



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: this is Edward Stokes, Evacuee Children, with Bob Puxted, Evacuees, tape one, side one.

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

I was born in Tenterden, Kent, England, sixth of the sixth, 1926.

Bob, the early life you had there, I think the family lived in a small village.

Yes, a small town - Tenterden. The house we lived in was just two rooms downstairs and three up. Bathroom, et cetera was outside.

Was this a detached house or in a cottage row?

In a row of four cottages.

I think your father, Bob, was a mechanic - he later worked as a bus driver. What do you remember of your father as a person?

My father, well, he was very good to teach me anything he knew he wanted me to know.

He was a fairly practical kind of a guy, I think.

Yes. He had a small shop - radio and television and cycle shop. He did repairs, and hired the cycles out for people to go anywhere they wanted to go.

Your mother, how do you remember her?

My mother, I think she had a very big job to raise the family. Always made our clothes and she used to make marmalade and sweets on the sideline to raise a little bit extra money.

Lovely homemade stuff. How many brothers or sisters did you have?

When I came to Australia I had three sisters, and before I went back in 1947 there was two extras in the family.

Who'd been born while you were away.

Yes.

You went to school, of course, in England, but I think from the age of eleven on you were also doing some part-time work?

When I was eleven I got permission from the government to work after school and weekends. I used to pick up soiled linen, deliver it to a laundry, then deliver it. After it had been washed, et cetera I used to deliver it again. That was during the week. Saturday mornings was with the butcher, first up, delivering meat, then I used to go and deliver laundry. And then I'd go

with the grocer, delivering groceries. And then six o'clock of a Saturday night I would go with a fishmonger sellin' fish.

The kind of picture that I've gathered from that, Bob, and also from other things you've said, is that in the period immediately before the war when you were twelve, thirteen, or so, you were fairly independent. Do you think that's correct?

Well, once I started earnin' money my father told me that now I can buy my own clothes and things that I want.

So you were being distanced a little bit from being totally dependent on the family.

That's right. Father thought I could support myself.

The general memory of the community you lived in, the town, Tenterden and your immediate locality, was that a kind of warm, friendly place, or not? How do you remember that?

Yes, Tenterden was a very friendly place. Everybody knew everybody for miles around.

And what about the house, your home life, was yours the sort of home that had people coming and going a lot, or was it a more private sort of home?

No, there seemed to be quite a few people callin' in, havin' a meal, a cup of tea. But that was a lot of business people used to do that sort of thing.

(5.00) Just briefly, if you were to remember what mattered most to you about your home life - about your family life - when you were twelve or thirteen, what would you say it was?

That's a bit difficult. I had a good life at home. Sundays we'd go for a walk which stands out in my mind more than ever. When I was at home, come Sunday, we'd go to church in the morning, Sunday School in the afternoon, and church again at night. And in between services we'd go for a walk.

Out into the countryside.

Out into the country.

It's lovely country, of course, down in Kent.

Yes, very nice.

Just moving on a little bit, Bob. The period leading up to the war, but before the war, do you remember anything of that? Do you remember anybody talking about the war, or not? I mean about the possibility of war?

Yes, my mother and father used to listen to the radio - see what the outcome, how it was going. It looked like war was going to eventuate. But other than that I don't think the topic was war at all.

The actual declaration of war, 3rd September, do you remember that day, or not?

I don't say I remember the day exactly, what I did on that day. But I can remember the day that they declared war.

How did the family react?

My father and mother seemed to be a little bit upset, but the children, well, I don't think the children realised what was goin' on.

Sure. The period following the declaration of war, the so-called phoney war, that went on for a good long while. Do you remember any events during that - any ways in which your life changed at all?

No, not exactly. I don't think I was the age to think of those sort of things.

You were telling me something, though, I think about - perhaps this is a bit later on - seeing planes up in the sky.

Oh yes, that was just after war was declared. There was German planes and British planes fightin' overhead. My sister and I and my father, we stood out in the backyard of our place and we could see them fightin' just overhead.

What about things like bomb shelters and gas masks? Do you remember anything of that?

Yes, always had to carry our gas mask. I used to hear the air raid warning. It used to go off and it used to vibrate the windows of the house because we lived right opposite, on the opposite side of the street. And that was what they called the ARP, where they used to control all this sort of thing.

The air raid warnings, to you as a child, were they exciting or frightening or both?

I think an air raid siren can really set your nerves up when it goes off. It can make you jump if you're close to it.

It's a kind of piercing noise.

Oh yes, very.

But you never where you were, I mean before you left, I think had any air raids actually where you were?

No, only about eighteen miles away was the closest anything happened - a few bombs dropped.

Let's move on to the story of CORB, Bob. What was your very first knowledge of the scheme?

One day, on a Wednesday, I can remember it - Wednesday lunchtime - my father came home from work and he said, 'How would you like to go to Australia?'. I said, 'Yes, please'. He said, 'Well, you better go and get an application form and we'll fill it in'.

When he said about going to Australia, did you realise that it was part of a scheme to evacuate children?

No, I didn't. I knew nothing of evacuation until I got on a train to go to London.

So it was really presented as a trip to Australia. When you said yes, you wished to go, why was that?

Well, bein' the age I was of fourteen I thought it'd be adventurous to go.

Did you know where Australia was?

Yes, I knew where Australia was, and I knew some people out here.

Yes, tell us about that.

Leslie Goodman and his wife, well, they was in England in 1937 and Leslie worked as an apprentice motor mechanic at the same garage as my father until he finished his apprenticeship, and then he came to Australia.

(10.00)I see, he was an Englishman himself. Right. He hadn't come from Australia.

No, he'd come from the same town as I did, and that was where they worked, it was in the same town.

I see, and they later decided to go to Australia.

Yes.

When your father told you about it, and in the following days, did he or your mother talk at all about their reasons for thinking it was good for you to go?

No, Mum and Dad didn't say a word about why they wanted me to go, and I didn't even know about the evacuation. Dad just said to me would you like to go, and I accepted it.

In the following few days I think you had to do various things. What do you remember?

I remember I went and got the application form, came home. Dad and Mum filled it in that night. Sent it in. The following Sunday we went for a medical and an interview, and the following Thursday I was on the train heading for London and going to Liverpool.

