



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: this is Ed Stokes recording with Tony Smith. [CORB] evacuees, tape one, side one.

Tony, could we just begin please with your date and place of birth?

Yes. I was born 17 November 1926 at Catford in London, and moved later to Hayes in Kent when I was about seven years of age.

I think there's an interesting family background, because although you were born in Britain your father in fact had himself been born in Melbourne.

Yes, he was born in Melbourne. And as a boy he had lived .... His father was an antique dealer and restorer. And my father had been sent down to pick up samples of fabric from a sailing ship and he'd gone home to tell his father that the master of the ship would take him and teach him the trade of seamanship if his father was agreeable and would pay the necessary premium for his - to become indentured.

So in a sense he went off to sea when he was really, barely a young man.

Yes, he went to sea and settled in London eventually, marrying my mother, who was the sister of one of his co-apprentices. And when he did come back to Australia himself with my mother and brother in 1942, he had been away from Australia for some seventeen years.

It's a long time. But when you were young, or growing up, he was, at that time I think, basically shipping out of London before he actually got a shore job. So you saw quite a lot of him?

Yes, at the time he was married he was the chief officer of the ship at Jervis Bay. He was married in 1924 and I was born in 1926. My elder brother was born in 1925. In order to be closer to home he joined the General Steam Navigation Company and was a master in their coastal trade ships running to Bordeaux and Labouheyre, places like that, and then he was brought ashore as assistant marine superintendent and was based in London.

Most interesting. Tony, I think school was so-so for you in England?

Yes, I think I quite enjoyed school, but I wasn't keen on it as - academically and I didn't do all that well. If there had been more in the class I would've come further down still, I suppose. I used to be about forty-seventh or forty-eighth out of fifty or so.

Yes, I just thought I'd work that in because it does in fact lead to the interesting change that happened in Australia we'll come to later. Tony, the declaration of war, Chamberlain, do you know where you were when you first heard the news?

Yes, I was at home with my mother, at least in London, and that was on September 3rd, 1939, and we certainly heard that we were now at war.

Do you remember your father having being involved with any wartime activities early in the war, Tony?

Yes, he was involved in shepherding children aboard the paddlesteamers that belonged to the General Steam Navigation Company in London. The school children were conveyed in those ships around the coast to what were considered to be safer towns. I remember him coming home after a day of that work and he'd fallen and sprained his ankle. He was brought home by car. So that put him out of commission for a little while.

(5.00) Do you remember any other impacts of the war on your daily life in the early days? I mean, for example, the beginning of rationing?

Rationing of food, yes I remember that, and I remember deciding that my contribution would be that I wouldn't have sugar in tea, for instance. And I've never had it since, so that certainly had an impact.

That's interesting. The other changes that did come about as a result of the war, of course the really big changes were a little bit down the track, at least a year after the declaration of war. What's your recollection of that, for instance, did you live through any early bombing raids?

No, I remember aircraft spinning about very far up in the sky that were engaged in dogfights with German planes but it didn't have any really dramatic impact excepting that these planes were chasing about and pretty far away. We used to hear air raid sirens fairly frequently, even from the day that war was declared. I remember getting on my bike to go two or three miles to see where a German plane had put down a stick of bombs before it left to get back to the enemy side. I didn't see any bombs actually dropped in - on a specific target.

Tony, the CORB Scheme, what's your first recollection of hearing anything about the possibility of your going to Australia?

Well, the scheme must have been circulated amongst parents of the school that I was attending and my parents asked me if I would be interested in the possibility of going out to Australia to stay with my father's younger brother. And I saw it as a chance for adventure and a chance for change, and I accepted it with glee. I thought that would be a great idea, but it was subject, of course, to making application of indications of interest and then medical examination. I remember being medically examined and the doctor being perhaps not over-impressed with my physical fitness but anyway I was accepted and things proceeded from there.

How rigorous was the medical test?

I think we were tested for wind and limb (laughs) and the amount of flesh on our bones. I think the doctor thought I might have been a bit overweight even at that time.

(Laughs). Of course there was no realisation on the part of most people at least that the war would drag on for the length it did, certainly, I'm sure, not in the minds of children. The aspect of leaving home, though, did that come strongly to your mind then, do you think, or was the whole thing the positive side of looking at a new adventure?

I don't think that the length of time that we might be separated came into it. I think that my thoughts were that the war would soon be over and that we would be reunited.

Right. The other selection procedures - there was a vast number of applications and very, very few of the children in fact came to Australia - do you remember anything else about that? Any other criteria that were used to, in fact, select children?

I don't know of any criteria excepting that these were school children required to be between the ages of five and fifteen. I was thirteen at the time.

Right. Was there any help on the part of your schoolteachers, or anybody in the school system to assist the process?

I can't recall that, but I understand that we were part of the general immigration scheme whereby Australia paid a premium for each immigrant. I think it amounted to ten pound a head.

Right.

Had to be paid by the parents toward the travel.

Let's move on a little bit, the actual preparations to leave. There's some interesting aspects here that we have touched on before. For instance, your father toured you around London, I think.

Yes, before the due date I was taken into London by my Dad to see such things as the Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, the Monument, though I do recall that whereas we went to have a look at the Monument with the prospect of climbing the stair - circular stairway to the top of the monument, by that time the Monument had been closed because of the danger of it being damaged by bombing attack.

