothy and I got our luggage on the train okay, and when we got to Waterloo our parents were there, so you can imagine the reunion of that, our luggage was thrown off the train onto the platform, and that time there was a lot of tinned food coming from Australia in suitcases sent by relatives to people in England, and it was being stolen and grabbed up. This guy had grabbed a large trolley and he obviously had a removal van out the end of the platform. He piled all our luggage onto this huge trolley ...

Did you see it being loaded and presumed this was part of the service?

We saw this happening, right in front of our eyes. And in this suitcase of mine was everything I'd saved: photographs, my drawing instruments, my text books, presents for my mother and father, clothing, the lot. Everything I possessed from the five years of being in Australia was in that suitcase and it just drifted past me - we were all crying of course with Mum and Dad there - went past us - the doctor on the ship lost all her instruments - and into the furniture van and off, never seen again. That cast a bad spell over us for a welcome home to England, but we understood what was the reason behind it.

As you arrived back did you at all have a sense that from your parents' perspective you would look almost a total stranger? Were you kind of aware of that?

Yes, we clashed virtually straight away, me with my mother because I started going out at night time and off to motor bike scrambles ...

(10.00) How old are you at this stage?

I'm twenty.

She wanted you back as a little boy, in a way, was that the thing?

That's right. She started to exercise her, the same as she was when we left. 'You will do this, and you will do that' and 'I won't do this and that', and so we clashed. And at one stage Mum was on her way to the Thames to throw herself in, and we had to go and drag her back and all that sort of thing. There wasn't so much clashing, I don't think, with Dorothy. Although she likewise took to boyfriends and was very late at night, early morning hours getting in and Mum getting upset and all that sort of thing.

What about your father, how was he responding to this?

He was always a very placid sort of guy and didn't like upsets and didn't like getting involved in those sort of situations. He probably said the occasional word to me to tone it down a bit, or something but no, he didn't interfere. The clash was between Mum and Dorothy and I.

How did you feel towards them? Was there an almost unreachable gap, or was it a matter of just, like the time had slipped away and there you were back in an emotional sense as a small boy in the first instance?

Yes, that's right. Unlike other children .... The children who came here when they were five, up to seven years of age, forgot their mothers and fathers. The people they came to in Australia were their mother and father because they were the people they knew. The mother and father they went back to in England were a nothing to them. Whereas our mother and father we left at the age of thirteen and fifteen and they were very much still our mother and father, and always were. So we came back to Mum and Dad, yes, but the fact that we were twenty and twenty-one years of age as against twelve and thirteen was quite a bit to get adjusted to. However, we did adjust and Mum adjusted and Dad and Dorothy and I, and we put up with one another and we applied as a family to migrate to Australia. We came out here and lived happily ever after, yes.

How did England look to you when you got back?

A shocking place, it was. The sky was low, it was always cloudy and you felt hemmed in. Everything was so much smaller. Having ridden on bikes, having been a bike racer out here, on a Sunday I would train from Melbourne to Ballarat and back on a bicycle. Now, in England that'd be unheard of. They'd think you were mad to think of things like that. And so everything was hemmed in. You were closed in. I used to walk the streets of the city of London thinking, 'My God, I wish I could be walking down Collins Street instead of here, in this dump'. After a while I teamed up with my friend from Emu Road in the 1930s and I took him out of his poverty-stricken house and I bought a tandem bike. I sat this kid on the back of this bike and I took him all round England, and he was amazed at this Australian bloke coming home and getting him out into the open air and the far distant places of England.

Did it go beyond that? Did it sort of change his outlook, do you know?

I'm sure it did but he never .... He was once a Londoner, always a Londoner, and he went back to .... I think he bought a motor bike later on and eventually did a bit of getting out of it but no, he's finished up virtually as a vegetable in a wheelchair back in London.

How did you see yourself by then? Did you think of yourself, or feel you were Australian? What did you feel you were?

Oh, very much Australian. I've always insisted that I was Australian and I still do. People who call me a Pom now, I just tell them that I was born in Moonee Ponds, Barry Humphries' territory, and I'm as good as an Australian and I was born here, and that's it, I'm an Australian.

What about other young people you knew back in England before you'd gone? Did you meet people again?

No, my mother and father had sold our house in Bromley and we were living at my uncle's, over my uncle's shop back, very close to the Battersea situation we were in in the 1930s. So the only person I palled up with really was Frank who was my childhood boyfriend. I went out to Bromley to see the old house but didn't see anybody there and didn't see any friends. But my sister has since communicated with friends who were in Bromley at that time. Billy Newton, my schoolboy friend in Bromley, was killed in a mining accident during the war, so

I'd lost him. Tony Smith was back out here in Australia with any connection with Bromley. So the only connection I had was back in London.

How long did it take then before you were able to arrange to come back to Australia?

(15.00) Eighteen months it took us. We applied virtually straight away 'cause we went home in November '45, as I remember, and we applied in very early '46 to come here and it took us till mid-'47 to get out here I think. We arrived in July '47, in Melbourne.

What were you doing, apart from that abortive attempt to join the forces, what sort of work did you do in the interim?