> Just stepping back for a moment, I think there was also another child who was a city evacuee living with your own family. His application went differently, I think.

Yes, Donald Snow, he was living with us as a London evacuee, in the country, and he and I both went and got an application form. But he didn't go home to his parents' place until the Friday night and by the time he filled his application in, he was too late, they had closed the evacuation list.

> Just going back to your family, Bob, was there any talk of either of your sisters going too?

No, not that I know of. I never heard of my mother and father discuss going to Australia to my sisters.

> The buying of clothes, packing up, and so on, do you remember that, or not?

Yes, I remember going .... As I say, I went to the interview on the Sunday. On the Monday we went up the street and done a bit of shoppin' - got three items of everything, and a suitcase. And on the Wednesday I was all ready to go.

> That Wednesday night, just before you left, do you remember that night with your family - the last night?

No, not really. It was just the same as any ordinary night.

> Did your father say anything to you before you left about how you should behave or things he'd hoped you'd do?

No, not that I can recall, but I suppose he thought I would.

> There was a camera. Tell us about the camera.

That was in Cape Town. He gave me a small camera and when we was in Cape Town - we were there for ten days getting a magnetic cable fitted to the ship - and business people used to come in with their cars and take us for a trip round Cape Town. And I took some very nice photos on Table Mountain and various places. On the return journey to the docks I had my camera on my lap and as we entered the dock gate a guard looked in and saw the camera on my lap. He immediately opened the door and opened the camera and exposed the film, so I've had no recollection of any memories of Cape Town.

> That's a shame. Bob, the departure on that Thursday when you actually left home, where did you say goodbye to your parents, and what was that like?

I said goodbye to my parents at Ashford where I met five other children goin' on the same trip - that was the hardest part.

Just that saying goodbye.

Yes, just that saying goodbye.

I know you remember it still very well now. How was the trip then on to London and on to Liverpool?

I think it was more adventurous, I think because we was with other children. And when we got to London we met more children and the war - well, I won't exactly say the war - but leavin' our parents had partly gone out of our minds because of all the other children bein' with us.

And it was as sudden as that, was it?

Yes.

Well, we'll come back to talk about homesickness, perhaps a little bit later on. The period in Liverpool, I know it was three or four days - exactly doesn't matter how many - how do you remember that?

I remember getting off the train and going by bus to this school and we had the classrooms as dormitories. I don't even remember what meals we had there, actually. But I remember no sooner we'd get to bed of a night and we'd be up and down the air raid shelter. No sooner we'd get back to bed again and up again. That's the thing that stands out in my mind at Liverpool.

(15.00) It must have been very tiring. That period in Liverpool, did you feel any sense of security there, or did you feel insecure in not really knowing what was happening, where you were going?

We didn't think about that sort of thing really. We were just thinkin' of what was happenin' at the present time.

Any other memories of Liverpool that you think are significant?

No, I don't think there's anything else at Liverpool that I can really call to mind.

The *Batory*, the ship that was going to be your home, really, for quite a number of weeks, what's your first recollection of seeing her?

Oh, what a big boat! I called it boats in those days, I didn't call them ships (laughs). But, oh this'll be good, on this ship.

So you were fairly full of excitement getting on to the ship.

Yes, more so than anything else.

The very first few days at sea, or even leaving port, what do you remember of that?

There was that many other ships we could see, within seein' distance, and there was one particular ship, the *Queen Mary* - the *Queen Mary* was with us for three days. And then we saw *Queen Mary* five weeks - the *Queen Mary* was in Sydney five weeks before us.

That's interesting. And was she in the harbour when you arrived?

Yes.

I thought I'd read that somewhere. What do you remember of being at sea in those first few days? How did that affect you?

New surroundings - I think our memories weren't about the war. We were thinkin' of our journey and what we were doin', and what we were gonna do to pass the time away.

I know in the early days there weren't too many activities because there wasn't much equipment on the ship - that came after Cape Town. What do you remember doing in those first days and weeks?

I can remember playin' fiddlesticks with the younger children, and there was readin'. And I think we had to carry our life jackets everywhere. And I think for the first few days we were just tryin' to catch up on a bit of rest that we hadn't had when we was in Liverpool.

Sure. I know you yourself weren't seasick, but I think you remember other children who were.

Yes, seasickness, I don't think I'll ever forget it. As we sat at the dinin' table - we never had a menu to choose from, the plate was just put in front of you - and every time there was a plate put in front of the boy sitting opposite me he was seasick. Then the steward had to finish up cleanin' that up, and then start serving meals again. So you can just imagine how you felt, wanting to eat a meal after a chappy's just been sick.

I see, when you said every meal he was sick, you meant he was actually sick on the spot.

He was sick sitting at the table - every meal.

Didn't they have bags or something to ...?

No, we only had bags in the cabins.

Poor boy, he must have rather dreaded going into that dining room. Homesickness, did that affect you much at this time, or not?

No, homesickness didn't really hit me until after I arrived in Australia, because I think where it was, the children all together, kept their minds occupied and different things that was done on the ship didn't give you time to think about it.

Did you have much to do with either older or younger children than yourself?

The older children had to look after the younger ones - do their washin' and see that they had their baths and things like that. Of course, there was no ironing in those days. You used to put them under your bunk and sleep on them to do the pressin'.

That's most interesting. Could you tell us a bit more about that, Bob?

It was the only way, there was no irons on board ship. We used to take the boards which stop you from rolling out of your bunk, and we used to put them together under a mattress and lie on those, and that's the way they were pressed.

It's very ingenious. You were saying about the choice of food during meals, how do you remember that?

The way I remember it was that I hated steamed fish in my younger days, and every Friday it was steamed fish, not fried fish. And it was put in front of me and I didn't know - am I going to eat it, or not? If I didn't eat it, I'd go without - there was nothing else to eat. So I thought, well, I must eat it. And that's what I did. And now I don't dislike steamed fish.

(20.00) You forced it down. I know water was short on the ship - fresh water. How often did you bath, and how did you wash?

We had salt water baths with salt water soap. But we also had a - we used to called it a swim every day with the two-inch water hose on deck, so that we could cool down in the heat.