(10.00) This period does follow on really from Dunkirk and of course Churchill by now, I think, has made his famous speech about fighting on the beaches, and so on. Do you think your father was showing you these things just purely out of interest or was there a real feeling that they might not stand the test of the war? They might not be there for you to see again later?

That may have been in his mind, but I don't know. I just saw these things as of interest.

Some of the other preparations he made with you were more practical and in a sense seemed to me very loving, tell me about those.

Yes, my Dad came home on one occasion with items to put into my suitcase that had been prepared and inscribed with my name and mark, so that it was identified and I could recognise it. But the items comprised a life jacket. It was a blue life jacket, like a waistcoat, unlike the life jackets that would be provided by the ship. There was a telescope inscribed with my name. It was quite a good single draw telescope. And a torch with batteries.

They're very much the thoughts one senses of a man who is familiar with the sea.

I think so, yes.

Was your father a very practical man?

He was a practical man, but he was a sea captain and a navigator. He was practical and had his hobbies to fill in long hours as a master mariner and a seaman. He used to embroidery and make carpets very well indeed, but these are not the practical things of an artisan. Nevertheless, he was excellent at his chosen career.

They're interesting memories, Tony. I can just imagine the little boy packing away the telescope and so on. We were just having a look at, for the record there, an example of Tony's father's embroidery. It's really lovely, isn't it? The final thing before any journey - packing. Do you remember that? Was it a last minute rush job or had it been fairly well planned in advance?

No, I remember some three weeks, or so, before the departure date that I was chasing about in the back garden with my brother and I stood on a nail through a board that was being used as reinforcement for the air raid shelter that was being constructed in the back garden. And I think my father gave me a telling off, that I was being silly and careless and that my actions could prejudice my opportunity to make the journey.

There was another story, I think, about packing. The lines on your suitcase again, the reflection somehow of a rather practical, thoughtful father.

Yes, I said, Ed, that my father had identified the suitcase. He painted two cream bands across the corner and said that in a stack of suitcases I ought to be able to pick that out quite easily.

And what about your mother, Tony? Was she particularly involved in the preparations to leave?

Yes. Every item of clothing that I took was in accord with a prescribed list, and every item was marked both with my name, with a Cash's name tag, and also with another tag with my CORB number. My number being 318.

Tony, your departure. Where did you say farewell to your parents? Was it easy, or not? And were there other people there with you?

Yes. Our departure took place - really our farewell from our parents took place at Bromley South station which was about two miles' distance from home. It was main long distance station. I'd left from there to go on holidays before, and the train came in to that station. There were a group of parents and young people that mostly I hadn't met before but we were introduced to one another. I think we were tied up with labels with our names and numbers on. The train duly came and we were waved off by our parents. I don't ...

(15.00) Was it a tearful farewell? Or did you all put a brave face on it?

I think there was a pretty brave face. I think we were charged with the spirit of adventure. I don't know of the parents there, they doubtless had a weep.

> Yes, there must have been heartache that night, one imagines. The immediate loneliness perhaps of being on that train, you've left your parents, do you remember that or were you all somehow in it together and therefore overcoming it?

I think we were in it together. I haven't got any recollections, really, of the journey from Bromley to Liverpool. I do recall the school building that we went to, and the beds we set up on the floor in the classrooms; but they're not very strong memories. But again it was spirit of adventure. There were occasions were drawn together and told what was expected of us and what we were to do.

> Do you think you, as children then, you were imbued with, if you like, the destiny of Empire that put a great onus on you to be grown up, to be in control, not to let your guard down?

Yes, I suppose that may have been there too, to some small degree. I remember some of the advertising of this scheme referring to the children as being the 'jewels in the crown'. I think we appreciated then, if that's what they said, then indeed we were the jewels in the crown and we'd have to behave accordingly.

> Right. The meeting up in the school, Tony, with your escorts, was that, as you recall it, a kind of clearly organised process or was there a certain amount of muddle and confusion as things sorted out?

I saw no muddling or confusion. The thing proceeded very smoothly, in my recollection and in my opinion. The escorts had been allocated and they drew their particular charges around them, and no it wasn't. There was no indication of any disorderliness at all in my view.

> The food at that period, was it ...? How adequate was it?

I have vague recollections of going into a school hall for meals, but, in fact, I've got no recollection of what was provided. It was nothing that I had any objections about.

> During the time in Liverpool, I think there were a number of bombing raids on the city, on the area, and from what I know you were all taken down to air raid shelters. Do you remember that?

I can remember the air raid sirens. I don't have any recollection of going into shelters. I think I might have recollections of searchlight beams. I can certainly recall the barrage balloons in London that were being deployed around about, but I can't recall any drama in Liverpool itself.

> Homesickness perhaps, fear, perhaps because of bombing and so on, are they things you would associate with Liverpool, or not?

Not really. I think my parents had provided me with stamped postcards to write notes home on and I attended to that. I had no qualms - but we were surrounded by a lot of other children

and they, I appreciated that they all had different circumstances, and may have reacted differently; that was their business.