I went back into engineering, and I was studying at night-school in engineering back in London. I worked at a factory called the Projectile Engineering Company, where we made experimental car frames. I was involved in building the MG TD model chassis. We made these over tooling that we made ourselves from their drawings and we handmade these chassis as an experimental .... The very first one, in other words, to be sent up to Morris to try out. We also got into plastic injection moulding machines later on in life. In that particular factory I was a marker-off who worked on a steel - marking-off table, and in the mornings during the winter I had to scrape the snow off this steel table before I could start work because they hadn't repaired the windows in the roof of this particular factory - cold as charity.

With the approval to come to Australia, you came as assisted passage people?

Yes, we came in the migration scheme for £10.

What did you come on?

We came on the *Orion* funnily enough, which was interesting that we nearly got here the first time.

How was that trip then?

Oh, that was a lovely trip. We thoroughly enjoyed that. It was a typical ocean liner trip from England to Australia. It was like we were just tourist class passengers and thoroughly enjoyed that, yes.

What about relations with your mother, had they improved?

They'd settled down and Mum was glad to be coming to Australia out of London. She'd had enough. Well, I, naturally, think part of the business of being unsettled was the fact that they had prematurely sold the Bromley house to come to Australia, and they'd got caught back in the old situation of the poverty bit in London, in Battersea. And I think Mum was terrified, quite frankly, of finishing her life back in Battersea. Because perhaps from a bit of pressure from Dorothy to stay there and so she was a bit terrified. She was equally glad to escape, along with me, and I think we both joined forces actually to hurry the thing up to get out here.

And your father, he just went along with whatever the family wanted? Or did he have a strong point of view either way?

Dad wasn't very well. He had sugar diabetes. That was another reason Mum would be glad to get him out here, because even at that stage food and that type of thing wasn't still plentiful in England and we were coming to this .... Mum, I think, was getting Dad out somewhere where he could have much better health.

> How did he pass the medical, because in those days there was a rule in immigration, one out all out? If there was a sick member of the family the whole family didn't come.

Don't know.

> Was it maybe a bit superficial, the medical?

I can't answer that. That's an interesting point. I'll ask Mum. No, I can't answer that one - whether he got round it, don't know.

> So when you arrived how did you immediately set about getting the family together and getting on your feet?

Well, we went to .... We took half a house in Caulfield and Dad, I presume, with help from Neville Clifton and the Masonic Lodge and all that bit, I gather he got a job in Melbourne, similar to what he was doing in England. I went back to Reolt's and did an apprenticeship back in there. Dorothy went back to her profession. Mum, I think, for a while looked after house till she got fed up and she got a job. Eventually Mum and Dad went to live in a flat in Parkville, close to where they were working, and Dorothy was married and I got married.

> You started off living together as a family?

Yes, we lived together as a family.

> And how long did that continue before things split up?

Well, I was married in '49. So it would have been roughly eighteen months, eighteen months to two years we lived as a family out here.

> I get the impression from talking to your sister, Dorothy, that when she looks back there's a sort of a what-if feeling. If this abrupt intervention hadn't taken place maybe her life would have taken a different course that in a way may have been more - if not more pleasant - somehow .... There's a mystery there and she's never been quite able to reconcile it. For you it sounds a bit like the what-if was a fortuitous event and you're well pleased with the way things went.

Definitely, yes. Dorothy's ideas on that are quite different to mine. I think Dorothy is inclined to think that she was in love with this guy in England and I think she's inclined to put too much accent on that situation. Dorothy has had a wonderful life and I have had a wonderful life.

(20.00)I can sit for days and days and days and just stare into space and enjoy in my own mind all the experiences of my life that have happened to me. And putting that up against the fact that had we stayed in England we would have been in a middle-class situation, and I would have been in the old situation of going to the office in the dreary old weather, and on a tram, and that sort of thing every day, and possibly for the rest of my life. No, I entirely disagree with Dorothy on that situation. I think it was a magnificent opportunity and I'm forever grateful to my mother and father for having allowed us to come to Australia and made that enormous sacrifice, which I realise what they did now, being a father myself. I realise what a wrench that must have been.

> Is there any unresolved emotional part of having been taken away from your parents at that age? Or were you just old enough to have got through it okay?

I don't think it's ever had any effect on me. I think the effect on me has been that the stealing of my luggage in London and the fact of leaving my things in England and leaving things in Australia, and jumping backwards and forwards has made me realise that material things don't matter in life and they don't mean a thing to me. I've lived in about twenty-two houses in all my time, so houses mean nothing to me. Now, whether that movement, and I think this has had an effect on other children that I've spoken to, that being moved has allowed us to grab opportunities which perhaps other people may not grab. I had an opportunity to go farming and I was in a situation living with my family in a new house in Melbourne, and I just up and sold the house and off in a matter of three weeks to go farming: that type of thing, where other people might hesitate. I think the experience of coming to Australia and all that has given me that .... Whether that's good or not, I don't know, but to me it is because I've had so many moves, and as I say, I've done so much in my life that I can live on this sort of thing, on those memories.
(22.00)
END OF INTERVIEW