This is when you were further south. Tell us about those hosings down.

Well, you'd take a group of about fifteen or twenty and you'd have about half an hour hosin' down, and that was very nice. Everybody appreciated it.

It sounds rather fun. And who were the people doing the hosing?

The escorts, actually. We had a Presbyterian minister on board, and he was the chief one that used to do the hosing.

Chief hoser, sort of like a mass baptism (laughs). The discipline on the ship, how do you remember that? How strictly were you controlled, and what happened if you broke the rules?

If you broke the rules you had to go and front Mr Kirby, the head escort, and he would give you a dressin' down. Other than that, everything seemed to go quite smoothly, actually.

Were the boys caned at all - anything like that?

Not that I know of. I never saw any children mistreated in any way.

In any way at all?

In any way, yes.

Well, the general impression I've certainly gained is of a very happy ship and good escorts. Your own escort, do you remember her or his name? And how close were you?

Reverend Martin, Church of England minister. A lot of children didn't take to him, and I for one used to intermingle with other groups who was a different .... As I say, I enjoyed myself with the other boys my own age and some younger, but it was the escort that made the trip.

Your own individual escort?

Yes.

Are you saying - I'm not quite clear there, Bob - that you yourself got on well with the Reverend Martin, or you didn't?

Yes, I got on well with him, but he had a different attitude towards the children as to what some of the other escorts did. Some of the other escorts were teachers on exchange in England and wanted to get back to Australia, so they had a different way of handlin' the children.

Are you suggesting through that that Reverend Martin was easier or stricter with children?

I think he was stricter than the others.

So that coloured the life of your group a little bit.

Yes.

I've noticed, some other people have rather lovely photos of their escorts with a little gaggle of children, and so on. Did he do that sort of thing with you?

No, there was no photos taken. He wouldn't get together over social things as much as we would like to.

I see, so for him it was a job and you were the boys and that was it.

Yes. He was doin' his job.

You were saying before, Bob, at the beginning of the voyage, I think, any money had to be given over in some way. Could you tell us about that?

About the second day we was on board ship they announced that any child with any money had to report to the purser's office. And there was an escort there to collect it so that no children could be disadvantaged by getting stuff from the canteen - a bar of chocolate or something - without the others bein' able to do the same. So it put everybody on the same level.

Did you appreciate that at the time, or did you resent losing your two quid?

I resented losin' my £2, because Dad gave it to me to get anything I wanted. But no, I think it was a fair way to go about it.

> Those little reverses that no doubt happened during the voyage, and perhaps later in Australia too - the little difficulties that you have to get over, if you like - at those times did you feel more homesick than others, or not?

No, not to my knowledge at the moment. I just can't recall bein' homesick on the ship, because there was so much activity.

> I know there was fairly active boat drill on the ship, and I think you were saying something about the lifeboats when you first went ot sea.

(25.00) Yes, as soon as we put to sea from any port, the lifeboats were lowered to the first deck and tied to the rails in readiness if anything happened to the ship.

> Do you remember much of actual lifeboat drills? How often they were? Were they relaxed or very severe?

No, everybody had to attend lifeboat drill - crew and everybody. They were very strict on that. And if you weren't present they would look for you and bring you up on deck.

> I think you remember one night, late at night, when I think you didn't go to bed.

No, we were in bed that particular night but it came over the intercom that we must get dressed and life jackets on and fold a blanket up ready to leave the ship. That was rather scary. But more scary was when you could hear the depth charges goin' off, and you couldn't step off onto dry land.

> Did that memory of that night, did it fade easily or were you haunted by that in the coming nights?

I don't know about that but I've never forgotten it.

> And what about the other children with you, did any of the other boys in your cabin, for example, ever have nightmares about submarines - that sort of thing?

Not that I know of, no. Even the night that they attacked us, the younger children went to sleep, but they was all dressed. We had to get them dressed and they were all ready to go.

> Bob, let's go on to talk about some of the ports that the ship went to. You had an amusing story about Freetown - the coins.

Yes, we pulled up at Freetown to let some air force chappies off, and while we were there we dropped anchor, and they seemed to go ashore just through the bush - the reeds - that were growin' on the side of the bank. But we had some, what shall I say, Negroes come out in canoes. And we used to drop ha'pennies and pennies over, but they weren't very happy with those. So what we used to do then was to wrap them up in silver paper and drop them over

and they would dive down and get them up. They'd come up with them in their mouth. And when they found it was silver paper around a coin they weren't very happy.

> And this was a bit of a lark for you boys. I can picture that. Going on to Cape Town, where the ship called again - you've told us about the camera already - I think there you visited some ships?

Yes, of an evening time we used to go around the docks for a walk and we'd stop at different ships tied up. And quite often we'd get invited on board and we'd have a look over the ship. When we finished lookin' over the ships we'd go back to their dinin' room and there'd be a big spread put on for the boys - for all of us.

> Did you enjoy that visiting of other ships?

Yes - very interesting. Different to what we were on our passenger boat.

> Just going back to the *Batory*, Bob. I know basically the children were fairly confined, they couldn't wander all over the ship, but you were saying you did, on one occasion, get up to the bridge. How did that journey start? Do you remember how you got along, and so on?

No, I don't know how it came about. There was another boy and I, he suggested we go up on the bridge and there weren't any escorts about so we just slipped away and up we went. And we found ourselves on the bridge and they wanted to know what we were doing. Anyway, they showed us around and then we had to go back down again and join the other children.

> Did anybody really rouse on you, or not?

No, we weren't really roused on, but we were told that we shouldn't have been there, it was out of bounds.

> That must have been a fascinating visit. Were you there long enough to really see much of it?

I can't remember what we saw but I can remember the wheel and the compass - that's the main things I can remember.

> Going on to Bombay ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

> Identification: this is Ed Stokes, Evacuee Children, Bob Puxted, tape one, side two.

> Bob, in Bombay, I think there was this very drastic incident with Bill Riely.