> Well, before we move on to the ship, the *Batory*, Tony, is there any other aspect you think of the period leading up to your departure, or perhaps the period in Liverpool, that deserves comment that you would like to put on record?

I can't recall any particular incident. I knew it was a period of preparation and of organising and waiting for the ship to be prepared ready for us. And when the time came we made our way to the ship and boarded.

> I think in fact there were some delays in boarding the ship due to bombing and mining in the area, mining the Mersey. And I think you might have made a number of excursions, morning excursions, destined for the ship that in fact were forestalled. Do you recall that at all?

I can't recall that, and I can't recall any incident that made any particular lasting impact on me.

> Well, let's move on to the ship itself, Tony, the *Batory*. You must often, I'd imagine, have heard about ships from your father. Was there an association there? A kind of excitement through his life and work of your first sea voyage?

(20.00) Yes, I think I was quite excited to reach the ship and to have a look at it, and get an appreciation of its purpose and its size, and to compare it with ships that I was familiar with. I had some familiarity with the ships that my father had been associated with, and in particular the paddlesteamers that used to ply for pleasure trips from the River Thames round to the seaside coastal towns. And I was quick to appreciate that this was not a steamer; it was a big diesel ship and that it was built for the trans-Atlantic trade for voyages of only a week or so, whereas we were setting off for a much longer period. We had to be careful of the use of water, and I remember my own father talking of privations in sailing ships, and we were frequently admonished to not let taps drip or waste. And I was beginning to appreciate his teachings which up till that time had been a bit overdone, I'd thought.

> It was now coming into perspective. Setting sail, Tony, down the Mersey, out into the Irish Sea, do you remember that? Was it daytime or night-time?

I think it may have been night-time that we departed. I think our attention was well distracted by getting us organised into cabins and introduced to the saloon and the seating arrangements, and it was not until the following day that we got out on deck. And we could see the mist and gloom of the Irish Sea at that particular time of the year.

> There seems often, to me at least, something very evocative, something almost mysterious about a ship heading to sea. Did that capture you then, and did you ever think back to that first sea voyage when you later went to sea yourself?

Yes, I think so. We were making a broad sweep out north of Ireland, way out into what was considered to be safe water and then to head south for the coast of Africa. Yes, it was, it was quite an exciting time and gave some memorable impressions.

> Atlases, maps of your route. Did you children have any atlases, or maps provided to help you know where in fact you were, or was that all kept very quiet?

I believe that .... Well, I did receive a dictionary as a farewell gift and I would have consulted the atlas which comprised part of that dictionary. Yes, I would have looked at that quite a bit, and we were certainly keen to know the route and to follow it closely.

> Were there regular broadcasts of information, not on your precise position, but your general area; the Bay of Biscay, the central Atlantic, and so on, or not?

No, I suppose most of the escorts' efforts were to provide diversion or distraction than to keep us informed of exactly what was going on physically with the navigation of the ship and our location, and the fact that there may or may not have been danger. I remember some talk at one stage that there was concern for our safety because of enemy ships, or submarines in the area, but this just filtered through in the pass of conversation. We, the escorts nor the crew, were dwelling on those points at any stage.

> I think it was the *City of Benares* that was sunk en route to America with other evacueé children, and that event happened during your voyage. Did you know about that during your voyage or did you only hear about it later?

I knew of a school chum that was in that ship, a lad named Peter Booker, and I was particularly concerned for his welfare; and he was lost in that ship - but I don't know at what stage I learnt of the *City of Benares*. I think it was during our voyage.

> Right. Seasickness. Part of your voyage, certainly later areas, fairly notorious for their conditions, the Bay of Biscay and so on, did seasickness affect you at all, and what about your friends?

(25.00) Yes, I think seasickness did affect us. We were provided with what were known as strawberry boxes. These were little square boxes that fitted in a small steel frame alongside the bunk and could be disposed of. I think I might have fallen for a day or so with seasickness - only now that you remind me and I recollect; but it wasn't a terribly ongoing thing.

> How general was seasickness a problem with other children in your recollection, Tony?

I believe that some may have been affected more than others. The passageways through the ship were equipped with grab rails, and I think that they were put to use to hang on to. I think that we had a fairly rough passage for the early part of the voyage, and perhaps later as we would have been approaching Fremantle in Australia.

> There's a particular smell that I'd certainly associate with ships - incidentally, I'm not thinking of seasickness there - but there is a smell, it's very hard to put into words. You later would have experienced it a lot. Do you remember it, looking back to that voyage? Could you put your finger on it?

The smell that I'm most fascinated with is the smell of an engine room, and I think even at that stage I was dipping my nose down into the skylights to sniff that up. It's a smell that I became familiar with in ships that my father attended, and I picked it up in the *Batory* which was a big diesel ship.

> Right. And just for the record, we'll come to it later. Tony later went to sea as a merchant naval engineer. I think that's right. Tours of the ship, the bridge, and the engine room, getting up onto the bows, were you able to do that, or were there too many people for children to be toured around the ship?

I think I was fascinated by doors which led to places that we weren't intended to go: into the workings of the ship; but I don't recall, excepting for one or two occasions, sneaking too far away from our restricted intended areas. I knew that the upper decks were reserved for first class passengers and I was happy to leave that to them. Similarly with the troops. They had their areas and our paths used to cross on occasions.

