

Interviewee: Roy Bartlett

Interviewer: Malin Lundin

Date: 26.10.2010

Interviewer: Ok, it should be recording now. This is an interview with Roy Bartlett and the date is the 26th of October 2010 and the interviewer is Malin Lundin. Would you be able to tell me your date of birth please?

Roy: June 1930.

Interviewer: Ok, so how old were you when the war started then?

Roy: Nine at the outbreak of war.

Interviewer: Ok. And where were you living?

Roy: In South Ealing.

Interviewer: And who were you living with?

Roy: My parents who had a hardware shop and two much older brothers and sister.

Interviewer: How old were they?

Roy: I can't honestly remember of the top of my head. But there was fourteen years difference between me and my next brother.

Interviewer: Ok.

Roy: I could never understand why I was referred to as the mistake [laughs].

Interviewer: Ok.

Roy: Yeah, mum and dad had a hardware shop and three storeys above so the – the rooms above obviously were the living quarters.

Interviewer: Ok. Can you remember the first day of the war? The 3rd of September 1939?

Roy: Very vividly and the one thing I do remember is that prior to the outbreak of war they were testing the air raid sirens and I can remember standing at the back door to the garden with my mother and she was assuring me, 'Well, don't worry Roy, it's only a practice. They'll never really be used, so don't worry about it'. Then watching in amazement as my tabby cat came hurtling over the fence shot between my

legs and hid under the kitchen sink and that was to be his ritual every time the sirens went. I suppose, one must conclude, compared to his nocturnal howl he must have thought that was one hell of a big moggie out there [laughs]. There's some good anecdotes about the cat.

Interviewer: So did you go down to the shelter when the sirens went?

Roy: Well, first of all I was evacuated.

Interviewer: So when were you evacuated?

Roy: One week after the declaration of war. We seem to have been one of the last schools to go. All the talk of school had been about this weird arrangement called evacuation. As far as I could figure out it meant that you were taken away from home, sent hundreds of miles away to live with people you never met in your life but was supposed to have a good time. I was definitely not impressed and said to my mum, 'I don't care whether you do have me on this evacuation lark. I'm not going'. Then found that I was the only one in my class not going and, of course, face the teacher who waived her finger and said, 'If you think I'm going to teach you on your own you've got another think coming. You go along with the rest of them' [laughs]. So I relented but just prior to that we – the only time I recall being frightened at the prospect of war was when gasmasks arrived at school. A very bossy lady instructor, 'Stand still. Keep quiet. I'm going to show you how to put your gasmask on'. When it came to my turn I was so pleased that that window thing misted over because the tears were trickling down my face. I thought we'd have to wear them all the time, even in bed. Then one of the more enterprising lads found that if you in – she said, 'Breathe normally', but this lad found that if you breathe in heavily and then breathe out quickly the air couldn't escape quick enough and would flutter out between the soft rubber part below the ears with a resounding, prrrrrrrr, I'll leave it to your imagination the class trying to keep control after that [laughs].

Interviewer: So when was this? When did the gasmasks arrive?

Roy: Two or three weeks before the war and on the morning when war was declared, again, it's a very vivid memory, sitting round in the kitchen with my parents and brothers and sister, knowing there was to be an important announcement by Neville Chamberlain at eleven o'clock¹. The old crackling radio, dad was fiddling about with it and then and then it was delayed to eleven fifteen. Mum sat with her arm around my shoulder and I can sort of still sense that now, they said war had been declared, she stiffened and muttered, 'Oh, my god. Not again'. See mum and dad had lived through the First World War. They knew what it meant.

Interviewer: Had your dad served in the First World War?

¹ 5 min

Roy: Yes, he had but he was fortunate he served in the Middle East. So he was spared the horrendous battlefields.

Interviewer: Did he ever talk about his experience in the war?

Roy: Not very much. No, he had goodies box upstairs which I used to love to explore. The only thing he did mention was that he – he was quite proud of having shaken the hand of the Lawrence of Arabia. Not sure what the circumstances were [laughs]. But he had this goodies box upstairs that I used to love to look in and it had his medals, photographs, lounging against palm trees with a white pith hat on and all that. Various buttons and badges and something which always caught my eye which was a gold ring and he said, 'You like that don't you?', he caught me one day. I said, 'Yeah', he said, 'When you are twenty-one that's yours'. So this is actually a replica [shows ring on finger].

Interviewer: Ok.

Roy: Because I passed it on to my son when he was twenty-one and he is about to pass it on to my grand-son. That's fascinating where it's originated from – but we will never know [laughs].