Yes. A member of the crew came 'round and locked all the portholes up. It was on the dockside because they've had this happen before, I presume, so nobody can put their head out

the porthole and have a look. You might know that the ship has a wire hawser from the bows along the wharf and from the stern along the wharf, and it just moves backwards and forwards at times. Anyway, I remember Bill Riely, he got the spanner off the fire extinguisher and the heel of his shoe, and knocked the bolt undone. And he put his head out and as the ship moved the hawser came up, caught under his chin and ripped the skin off the side of his face. So naturally, we had a mess there. Bill had to be taken ashore to hospital, and we were due to sail that night. Well, the doctors took him to hospital, stitched him up, and he was back on board ready to leave.

That must have been quite a warning for you other children.

This is right. We had a lecture the next day on what happens if you put your head out the porthole when you shouldn't have it open.

I guess that was one lecture that was really listened to fairly well. Were you very close to Bill?

No, I knew Bill, he was a younger one of the children. But I knew him before the accident and I've known him since. I saw him in Queensland just recently at a reunion, and he said he can't remember the accident happenin', but he says everybody is remindin' me of it.

I'm sure. Bob, Colombo, I know you visited a tea plantation and so on, and I think you visited a family there.

Well, the people that came in their car owned the tea plantation, and they took us and showed us all round the tea plantation. We went shopping for fruit. The lady who was in charge, she told the driver not to say anything who we were or anything like that to any of the stall holders, and she also said the same to one of her servants.

I see, so there was really still quite a deal of secrecy about the operation. Is that the point you're making?

Yes, there must have been, keepin' the scheme quiet so it never got out and broadcast.

Going on a bit. I do know at Singapore the troops left the ship. Do you remember the voyage south from Singapore after the troops had left being different to the other part of the voyage, or not?

Up to Singapore the troops did all the fire watch of the ship and when the troops got off at Singapore, well, the oldest of the boys had to do it. We had to do it night-time and daytime.

Were you one of those boys?

Yes, I was one of those boys.

Tell us about that.

It used to be very hard to keep your eyes open, but the ship's officers used to walk around of a night-time and they'd come along and just give you a shake on the shoulder if you'd nodded off to sleep.

And what were you really supposed to be doing?

Keepin' an eye out if fire breaks out on the ship.

I see, so you were really on the spot so that if there was a fire it would be spotted very quickly.

That's right. We were all over the ship.

(5.00) Did you have any means of communicating with the bridge?

No, we had no means at all. But there was communication on the ship which indicated on the bridge if there was any fire outbreak.

I see, so if you saw something you had to run and get help. Would that be the story?

I think the idea was for us to apply the fire extinguishers.

I see. I think you were also a scout on the ship. What do you remember of scouting?

It was sitting groups actually, more than anything else, because we couldn't go on bushwalks or anything like that. So it was tyin' knots and just goin' through the handbooks and things like that.

And did the scouts have any extra responsibilities to the other children?

Not that I know of.

Well, let's move on to arriving in Australia. You sailed into Sydney Harbour, I think, in daytime. How clear a memory is that?

Yes, I can remember comin' into Sydney Harbour. I think all the children were on one side of the ship at the time. And I have seen photos of the groups of children on parts of the ship which were out of bounds until we got to Singapore because the troops occupied those. Unfortunately, I'm unable to find myself in those groups.

Just for the record too, I think there had been a grounding as you left Melbourne.

Yes, the tugs were pullin' us out to turn the ship around for us, ready to head off to Sydney, and we ran aground on a sand bank. It was five to six hours before we refloated again. In that time the ship had started to list over to one side quite a bit.

And you got off at high tide, did you?

Yes, we got off on high tide.

Bob, let's go on now to talk about the period in Australia. It is a little bit complicated in your case because of the different moves to a number of places. What I wondered is, could we leave the details of your life with these people until later, and could we just run through very quickly and just put down the guts of where you were and when you were there? Would that be alright? The first family you stayed with was?

Leslie and Alfreda Goodman. They was in Sydney at Dulwich Hill. I was at Dulwich Hill for two months and then we moved to East Lindfield.

I think you stayed with them overall for about fifteen months.

Yes, fifteen months I stayed with those people.

After that - and we'll come to the letter writing later - you then, I think, went to Singleton.

Yes. It was time for me to leave school by this time, and I didn't want to stay in Sydney so I went on a farm at Singleton with the Vickers family.

And did they have any children?

Yes, they had four boys and a girl.

And I think you stayed there two years. After that you went to, I think, another farm.

Yes, I came from Singleton down to Raymond Terrace on to another dairy farm where they had one son and a daughter.

And what was their name?

Smith, Harry Smith and his wife Eileen.

And then I think there was another farm, the Dodds' farm, where you stayed a few months. And then after that you went, I think, to Maitland.

Yes, I became the age of eighteen and, of course, the adult wages had to be paid so these people found me another farm. I went over on to the Dodds' farm where there was two sons and a mother. And, of course, as I was able to drive the car and there was only one of the sons could drive the car, so I used to have the job of takin' Mum and the other son that couldn't drive everywhere.

Just going on, Bob, to finish the record here, after the Dodds' farm I think it was Maitland.

Yes, I went to a job in Maitland makin' fibrous plaster and fitting fibrous plaster in homes.

And where did you stay?

I stayed with a family of four sisters and one brother in a house. I was the only boarder there. But the rest of the family never married. I was there until, I think - where did I go to there - Newcastle. I went back to Newcastle from Maitland where I went into a boarding house. There was nineteen of us in this boarding house but we had a good time.

(10.00) And I think you got work in Newcastle during that time.

Yes, I got work in Newcastle durin' that time.

And it was really from there that you then later went back to England.

Yes, I was in Newcastle. I got a job with the BHP steelworks and had a phone call from Sydney asking me if I wished to return to England. This was the end of November 1946.

We can perhaps come to that later, Bob.

Rightio.

That's very good, thank you, that's given us a clear overall outline. Well, let's go back, Bob, to when you first arrived in Australia. You'd been on the ship, of course, all this time. Leaving the *Batory* were you pleased at that or sorry.

No, I think I was pleased to get off the ship, because we'd had nearly eleven weeks which was rather a long time for one trip. So I got off the ship and we were taken to Newtown Public School where Leslie and Alfreda Goodman picked me up and took me to their home.