> Right. Into the voyage, some way down through the voyage when routines have become established and the pattern of shipboard life is fairly clear. Could you draw a picture for us of a typical day? When you got up? What you did first and so on? How the day went.

Yes. I think we would get up and the escort would make sure that we washed properly and brushed our teeth, and then we would have breakfast in the saloon. And I think that a program was mapped out for us, or was pinned up whereby those that had expressed an interest in scouting, or other activities, could indulge in those particular groups. So the groups were not static, they would move about. There were occasions we had concerts and other events that we did as a whole, or in smaller groups.

> Singing was a very big part of the ship's life, from various stories I've heard. Is that how you remember it?

Not - I wasn't a willing singer I wouldn't think.

> (Laughs). Were you aware of the - you sound very much like myself in that regard - were you aware of the singing going on around you, though?

Yes, I knew that Meta Maclean had composed the song, or various ... [Interruption].

> The accommodation on the ship, Tony, how do you remember that? Was it crowded or not?

I think it was fairly crowded. We had, I believe, four to a cabin, and I think I may have had an upper bunk but I'm not too certain of that. But we didn't spend much time in the cabins during the day. It was just a matter of getting prepared ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

... and event and well set up. I think most ships carry items for celebrating the event like 'Neptune's trident' and all those sorts of things appeared and we were certainly doused on that occasion and lathered up with soap, and that was quite fun.

Did you all get a dunking, or only some?

Oh, I think some. I think the cheekiest ones got dunked the most. That's the way it normally goes. They find a victim to make the scapegoat.

(Laughs). Yes, that's the tradition, isn't it. It sounds rather as if ships must have a Neptune cupboard where they keep tridents and things like that.

I think they do.

Scouts, were you involved in that?

Yes, I'd been a wolf cub and a scout, as a boy, and I continued to show an interest in that activity, but I can't recall exactly what we did.

No I was going to say ...

We certainly didn't go camping.

No, I was going to say, that might be a bit hard. You don't remember the sorts of activities you were involved in?

Perhaps learning knots and craft and those sorts of things.

Submarine spotting, whether serious or not, and your telescope, did they come into the story?

Yes, I think so. I think that at certain points we were asked to keep an eye out and to report anything suspicious. We weren't split up into submarine watching parties but there were stages when we were asked to keep an eye out for anything suspicious and to report it. And certainly to keep our portholes closed at all times, and not to scratch off any of the paint that had been used to black out the portholes. Our porthole was below the water line, as the ship rolled, I know that the water was outside as the ship rolled. The particular porthole would be under water.

Yes, I remember that from ships myself. It's a strange feeling isn't it, your visible world suddenly dunking. How do you remember that as a boy, was that exciting or was it ever a bit of a worry?

I was fascinated by the fact that from our position in the saloon with the portholes open for ventilation that one moment you could see all sea and then you'd see all sky. If you saw all sea on the one side, you'd see all sky on the other side: as you'd look from side to side at the portholes.

The wonderful changes that you get coming down into the central Atlantic and the equatorial regions and then of course the Indian Ocean: the sunsets, the flying fish, dolphins. Do you remember any of those?

Yes, I seem to recall flying fish landing on the deck and creating great interest and excitement. As the ship would roll the flying fish would be swimming and they wouldn't have to come very high to land on the ship's deck. I can certainly recall those.

Right. Do you have any other memories of those shipboard sea experiences that were very different and very novel?

Yes, I think I can remember seeing whales sounding and spouting in the water, at times, and dolphins in schools swimming fast alongside the ship. Yes, that created interest and excitement.

People sometimes say that the sea is unchanging, that there's a kind of boredom in the sea in the way people talk about deserts, to my way of thinking, quite mistakenly. Remembering that first voyage, Tony, if you can separate it from later voyages, only if you can really remember that occasion, how did you see the sea: as a place of endless boredom, or as something that was very different and interesting?

I can certainly remember the sea as being ever-changing. We went from the Atlantic into Freetown to take bunkers and to await the assembly of convoy to make the next passage onwards down to Capetown, and the sea was still and oily in Freetown and the - we could smell the land and the jungle. Although we weren't close to the shore and we never landed there, it was a place and a point of interest.

(5.00) That's a very evocative description. Do you remember the different moods of the other seas? I mean, was the Indian Ocean different? Do you remember the - that, for instance, being different to the waters through the archipelago south of Singapore?

Yes, it was ever-changing and we knew that the voyage was progressing. We knew that we'd crossed the equator on the one occasion and we'd cross it again and then a third time. We were certainly following our track and these weren't just days and days of boredom. Every day was of interest both by way of the diversionary activities we were involved in, and by the changes of the voyage and the progression of the ship itself.

Right. Lessons, Tony, do you remember that, formal lessons of any sort, or not?

No, I can't recall any formal lessons as such, but I'm sure that they were kept up in some way.

Your escorts, really the closest thing you had to parents unless you had older brothers or sisters, I think your escort was a Miss Pearson?

Yes.

And what do you remember about her? Was she old? Was she young? How did she relate to you?