Interviewer: Oh, so you – ok.

Roy: Anyway, I digress. Evacuation, we left at half past six I think it was. Very early in the morning outside the school, where there were red London double-decker busses lined up. All the dads stood to one side. You see, in those days it was not the done thing for men to show emotion. Certainly not to shed tears. And so we were given a packed lunch and a carrier bag with goodies in it and it was a packet of biscuits, a tin of bully-beef, corned beef, and a pot of jam and the teachers told us that was for our first meal and to this day I cannot figure out how you would combine bully-beef, biscuits and jam. All the mums were crying or trying not to cry. I know that mine was saying that, 'Don't worry about it. It will be a good adventure and you'll be with nice people' and I suppose to us it was an adventure cos few of us had travelled very far. We loaded on to these buses and in doing so all mums were crying platitudes that they're famous for, 'Don't forget to write!', 'Be good!', 'Don't forget to change your socks!', 'Wash behind your ears!' [laughs]. The journey to us seemed to go on forever and confirmed our suspicion that it's got to be hundreds of miles away. But in fact it was only to a village called Wooburn Green which is near High Wycombe and in later life I used to drive there every day cos I worked nearby. So it was only what twenty-one miles [coughs]. I wonder whether you can stop.

Interviewer: Do you want me to pause?

Roy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

[Recorder paused].

Interviewer: I'll turn it back on.

Roy: On arrival at the village green we were – sorted out. I think the best expression, like bundles of washing in the Village Hall. People were coming in and sorting us out. Now, we were generally known as cockney kids, it was anybody from London, it didn't matter where you lived, you were cockney kids. It was a bit of a farming community and I now realise that the bigger boys were² being taken by the farmers, might be useful to help on the land. After that little girls because they would be less trouble and my friend and I were among the leftovers, I'm a bit upset about that now [laughs]. We were put in a car and toted around the village on offer. They hadn't gone hundred yards, I suppose, the car stopped and it was surrounded by women peering in. My friend and I were terrified, we was huddled in the back of the car and I can remember all these comments, 'Poor little Londoners', 'Don't he look pale', 'Who's going to have these two then?' and I first thought, 'Don't they talk funny? We must be hundreds of miles from home' and a kindly couple opened the doors and said, 'Hello boys, would you like to come and stay with us?'. We had little option [laughs] we followed them up a long garden path to a neat little bungalow and as soon as we opened the door one thing that caught our eye was the full paraphernalia of a fireman, complete with glistening brass helmet in those days, and this tended to break the ice and foster dad, Bill, was in the village fire brigade. So that helped really to break the ice. Then at lunchtime for our first meal, the lady, Connie, had prepared a meal, which we refused to eat. The teachers told us we got to have the jam, biscuits and bully-beef and I can only think – she said, 'What! Alright then I'll open the tin for you to share', 'No, you can't do that, we each got to have our own tin'. I can only imagine talking to her in later life, she thought, 'What have I done?' [laughs]. A long story short, now that commenced a firm family friendship, although I was only there for nine months and mum and dad used to come down to visit me whenever they could and this friendship developed that lasts until this day. Because though, obviously my mum and dad have died and the foster parents, it's continued now through their grandson and great-grandson and we still correspond and chat on the phone. So that's what? Seventy years.

Interviewer: So h-have you gone back to see them?

Roy: Yes, as often as we could. My wife and I went down and foster dad Bill died quite young in his sixties but Auntie Connie [laughs] kept going till she was ninety-four and we saw her just a short while before she passed away. And she was – lovely sense of humour, every time we went down for tea there would be bully-beef and biscuits [laughs] and at the end of the meal I still had to put my hand up and say, 'Please may I leave the table' [laughs]. It was interesting, the grandson when they were clearing the bungalow, they found – he had a chest-of-drawers, he was renovating it and a slip of paper fell out and it

² 10 min

was a poem that I'd written when I was nine years old. So Connie must have kept it and somehow it got jammed at the top of the drawer.

Interviewer: Did you get it back?

Roy: I've got it. Mmm.

Interviewer: So you had a – your experience as evacuated for those nine months was that – was it a good experience?

Roy: Oh, very good experience. Yes, I was one of the very lucky ones. Other children I know who were not so lucky and some were indeed very unlucky.

Interviewer: How – how did the local children treat you?

Roy: Sorry?

Interviewer: How did the local children treat you?