Of course, you'd known the Goodmans before, in Britain. The Goodmans that you met when you got to Australia, were they the same people? Did they live up to your expectations?

Yes, just the same as when I last saw them in 1937.

The home you lived in with them, what was that like?

An older style home, we first went to at Dulwich Hill - an old weatherboard home. But we was only there for a couple of months and they'd built a new home at East Lindfield on the North Shore.

I see, and you moved up there. How easy, or perhaps how difficult, was it to be accepted into their family, to be part of their life?

They accepted me very well, but I had in the back of my mind that I was interruptin' their life quite a bit as they never worked. They had other income. So they was able to go away for one or two weeks at a time several times of the year.

I see, and did you stop them going, or did you go with them on those trips?

No, they didn't stop me from goin'. I went with them and thoroughly enjoyed it. We went to Jenolan Caves for a couple of weeks, and we'd go down to Manly for a couple of weeks. This is where I missed a bit of schooling.

Did you meet other children on those trips, or were you very much involved in their life?

No, I was mostly involved in their life. This is one reason why I think I was standin' in their way to a certain extent.

Yes, sure, you could imagine that with a youngish couple. While you were with them I think you went to school. What's your general memory of school? Was that a good or difficult experience?

Well, it was quite difficult really because I went to Crows Nest High and actually it was a little bit higher than my standard.

So you had a bit of trouble fitting into the lessons.

Yes, into the lessons. There was one or two lessons that I'd never done before.

Did the teachers go out of their way much to help you, given that you had a different background?

Yes, they'd try and help you, but I think I was a little bit slow on the pick-up.

And what about boys at the school? Did they see you as somebody special, or did they tease a bit for being the English kid?

No, there was no teasing whatsoever. I think they was more interested to know what the other side of the world was like.

So school, putting that together, how would you sum up your time at school there?

I enjoyed my time at school, which was only for fifteen months. But I don't know quite - no problem with the children, no problem with the teachers. Any problems, I think it was me.

(Laughs) Right. That's a common enough story, that one. Bob, the other changes in Australian life - we'll come to the bush life later on - the climate and all that sort of thing, how did you react to that?

Well, my first Christmas dinner was on the beach at Manly, which was a vast difference to England. Normally we were sitting near the fire or in the room with a fire to keep warm. It was a totally different atmosphere for Christmas.

Could you tell us anything more about that Christmas at Manly?

Christmas at Manly. Well, instead of having roast turkey or pork, or something like that, we just had sandwiches. That's one of the things that stands in my mind today.

(15.00) And were you just picnicking or swimming as well?

Picnickin' and swimmin'. That was my first taste of the beach, really.

> Really, that was the very first visit. Those great beaches and the sand, how did they strike you?

I liked it but the sand can get very hot to sit on.

> Sure. Just going back to the period that you spent with the Goodmans. Is there anything else that you think's significant of that time that you'd like to tell about?

No, I don't think so.

> I think it was, though, while you were living in Sydney, Bob, that you had some days visiting an escort. Tell us about that.

Yes. While I lived in Sydney there was two other boys that I'd met, they lived at the next suburb to where I did. And Leslie Goodman used to take us up to where one of the escorts lived and we'd often spend an afternoon up there with her. She enjoyed it and we enjoyed it because we knew her so well on the ship.

> What sort of things did you do together?

We didn't do a great lot up there. It was more talkin' of different things that went on, up at the house where she lived. But mostly walkin' around the garden. She was very interested in the garden. I'm not much of a gardener myself.

> Well, let's move on, Bob. There was, I know, at the end of the period with the Goodmans, I think you decided it was time to move on. I think part of the story was you weren't too thrilled with Sydney as a place.

No, I didn't like Sydney. Sydney was all rush and bustle. Coming from the country like I did, I wasn't keen on the city. So that's why I chose to go in the country on a farm.

> Now, the move from the Goodman's, I think was initiated by yourself.

Well, that was initiated because I didn't want to stay in Sydney. So I couldn't expect Leslie and Alfreda to move from Sydney. So I thought, well, I'd better go to the country on a farm myself.

> And I think you wrote to the CORB people. Tell us about that letter.

After I'd spent approximately two years on this farm, only getting thirteen shillings a week and my keep, so I thought, well, there must be a little bit more money somewhere else. So I wrote to the CORB and asked them if there was another farm, which next thing I know I was told that I'd be going to another farm. I'd be picked up and taken to another farm, which I was. I was taken to Raymond Terrace on Mr and Mrs Smith's farm.

> And how much did they pay you?

I think they paid me about another five shillings a week.

> Well, we'll come on to the details of the country life and the pay in a moment, Bob. But just stepping back for a moment to leaving the Goodmans. When you left the Goodmans in Sydney, did you also write a letter, or not?

No, I didn't write a letter when I left Goodmans.

> How was that organised? How did the CORB people know what you needed?

I had to go into the city and sit for a test to see what I'd be suitable for doing in the workforce, and that's where I suggested to the people, when I took this test that what I would like to do.

> I see, this is after you left school.

No, this was just before I left school.

> But knowing you were leaving school.

Yes.

> I see. Now, that aptitude test was that, do you know, run by the CORB people or was that run by somebody else?

I don't know who it was run by, but it was run for the CORB.

> And during the time, both with the Goodmans and where you stayed at other places - the different farms - did you ever have visits from CORB people, or letters from CORB, coming to check up to see how you were - to make sure things were going okay?

The only place CORB people came was when I lived with the Goodmans in Sydney. That's the last time that I can recall anybody visitin' where I lived.

> Tell us about that visit. What happened?

They just come round and see if you're okay, but the last time there was a person called - I was still in bed actually - and Mrs Goodman answered the door. And she thought I'd gone to school but I was still in bed. And as she was talkin' to this woman at the door I'm listening at the bedroom door.

> What was the conversation, do you remember?

No, I've got no idea what the conversation was.

(20.00) And then after you left the Goodmans you, it seems, slipped out of their net a bit.

Yes, I seem to .... Well, I thought I seemed to disappear out of the CORB control but they knew where I was all the time.

That you provided them with addresses.

No, I didn't provide them with any addresses. They knew the addresses without me advisin' them.