I think that we might have regarded - I was in a group of boys and I think that we looked on her as a young teacher concerned for our welfare. I know that she referred to more senior people from time to time if she had problems with us, by way of discipline or concern.

Right. Were there many problems like that, or were you ...?

I don't think there were. The more senior escorts would come around of an evening, as we were preparing for bed, and make sure that we were doing as was expected of us. I remember that this senior escort would have a pocket of toffees perhaps and would distribute them, and that was a nice touch sometimes.

Were there any adults, Tony, who could give you the closeness, the intimacy that perhaps you were missing, having left your family, home?

I think that there was sufficient forthcoming from our Miss Pearson that satisfied my needs in that direction. I didn't suffer to my recollection, any pangs of homesickness. It was just ongoing interest. At a certain stage there was some unrest about the sameness of the food and the desire for a change in diet; but I think that even then I appreciated that we were on a Polish ship and that the crew had different dietary customs to our own. We would have vegetables such as mashed beetroot, which I'd never seen prepared before. And the novelty of mashed beetroot seemed to wear off, and we would have liked some variety in the food. But the senior escorts could see that there was some restlessness in this area and, in fact, I think that there may have been a complaints delegation approach the senior escorts to see if there could be some change, and this was jumped on very quickly and those that were expressing some unrest were told that they were behaving like Nazis and they ought to pull their socks up and have some consideration for the ship which was our kind host, and we ought to be more grateful.

You use the word 'Nazi' there, was that an actual memory? Or was that ...?

Oh yes.

That seems rather a strong way of putting it.

It was. Oh yes, we thought that was a bit strong too, but our complaint we thought, I think, was legitimate but it may have come across more strongly from those who were pressing harder.

(10.00) Right. The Polish crew. How close did you get to some of the crew? Did they appear interested in the children? And if they were, how did they show their interest?

I think that they were going about their jobs. I remember stewardesses and stewards being involved in looking after the accommodation. I think that they were kindly to us. They were mature people. The voyage to them was different from the regular voyage and in fact I'm sure that they'd been involved in closer to a hostile situation than this voyage was. And in fact it was said, either during the voyage or subsequently, that they were virtually on a rest and

recreation voyage compared with some of their more hostile environments that they'd been involved in.

> Yes, well, it certainly sounds different to a winter crossing in the north Atlantic. The servicemen on the ship who were destined for Singapore, mostly I think, was there much contact between them and the children, or not?

There was at times. We used to see them about the deck and they used to go to their NAAFI store for their chocolates and boot polish and whatever. I think that was situated at one end of our deck, so we certainly saw them on occasions.

> Do you ever remember being involved in their concerts, or their entertainments?

Yes, I think there might have been an interchange that way on a couple of occasions, but it - we went about our business separately in the main.

> I was going on, Tony, to ask you some questions about the ports of call, but leaving those aside for a moment, is there anything else about the voyage itself, the shipboard life that you think deserves mention?

No, I can't, at this stage, think of any incidents excepting that the boys occupied one section of the ship - at least our particular party that left from Bromley which were our particular little family, had been separated into boys and into girls, and that the girls were at the other end of the ship. There were some amongst us who were keen to get back amongst the girls but that wasn't my great interest at that time.

> Were there any little shipboard gangs, or bullying, that sort of thing?

There could have been. There were, I suppose, some who were unruly, but that didn't affect me and I have no great recollections of any of that.

> Right. Well, let's move on to the main ports of call. We might bypass Freetown although you've described before the atmosphere of lying in the roads off the port. Capetown, well, the first place you actually went ashore. I think you were rather feted?

Yes, Capetown was quite dramatic. We stood out in the Table Bay and the Table Mountain was quite a spectacular backdrop for our arrival at that port. There was a program of interesting activity, and people had kindly offered to take parties of the children on visits. And I remember seeing the memorial there of - Rhodes memorial - and also seeing the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean from one particular vantage point inland.

> I think there was something of a change in diet while you were there?

Well, certainly we had access to fruit and we saw market activities. And it was interesting to see oranges on display and I suppose fresh food was procured for the ship at that point. There was a big assembly in a sports arena and we were addressed by General Smuts and there was a sports program carried out, and we intermingled with school children who were brought in to share that occasion with us.

If you had to put your finger on the reasons for the hospitality you received, could you do that? Was it just one of general sympathy for children who were obviously far from home, or was it something wider or more perhaps political - overtones of the Empire and so on?

(15.00) Yes, I've not doubt that that was a motivation. These people that entertained us, I think, they were certainly of British stock.

Right. Well, before we move on, anything else on Capetown that you really recall as particularly significant?

I recall being in the stands watching some of the sporting activities and I remember at least two or three of us talking to a big Zulu fellow. And he seemed to be a very cultured sort of chap and he had some philosophy that he expressed. I don't recall if it was at all political, but he certainly made some comments which were of interest at that time. I don't recall the detail of it, but it was certainly .... I considered him to be a civilised being, and it was interesting that he had a few words with us.

Did that contrast perhaps with the stereotype that you'd had as a child of the kind of - well, the stereotype of the native?

Well, the lady that entertained us to her home which was a beautiful home, we were entertained to afternoon tea. And her driver was another native South African that she referred to as 'Martin', and Martin was called for and he drove the car. The relationship was certainly mistress and servant there.