Roy: That's interesting because the sudden influx of a lot of kids from London put the local schools and education system under great strain and as a temporary measure we were educated, if that's the right word³, in the local village hall sitting on the floor. But when the children started going – returning home and the evacuation scheme was probably in dire straits after six months and by nine months I think it's fair to say the majority of children were trekking back. I mean, parents were missing them, understandable. Kids were homesick and nothing had happened, it was the period – what they called the Phoney War. Nine months where very little happened, except at sea, and it was many years later that I found out the primary reason for me coming back home was that Connie and Bill only been married a year and she was expecting a baby. Not a subject that would be discussed with a nine year old boy in those days and I really did not find this out until many years later. That was the primary reason. I came back home, as I say, after nine months so literally only eight weeks before the Battle of Britain commenced and – or two or three months before the Blitz and not really good timing [laughs]. When I came back home I found that both my brothers had been called up, my sister was now working in a munitions factory, my mother had joined the WVS, had a nice green uniform with a bonnet, dad was an air raid warden and he'd become caretaker of the school which I attended. I was not particularly happy about that having dad in constant attendance. Interestingly the cellar beneath the shop had been converted into a public air raid shelter. I know it had very substantial extra support, a secondary roof, all bolted on, pavement access and communicating doors been knocked through into adjoining cellars to provide alternative means of escape and ultimately there were fifteen bunks installed. I could never

³ 15 min

understand, you see, we had a bank that was next door but one, they didn't put a hole through that wall [laughs]. No school at that point, coming back the school was shut because, theoretically, all the children were evacuated and I guess it gave the authorities quite – quite a problem. Many of the younger teachers had been called up, dad was now care-taker of an empty school and I'm pretty sure it's fair to say they had to drag a lot of teachers out of retirement. Kicking and screaming I imagine [laughs]. It must have been quite a number of weeks before school re-opened and I guess we were running the streets. I certainly wasn't allowed to. My mum and dad were quite disciplinarians but there was certainly no school. How we ever learnt anything, ah, I really wonder now and I suppose the next phase then was the commencement of the Battle of Britain. Although the sirens used to go, school had re-opened, the sirens would go and we would be up and down the shelters which had been built in the playground, long tunnel-like things, lit by hurricane lamps, though very dim, cold, damp. There wasn't a lot of activity directly over London. Much of it was taking place over southern counties in the Battle of Britain daylight. Initially down the shelter we would sing or chat and then some silly teacher decided we ought really to try and learn something and number puzzles and quizzes were devised which was quite good fun and ensured that we at least picked up a little bit of knowledge, I suppose. Not a lot. As the Battle of Britain commenced we could see a lot of the action taking place but⁴ mainly in the far distance. You could see the contrails in the lovely summer's day in those days. You could see the contrails and battles taking place but it was all in the far distance but nevertheless the sirens would keep going and then, of course, it developed into, as we now know, a complete change of tactics because towards the end of September the Germans realised that they were not going to win the Battle of Britain. They needed that numerical superiority and mastery of the sky in order for the invasion to take place, an essential ingredient, and it was postponed I think on three occasions and finally terminated on the 19th of September 1940 after Goering, the – the Luftwaffe Commander, had thrown absolutely everything at the RAF and failed. And as early as the next day the invasion barges started dispersing from the ports in France. We were not to know that and I can clearly now remember the first night of the Blitz. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, a lot of people in mum's and dad's shop, you could hear the aircraft, the siren had gone, but, of course, what was happening, unbeknown to us at that time was that – I think records say there were a thousand aircraft involved in two waves covering eight hundred miles – square miles of sky and their principal target was, of course, the East End which is now known as Docklands. Bearing in mind that in those days London was one of the biggest ports in the world. What we didn't realise was that the thunder of aircraft, they had in fact unloaded their cargo of bombs and were reaching Ealing, the western suburbs, to turn and go back home. So it was still very, very frightening because we were totally unaware of what was going on and the shelter, obviously, was packed. But just prior to that we'd gone all way upstairs, we had thirty-six stairs to the top of our house, and there was a parapet at the top where you could get out and it was a panoramic

⁴ 20 min

view over London. On a clear day you could see the dome of St. Paul's and with a bit of neck stretching, maybe binoculars, the top of Big Ben. It was a fantastic sight, I mean, we realised this was for real. The anti-aircraft guns were going, the searchlights were now in action and I can still – in my mind I picture that red glow over the horizon and pillars of smoke were rising which by next morning having encompassed London like a big umbrella and you could smell the acrid smoke of burning wood and it's an image that I don't think I'll ever forget. That was the commencement of the Blitz and little did we realise at that time that staying down the shelter all night would become many, many months exceeding the year of nocturnal existence. Perhaps it's just as well we didn't know at that time.