Via the people you went to.

Yes.

Okay. Well, I think we might just leave it there for a minute. [Interruption.]

Bob, you did move after the period in Sydney to these different families in the country. Thinking generally about those families, how easy was it to get into their different country way of life?

Very easy, actually. Coming up from the country originally, I could fit in with them very well. It was the type of life I liked, and the families wherever I stayed accepted me for what I was.

So you were part of their general family life, besides actually working on the farm.

Yes, wherever they went, if I wanted to go, I could go.

You were saying, I think, that you were fairly practical. Did that help in this process?

I think so because doin' things practically makes it much easier to adapt yourself to do different jobs and repair things, et cetera.

Tell us a little, Bob, about the living conditions on one of these farms. I think in some ways they were quite similar. Did you sleep in an outbuilding or did you sleep in the house?

No, the room that I had in the first place was a room attached to the house and I had meals with the family. The second place, I was in a bedroom of the house with the son - seemed to fit in very well.

They were long days, I think - differing a bit from farm to farm - but I think you started pretty early and so on. Tell us about that.

Well, dairy farmin' is always early risin': get the cows milked in time to catch the milk lorry. In those days it was all churns. Today it's much easier, it's all tankers. But the first place was about four o'clock in the morning and you'd come in about half-past five, six o'clock, for tea at night. The second place I worked at, we started milkin' at three o'clock in the morning and you worked till dark.

Did you sleep at all during the day, or not?

No, no sleep durin' the day unless you'd had a night out the night before and went to sleep under the cow while you was milkin' her.

The evenings, did you do much in the evenings or were you normally just thinking of getting to bed?

No, if we did anything in the evenings, we'd go to a neighbour's place for a few games with their children, and they would come to our place sometimes to make our own entertainment.

What sort of things did you do?

There was dominoes and cards and listenin' to the radio - different things like that.

You were saying at the Raymond Terrace place, you used sometimes to go to dances. How did you get there, and what did you do?

Yes, we had eight miles to go to a dance, and sometimes a bit further. We always rode our horses - that was our means of transport. We'd tie our horses up outside the dance hall, dance, and then ride home. Before we got home we were asleep on our horses and the horses always took us home.

That's a lovely picture, and so different to England, Bob. Could you tell us anything more about those night rides by horseback to the dances? Were you going through the bush along a track? Tell us about that.

We used to go along and you suddenly, if you woke up and found the horse had stopped, so you had to stop and open the gate - wake up and open the gate for the horse to go through. Other than that the horse would take you right home.

How do you sleep on a horse without coming off?

Very easily. You used to shut your eyes if they were just walkin' along.

That's a lovely image of the bush night. Do you remember the smells of the bush at night?

You'd get all different smells of a night-time, different trees are out in flower and that sort of thing.

They were different, obviously, to the smells of England. How do you remember them? Could you actually describe them?

They seemed to be very sweet smells from the blossoms, from the trees.

And the dances themselves, were they fun?

(25.00) Yes, great fun. Used to be a lot of troops there, of course, because there was camps around.

I see, right. So this was troops and the locals.

Yes.

And lots of girls?

Yes, lots of girls, yes. I'd never get tied up with the girls though.

The period while you were working on these stations, I know you had different wages you've told us about. How many days a week did you work?

Seven days a week - that's milkin' seven days a week.

You were saying, when you left Raymond Terrace, I think there was an issue there that you'd passed eighteen - that affected things.

Yes, when I became eighteen my employer had to pay higher wages, so therefore they would rather have cheap labour than what they would have an adult workin' for them. So he found me another farm to go on to.

How did you feel about that?

I didn't mind. I just accepted it. I went on to this other farm and things worked out alright.

Well, let's go on to talk about some of the actual farm life, Bob. Just for the record, Bob said the Singleton farm was about eighty acres and the Raymond Terrace farm about two hundred acres. Tell us about milking in those days.

Milking was all done by hand, and when the cows dried off we used to turn them into the bush over the mountains. And then periodically we used to know how they were goin', so we'd have to go and look for them. Most of the time we used to find them, they'd be down at the waterhole havin' a drink or something like that. So we never had to roam right through the mountains to find them.

Tell us about one of these mustering rides. When would you have made your preparations, when would you have set off?

After breakfast in the morning we'd set off and we'd make a late milkin', so it would be about seven or eight hours ridin', roundin' up the cattle to see which ones have got to be brought down to the pastures.

You hadn't ridden, I know, in England. How easy was it to learn to ride? In particular, to ride through scrub?

It's not very easy to ride really, because wherever I went to start riding, I was never allowed to use a saddle. So if the horse moved any particular way I'd slide off, and of course you have several falls. Until you've had three falls they don't like you to have a saddle.

Could you explain why that was?

For safety reasons. If you're a new beginner and if you fell off and you got your foot hooked up in the stirrup, then the horse could drag you along.

I see, really so it was just that you'd come off cleanly and that would be it.

That's right.

Could you tell us anything more about those rides up into the hills to muster out cattle?

As you can imagine, as you don't stick to the tracks in the bush when you're mustering the cattle, you've got to go all ways. Sometimes you might get a branch under your chin, or you've got to duck underneath it, and all that sort of thing. It's not easy.

You'd really have to have your wits about you. The cattle, after they'd been up in the hills for a while, did they get at all wild, or were they still fairly tame?

Oh no, they're tame cattle when they go up and they don't mind coming back down again. They seemed to know where they were going when you bring them down on to the flats again.

I think you also did quite a lot of work preparing the ground to grow fodder crops. How did you do that?

That was with ploughin' and harrowin' and rolling. And when the crop needed harvestin' with the harvesters - five horses on the harvester - when the oats needed cutting and harvestin'.

Did you do the harvesting?

Yes, I helped with it.

Driving the teams?

Yes, I had a team of five horses.

Tell us about that. It must be quite a sensation to have five draught horses ahead of you.

It's strange that these horses, they know just what to do. They don't take a lot of driving. It was just keepin' them straight more than anything.

And you'd have following on the big harvesting gear.

That's right, yes, on the big harvesters.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification: Ed Stokes, Evacuee Children, Bob Puxted, tape two, side one.