Right. Well, let's move on to the other ports of call, Tony, to Bombay and Singapore. I think you went ashore briefly at Bombay?

Yes. We went ashore at Bombay and we certainly were driven, I suppose, by bus through the streets of Bombay. I don't recall the details of it specifically but it was certainly India and very different to what we had seen before, both in England and even in Capetown.

Yes, the crowds, the ...

Yes.

... colour, and so on.

The colour, the smell of the East.

Did you go back to Bombay later?

I've passed through Bombay, only by air.

Right. Singapore in fact, was really visited not long before it fell, although that realisation lay ahead. Do you remember Singapore well?

Yes, Singapore was quite bustling. We landed our troops at Singapore, the two regiments that we had on board. They marched off to do their duty and ....

> Was that a sad farewell? I mean had you become close enough to these troops to regret their leaving?

I think we realised that they had gone to be engaged in fighting and that wasn't a very happy thought on their behalf.

> And what about Singapore itself? Do you remember the atmosphere of the place, the mood of the town?

Yes, it was quite bustling. I don't really remember a lot of detail of Singapore, I've seen a lot of Singapore since. I've got some impressions just of it as a bustling place, but I don't recall any appearance of imminent concern for their - the fact that the place would fall to the Japanese soon after.

> Well, I think they were still rather lost in their blind confidence; the guns pointing the wrong way and so on. How were you treated there, the children? Were you feted again, or not?

Yes, I think that some sort of diversion ashore was arranged for us. But without prompting I can't think what that included. I recall that we went to the zoo at Colombo, but I can't recall where we could have gone in Singapore.

> Well, as the journey continued on, Tony, from Singapore southwards - of course coming west about Australia, Fremantle first - was there a growing sense of excitement, of anticipation of the end of the voyage, of the country where you would stay?

(20.00) Yes, from Singapore down to Fremantle would have only been a matter of a week or ten days, and we realised that we were approaching Australia and when we arrived at Fremantle again we were taken ashore. And I recall it as being a sort of hot and dusty environment, that was in the immediate Fremantle area. It was rather a wild west town in those days.

> Yes, the skies, the colours, they're quite different to England. Did they .... Was that all exciting, or not? The dust, was that an exciting thing or an unpleasant thing?

I think the fact that it was rather sparse and dusty was a bit of a let-down to our expectations, but perhaps we excused that because it was Western Australia and not as developed as the eastern side that we were headed for.

> Well, after the journey around the Bight, of course you entered Port Phillip Bay, was that a daytime entry or did you slip in at night?

I think it was a morning entry that we came up into the harbour and came alongside - I think it would have been a morning entry and we would have come alongside something like midday.

Were you all on deck? One would assume you were watching the city approach?

I think so. We came into Port Melbourne to either Princes or Station Pier. I think it must have been Station Pier since there were trains lined up to convey us into the city.

And did Melbourne appear .... Was this more what you'd expected, more than Fremantle had to offer?

Oh, this was certainly a bigger and more bustling city than the impression gained at Fremantle.

Disembarking, the *Batory* had been your home for three months or so, a little world of its own, how do you feel stepping off a ...?

I think we were quite glad the journey had finished. We were aware that a smaller number would continue on to Sydney, and perhaps we envied them continuing the journey to its ultimate end, or their destination in Sydney, but we were quite happy to leave at that point.

I understand that you were entertained some time in a city restaurant by some radio personalities as the people who had cared for you all assembled. What's your recollection of that time?

Yes, I can recollect that we were taken to a basement restaurant. There was afternoon tea prepared for us and two or three radio personalities, including a Charlie Vaude of that - popular at that time - and a party atmosphere was generated and my aunt and uncle were there to meet me and convey me to their new home at Box Hill.

You'd never seen them, your aunt and uncle before, I think?

No ...

He'd never visited England, had he?

No.

Was that an easy joining up of the family? Did you suddenly feel at home or was it a much slower process?

They made it as pleasurable and easy as possible and I did, I think, have some - there was some strangeness about moving into a new home and that certainly took some adjustment but they had a little daughter and I was quite happy to be a big brother to her. Then I was introduced to a school and started at Swinburne Technical College.

Let's talk about the school, Tony, because you have said that school in England had been not altogether a happy experience. I think this was very different.

Yes, I started school at Swinburne Technical College in October and finished out the year with that class and then resumed in the same grade again the next year when they started after

the school holidays, and I found that schooling in a technical college was far more to my liking, and I made better progress there than I had done previously.

(25.00) Was that because of the subjects or the way things were taught?

I think it may have been both. I think the practical nature of the school lessons: metalworking, blacksmithing, technical drawing, practical mathematics, and the school atmosphere there generally was to my liking and I reversed my previous position and was able to get nearer to the top.

Did you make friends easily? Were you accepted into your peer group easily, or were you seen as an outsider, a little 'Pom'?

(Laughs). I certainly went home with bruised ears on one occasion (laughs). I don't know what I could have said that was out of place, but certainly I had to take my share of drubbing for being different.

Was it good-natured drubbing, or was it ...?

Well, if you go home with bruised ears it doesn't feel very good-natured at the time. I certainly got a belting but ...