Bob, do you remember any other work you used to do with the horses?

Well, there's not much else you can do with them, really. We used to take, when we had an hour of an afternoon, we'd take our rabbit traps over the hills and set the rabbit traps. Set about a hundred a day. And then we'd have to go round them of a night-time - go round about seven or eight o'clock at night and about one o'clock in the morning. It's very eerie walkin' through with a hurricane lantern through the bush and hear different things movin'.

Yes, I can imagine it was. Tell us a bit more about that rabbit trapping. You'd go out twice a night, would you, to check your traps?

Yes, we'd go out twice a night, and then quite often after breakfast. There was two of us - the son of the farmer I was workin' for. We decided no good two goin' together so one went one, and one went the other time.

A hundred traps, how many rabbits would you bag generally on a night?

Well, you could bag, I'd say, about 130.

I see, what, night after night?

Yes, night after night. And we used to just take the skins off them and bring the skins home and sell the skins.

Yes, I know the rabbits were very bad. I didn't realise they were quite as thick as that. Carcasses were left?

Yes, we used to light a fire and burn the carcasses.

Tell us again about going through the bush at night. You were saying it was eerie. Was this walking round open paddocks or through scrubby country?

That was walkin' through the scrub country where we set the rabbit traps.

Did you ever get lost or perhaps think you were going to get lost?

No, we seemed to follow our tracks pretty well because a lot of things are only just off the track and you come back onto the track again through the bush.

Any other memories about rabbits?

No, I don't think I've got any others about rabbits, really.

Foxes, I think, were another pest.

Oh yes, foxes were - if you got a fox in a rabbit trap they were very hard to kill. We used to set baits for them sometimes, because you can always smell a fox if you can't see it.

And did you do any shooting?

Yes, we used to shoot occasionally. We used to shoot for the flying foxes that were eatin' the fruit and that sort of thing.

The other work around the properties you were on, no doubt there were yards to maintain, equipment and so on. What do you remember of that?

Yes, we used to maintain all our stock yards - fences. We used to cut timber, split our own fence posts out of the trees, and they all had to be done by hand, no chainsaws or anything like that.

Tell us about that, working with an axe, felling timber, splitting fence posts.

Well, you split fence posts - you use a cross-cut saw, two of you, and then you can take the bark off, cut it up into lengths and then you have to split it - it all depends the size of the tree to the amount of posts you will get out of it.

And did you also build fences?

Oh yes, we done miles of fencin'.

Tell us about fencing. Tell us how you did it. Was it easy or was it difficult work?

A lot of it was over the mountain with a crowbar, diggin' the stones out - rock out - things like that, so as you could get a post in. It wasn't easy work. When you didn't have fencin' to do, in the winter time, you used to go on the side of the mountain, grubbing all the undergrowth out so that more grass could grow.

I see, that was to produce grass for the cattle. How did you grub out the undergrowth?

(5.00) With a mattock - swingin' a mattock all day long.

And then burning it off?

No, we never used to burn it off because of bushfires - too much undergrowth to burn. It could set a large bushfire.

Did you ever, Bob, have any particularly dry seasons, that you remember, when water was really short?

Yes, we used to get very short of water. We only had tank water. And there was several times there when we sent our milk away. The milk lorry used to bring churns of water back with them to replenish our water supply.

This is for the homestead?

Yes, this is for the homestead.

Did you ever have any times of severe drought when there just wasn't the water for the stock?

Yes, we've had to drive the cattle to water - down to the river which was mostly salt water. But they would drink it because there was no other water for them to drink.

Those times must be very difficult on a farm. Do you remember was there much wear and tear on the families you stayed with through those bad years?

Yes, I think there was a lot of stress built up with those sort of things. I've seen the time, when I was at Singleton, we had to chop trees down for the cattle to eat the leaves off.

Cutting scrub to feed cattle.

Cutting big trees down - big ironbark trees down so they could eat the leaves off the trees for food.

How do you remember doing that at the time? Was there great regret knowing that these big trees were coming down?

There was regret, but we used to utilise them for fence posts, but the cattle had to eat something. Like, the farmer couldn't afford to buy hay in so we had to find some other ways of feeding them.

Sure. You were saying that there were some bushfires at different times and I think there was one particularly bad one at, was it Dungog?

Yes, Dungog. I went up to see some friends at Dungog one Sunday and I was fightin' bushfires all day long because of the wind. And there was two homesteads burnt out, hay barns and things like that. There was a terrible lot of cattle burnt that day, and I'm afraid we had to kill them because they were burnt too far.

Yes, that must be a terrible thing to have to do. How did you go about that? First of all, how did you try to put out the fire, and what did you do later with the cattle?

We just got a branch off a tree and we tried to beat it out, so's it didn't travel any further. Regarding the cattle, well, we just had to use an axe or something like that to hit them on the back of the head to kill them.

That must be ghastly.

Yes, it was, because a beautiful herd of cattle and you're gonna lose them like that.

Just going on, Bob, keeping on the farm life. Do you have any other things you remember particularly about these different farms you worked on? And in particular, do you remember anything that seemed so different from Britain?

[Interruption.]

Bob, during this time in Australia how aware were you of the war continuing on in England and Europe?

I used to send a letter about once a month. There was a telegram card allocated to us from the government to allow us to send a telegram once a month to our parents just to let them know that we were okay. I used to receive cards when my father went to London or somewhere - he would send me a card. And my mother used to write from home - letters from home. But that was our way of correspondence in those days.

Did you get any sense in the letters of how much they missed you?

Not really, no, that wasn't mentioned at all.

And how much during all the years in Australia, Bob, did the family in Kent remain in your thoughts?

Well, they were always in our mind because we were thinkin' one day we hoped to go back and see them again.

You were saying that when you got to Australia you were, in a way, more homesick than when you were on the *Batory*. Did that homesickness fade or increase or stay the same while you were in Australia?

No, I think it faded actually as time went on. The first couple of years was the worst and then you were meetin' different people, doin' different things. I think it eases your mind away from bein' homesick.

Sure. Just one other thing about England during the war, Bob. Besides the family aspect, how aware were you, or not, of the general destruction that had been heaped on England during those years?