But by and large was there just an undercurrent of sort of fairly harmless name-calling, if you like, or was it a more thought out process of discrimination?

I think that that was just bullying, that I'd got drawn into, and the general acceptance in the school was very good. And I think that it was seen that we had something mutually of interest and we continued on those lines. And my schooling was really quite happy.

Right. Home life, going back to the family, Tony, I mean the family you were staying with - we're getting along, we're .... Living out at Box Hill, very, very different to living in London. Box Hill, I'd imagine in those days, was quite rural?

Yes, it was a newly-built home that I was taken to. It was a newly-built home but even then there was an additional room put on the back because I was coming, and that was my room for the period until my parents arrived and set up a home and I was reunited with my parents. Being a new home there was a garden to be arranged and my uncle was a good gardener. And I remember going to the fields nearby and collecting manure in a barrow and there was a financial arrangement relating to these barrowloads of cow manure. We got along as a family quite happily ...

How lucrative was the manuring (laughs)?

I think about threepence a barrowload, which was quite good at that time.

So that provided some of the money for the wherewithals of boyhood.

Yes, my uncle had an antique furniture shop in Canterbury which was nearby, situated along the road between Glenferrie, Swinburne Technical College and Box Hill, so that I could stop off at Canterbury with my pushbike and spend a bit of time at my uncle's shop.

> And did you do anything practical there? Were you involved in restoring - doing any woodwork, or any other work?

Oh, just to a small degree. I think I would help shift furniture on occasions and the delivery of furniture, just to assist my uncle who had an old Morris Cowley car that had been converted into a commercial vehicle. That was quite a feature, the old Morris Cowley truck.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

> Identification: This is Ed Stokes with Tony Smith on [CORB] Evacuees, tape two, side one.
>
> Tony, the emotional side of family life, the more personal side of it. Was your aunt able to give you what you were missing, perhaps from your mother?

I think she tried hard to do so, but I recall getting letters from home and realising that my family had been left in fairly dangerous circumstances, that the house had been bombed and the effects and contents of the home had been damaged. The bombing had caused breakage of windows and there was glass splinters into some of the furniture items that I can remember. The piano was taken away and given to the local air force squadron for them to entertain themselves and I felt perhaps I'd let my family down by not being there when things were at their height.

> Although they wished you to go to Australia?

Yes. In fact things in London got so bad that my father's office was transferred to Glasgow. That, in part, was because the Thames had been closed to navigation and the fact that the city itself had been bombed and was no longer so habitable.

> Did you follow keenly, news from England on the wireless, in the newspapers?

Yes, we were following keenly, but the Australian press would of course be publishing things that related to Australia: Australia's part in the war, rather than going in to any detail on what was going on in England.

> Letters to and from home, Tony, letters from your parents, letters you wrote home, they must, I imagine, have been very important. How often could you write?

I think that I had to be encouraged to write by my aunt and uncle, and that it was coming time that I did write a letter. Letters from home, I'm sure arrived reasonably frequently, and they were concerned as to my welfare and wanted news. My mother did keep, I'm sure, every letter that I sent and up until the time of her passing; and they're still available, the letters that I wrote.

That's very touching. Telegrams, I think sometimes you could send telegrams but they were of a formal nature?

There was a code system, a telegram - I think a monthly telegram - was allowed and the messages had to be made up from a published code so that we would select a message that suited the moment, and send off the number code in accord with the allowed message. They were all assembled from all the evacuees and transmitted, and then distributed to the various families. It was a good system and much appreciated. I think it worked in both directions.

Yes, I think that's correct. I think there were a couple of occasions when the Melbourne evacuees, at least, were got together for annual reunions, if you like, and also I think occasionally to broadcast messages directly to Britain. Do you remember that?

(5.00) Yes, there were occasions that there were broadcast messages to families in Britain but I was never involved in that. I was certainly involved in reunion concerts that were held in 1942 and 1943. We got together with contemporaries, at that stage, and they were quite good events. And there other sorts of activities arranged, but I haven't retained any details of those, but I can certainly remember the concerts that were held in St Kilda Town Hall.

Did you have any ongoing social contact with other children who'd been on the *Batory*, or did you only see other *Batory* children at these organised reunions?

There was at least one other boy at Swinburne College. I wasn't particularly friendly with him except to acknowledge that he was there. My friend from Bromley, Reg Loft and his sister, Dorothy, were my closest continuing acquaintances, but after a number of years I lost contact with Reg and I had no contact with any other of the evacuees for many, many years.

The reunion that you've just recently held in Sydney, was that the first time you've got together?

After about 1943, and a year or so after, that I completely lost contact with all of the evacuees. The reunion has been quite an event in my life. To be confronted with those people after such a long passage of time, was quite a moving event and I appreciate that the reunion was organised in the way it was, by one of our number.

Yes, I can imagine that. Just stepping back to Australia in the early 1940s, your life at Box Hill, and compared with your life that you'd known in Britain, what were the greatest differences and were they good or bad differences? Was life better for you here in Australia, leaving aside your family and so on?

Yes, I think I could see how well off we were in Australia. There were occasions that we went off for family picnics and outings into the countryside outside Melbourne, to places like Emerald and Gembrook. Our travels were restricted due to petrol rationing, and the like, but nevertheless we could see how well off we were. I had another uncle, who was my mother's brother, living at Ivanhoe and he had a daughter, my cousin, and I would go on holiday outings with them also. Yes, we had a much freer and mobile sort of life in Australia compared with fairly restrictive conditions in England. Yes, I could see we were better off.

Again, leaving aside the family aspects of it, Tony, were there anythings that you really missed from the life you'd had in Britain?

No, I don't think so. I had relatives in Britain that I missed to some degree and have maintained contact with them to this day; but no, I saw at all times that we had better opportunity in Australia. I've come to appreciate that England and Europe have a very interesting background of history that is absent in this country.

Yes, that's certainly true. One final question about the family. In your general knowledge of the evacuees that you have since met, perhaps looking at your own experience, do you think there was ever a feeling with your particular family, or the families of evacuees in Australia, that they were somehow put upon whereas children who went to foster homes with complete strangers were in a sense welcomed by people who'd made a positive decision that they wanted a foster child within their family?

(10.00) I've never ever considered that comparison, and I can't really comment on it now. I know that my family, my uncle and my aunt, and my Dad's older brother and his sister, all did their best to make me welcome, and I was certainly considered to be part of the family.

Right. Just on that finally, do you have any last thoughts you'd like to record about your family life, about why it was good, or perhaps occasionally not good, being with your uncle and his wife?

Yes, I had an inner feeling that I wasn't really part of their own family. I accepted being made welcome, but I had arrived from the UK and I'd been separated from my family. And it was quite exciting that my family were able to come out to Australia, in 1942 as a result of my father's illness and his virtually being repatriated to his home country due to his deteriorated health. And yet I knew that this was going to be another disruption to the comfort of the freedom that I had developed, that I was going to be again under the discipline of my own parents. So I welcomed their arrival with mixed feelings, again.

That's interesting Tony. I was going to ask you about that. I know your father did bring the family out to Australia; a risky voyage of course in the war. The actual reunion with your parents with those thoughts in mind, how easily did that go, making the transition back again into your old family situation?

Well, in the interim I had learned some Australianisms and ways of speech and attitudes that my mother thought were very forward and impolite and these were being corrected immediately on their arrival. And I thought that they had a lot to learn, rather than myself (laughs).

Of course your father was coming back to his own country but with an English wife. Was it easier for your father to accept how you'd changed?

Oh, I don't think so. Maybe so, but he himself had been away for a long time and I suppose that in fact both he and my mother had to make a lot of adjustments.

Did they ever have any regrets about coming back?

I don't think so. The adjustments were quite severe insofar as my mother came from suburban London to take up life on a poultry farm in Melbourne that had virtually no electric - it had no electricity in the house, it had no refrigeration, it had a wood-fired copper in a separate laundry. And my mother thought that she could continue at the pace that she had worked and lived in London. And coming out to the heat and those conditions in Australia were pretty tough.

> Yes, it must have been a great accommodation to make. I know you did, later in the war, after the chicken farm period, I think, Tony, go up to Sydney to begin an apprenticeship that led later, I think, to your going to sea?

Yes, I started at apprenticeship after finishing high school in Melbourne. I started the apprenticeship in Melbourne, and after the passing of two and a half years my father moved us to Sydney to take up work in Sydney. And I continued and completed my apprenticeship at Mort's Dockyard in Sydney and then went away to sea as a junior engineer. And so started my sea-going, or marine engineering career.

> Just a few final questions, Tony. The *Batory* experience, on balance, was it a good, or a unfortunate experience for you?

I think it was an excellent opportunity and a great experience.

> Without reservation?

Without reservation, yes. That was a turning point of my life and a good experience.

> Did it change you as a person within you, or only in the sense that it gave you the opportunities of school and so on in Australia?

(15.00)I think an experience like that must have a deep influence. It's not superficial, it must have a deep and lasting influence. But then, of course, there have been other incidents through life whereby *Batory* has almost long-forgotten until this revival of interest has taken place.

> Finally, your family, your mother and father, did you regain again the closeness, the intimacy that you'd had before you left England, or was there always a difference?

I think that there was a difference after that experience, but I think it was a difference of mutual understanding and respect for what had intervened.

> Right. In the sense of how you'd been changed through the whole process?

Yes, how I'd been changed through that process and how they'd been changed through the experience of war, although my mother had had similar experiences in the first world war of bombing and the like, but these were experiences that my parents had had on the one side, and experiences that I'd had in travelling to Australia in the group.

One final question, is there anything you feel you would like to add to this record, Tony, that you feel hasn't been covered now and anything that you would like to put on record?

No, I can't think of anything, Ed, excepting that I appreciate the opportunity to explore these thoughts and put them down at this time. I think that we were very fortunate in our experience that things did go as smoothly as they did. I know that a lot of people in the wartime were physically affected more seriously and hurtfully than ever we were. We had a dream ride compared with what it could have been. It could have been disastrous, calamitous.

Yes, of course, in many ways, for instance the *Benares*, and other examples of that. Well, Tony, on behalf of the War Memorial, thank you for your time.

Thanks for the opportunity, Ed.

END OF INTERVIEW