(10.00) Well, I didn't realise the destruction that had gone on until I returned in 1947, and then a lot of vacant land and all new buildings, then it showed me how much damage was done.

When the war did come to an end, and just for the record of course, this was after you had gone on from the farms to Maitland plastering. And then I think in Newcastle you were working too?

Yes, I was doin' a bit of lorry drivin' and I got to the BHP - workin' at the BHP.

The war ended, did you immediately organise to go home? Did people contact you immediately war ended, or not?

No, nobody contacted me about return when the war was finished. The first I knew of returnin' to England was late November 1946 when - as I was workin' at the steelworks - I received a telephone call. I had to go to Head Office and make this phone call and I was asked whether I wanted to go back or stay. If I wanted to go back I had to be on the next ship that was leavin' early December or remain in Australia. So I chose to return to England in December.

> Just going back to the previous year when war did actually end, Bob, of course by then you were over eighteen. Had you, once the war ended, yourself wanted to seek out CORB to find out about going back or were you quite content to stay in Australia for the time being?

No, I never contacted CORB at all. I was content to stay here. I seemed to be settled. So I knew nothing of going back to England until I received this phone call in November 1946.

> And there'd no letters from your parents or from CORB saying that once the war was over you could go back?

Well, right from the beginning when we were told when war was finished we could return, but right from that day, right up till November '46 nobody had contacted me prior to that.

> It does seem that perhaps moving out of the cities you'd got outside the CORB influence a bit, I don't know about that. But anyway, the trip back. You went back by sea again with, I think, one other CORB person.

Yes, there was another chappy, John Coleman from Tasmania, he and I were the last two to leave on the *Rangitata*, December 1946.

> Leaving Australia, steaming out of Sydney, I think, what were ...

Melbourne.

> Sorry, Melbourne. What were your thoughts? About Australia? About England? About what had happened in the last six years?

Well, I was very happy with six years in Australia. No regrets. But I thought it was an opportunity to go back and see my parents and family. Whether I came back or not, I didn't know at the time.

> So you left with a kind of open mind about Australia.

Yes.

> Well, when you did get back to England, what were your impressions of England? Not so much your family but the country, what do you remember of that?

The first thing that impressed me was the narrow streets and high hedges - you can't see over the fence - that sort of thing. But everybody seems to be workin' all the time and not havin' any pleasures.

Building up the country again after the war.

Yes.

And how about the climate?

The climate, well, as you know, December in England - January in England's very cold - snow. Not a very pleasant weather to go to.

And it wasn't nice to be back in the English winter when ...

Not really, no. I wasn't keen about it, but I was notified - sent a letter twelve months after I'd been back in England, if I'd like to return to Australia but I chose to stay in England. But I don't know, really I suppose I should have come back earlier.

Who sent you the letter about coming back to Australia?

Australia House.

I see, that's interesting. So they obviously had your name as an ex-CORB person.

That's right, yes.

And what sort of assistance were they offering to get you back here?

The immigration - £10.

Well, going to the family side of it, Bob, going back. How was it getting back to see your family after all those years?

(15.00) It was nice to go back but I don't think we really fitted in with the family, because they've been leading their life and we've been leading a totally different life in Australia.

Yes, sure. Your life on these farms must have been so different and I guess you'd also grown up a lot. It seems you'd become quite - reading or listening between the lines - a fairly independent young man.

Oh yes, I travelled around quite a bit in Australia. When I went back to England, well, it was a different thing. You didn't seem to have the money to travel like you did in Australia - to get around. Things seemed to be so much easier in Australia.

And I guess once you went back you did stay in one place rather, did you?

Yes, very seldom went any further than eighteen miles from home.

Yes, it is different in that way - the two countries. When you went back, Bob, could you talk at all with your parents about the experiences you had in

> Australia, and perhaps about their feelings while you'd been away? How they'd felt not having you?

Yes, I could refer to them. They asked a lot of questions. I explained to them what it was like.

> Were they keen to hear about Australia, or was it somewhere somehow beyond their understanding?

No, they were very keen to hear about Australia and what it's like, because my parents have never travelled overseas to see other countries, which made them more interested than anybody else, really.

> And what about the other personal things? Could they talk to you at all about how they'd felt during the war, what they'd gone through?

I don't think that crossed their mind, I don't think, and I never asked the question, so that was a thing that was never discussed.

> Well, just moving on a bit, Bob. I know you did later marry, or in fact, you lived at home from January '47 to April '49 when you married a Sylvia - here today. About nine years later you came to Australia , 1958. Why was that?

Well, I always wanted to come back and it was a very hard decision for Sylvia to make because she, one of sixteen in the family, and a big decision to leave her parents and family. But she suddenly made her mind up, well, let's go to Australia if you want to go. We've had two trips back to England and now I don't think Sylvia wants to go again.

> So has Australia lived up to your hopes?

Yes, Australia's lived up to what we expected, and Sylvia seems to be very happy.

> Just a few final questions about the scheme itself, Bob. Could you say how you think CORB - coming to Australia - changed you as a person, if it did?

I think CORB did change us because it give all us children a different outlook in life to what we'd been used to, which is more open. We led a very sheltered life in England compared to here. And I think really it was hard for the children, it was hard for the parents, but I think it was the right decision.

> So overall it would seem you're saying CORB for you was a blessing not a curse.

Yes, definitely.

> If the war's duration, the length of war, had been known do you think you would still have gone?

That I wouldn't know. I don't know because we couldn't foresee what was going on actually.

And if you had been a parent in similar situations of war and the danger of invasion and bombing and so on, with youngish children, how do you think you would have reacted yourself?

Now that is a very hard decision, but I don't think I would have offered them the choice. It's a very big decision for a parent to make.

You would not have offered the choice.

I don't think so.

But are you saying in that you would have suggested they go, or you would have kept them?

Well, I think I would have kept them, actually. If they was a bit older, yes, I'd say go, but not at such a young age.

By that you mean your age?

Yes, my age and younger.

(20.00) Well, I was just asking Bob about any final questions but he feels no. Bob, on behalf of the War Memorial in Canberra, for doing this and your time, thank you.

Thanks very much, Ed.

END OF INTERVIEW