Interviewer: Do you remember how –

Roy: Can you put that off?

Interviewer: Yeah.

[Recorder paused].

Roy: We were – we were scared. I think that's a masterpiece of understatement. It was a sudden awful reality. But strangely enough life adapted and there appeared to be a philosophical attitude. If it's got your name on it, so be it. Life carried on as normally as possible. People went to work, we went to school⁵. We were all very, very tired. I can remember nodding off at the school desk, waking up with a start and realising that our teacher was sound asleep. Just got on with it, quite remarkable really when you think back. Mum and dad kept the shop open, of course, and they were all very busy and I wonder now how they could cope with all these different changes. I mean, dad worked in the shop, he had his warden's duties and he was caretaker of the local school. Mum was doing WVS work, she became a marshal for the shelters underneath the three shops and she was keeping the shop open as well. My sister would work at a munitions factory and then be on fire-watch duty. Her husband came to stay with us and he was in the Auxiliary Fire Service and ultimately during the height of the Blitz served on one of the Fire Brigade River boats 'Massey Shaw', it's quite famous and indeed went to Dunkirk. He didn't go on the Dunkirk trip. But he was telling us extraordinary stories that on one particular night, I think it was the firebomb raid on the 31st of September, no, December that the heat was so intense from burning warehouses that the paint on the vessel in the middle of the river was blistering. He also told us about a sugar silo that caught fire and collapsed, sending molten sugar cascading down onto the river surface and enveloping the vessel. Quite extraordinary. He was unfit to join the army but I think on occasion he wished he was fitter, cos it couldn't have been much worse than that I shouldn't think. The smell of burning wood, even to this day will give me a mental picture of Arthur, trudging in in the morning, black face, sooty, wet, come home on the Underground in that condition and the house would be filled with that tang of burnt wood and it always

⁵ 25 min

–. I mean perfume is a good example, you recognise someone by perfume. To me, burnt wood: Arthur. And it still happens to this day [laughs]. The shelter was made more comfortable and we began to get the regulars and, yeah, formed a little – little clan of regulars. Being adjacent to South Ealing Underground Station, people would come dashing in there at the height of a raid and shout through the hole in the pavement, ‘Any room down there?’. On one occasion it was standing room only and a little funny story that, I suppose, perhaps it was the traumatic circumstances. I walked in my sleep for the one and only time, now my mother – mum and dad had made me a bed in one corner of the shelter and mum was always stickler to protocol and whilst everybody else could flop around in old clothes or siren suits or whatever, I had to change into pyjamas. I was not happy about that but you couldn’t resist mum. And the story goes, I didn’t know this for quite a while afterwards, I got up out of bed, took my pyjamas off and wearing nothing but a vacant expression, walked through the shelter, upstairs with mum behind me saying, ‘Come on Roy. We’ll sleep in the shelter tonight’. Whispering all those things you’re supposed to do to a sleepwalker. I reached my bedroom, she managed to turn me around, we went all the way back again to the undisguised delight of a twelve year old girl peeping out from her bunk [laughs]. I can never understand why afterwards she kept calling me wee-willy-winky [laughs]. Oh, you know, I guess those probably traumatic circumstances will⁶ induce that [laughs]. We didn’t really realise, that we were going to stay down there for so long.

Blackout was causing a few problems. I mean, I met a lady quite recently – it’s difficult now to comprehend how dark it could be on – with a bit of cloud cover. No reflected light whatsoever and you really can’t imagine it now. I met a lady recently who said she used to go to work waiving a long cane in front of her, as would a visually impaired person and there’s a river fairly close to here, called the River Brent, and it has several bends in the road and evidently quite a number of cars didn’t bother with the bend and drove straight into the river because headlights then had to be shaded to small slits as were torches and everything else. One bonus effect of that which I can remember is that on a cloudless night, the night sky would take on a velvet hue with thousands of stars which wouldn’t normally be seen and whereas now seeing a shooting star is a rare occurrence it was not. You quite often saw them, I guess that was one little bonus. Nature’s bonus and –

[Recorder paused]

Roy: I assume that with most of the – what we used to call it Docklands area, now destroyed after about three weeks of the Blitz, the attacks became far more random and widespread. Ealing, now, began to suffer quite badly and it became more personal, shall we say, and the first really heavy bombed to fall in the area was something like five hundred yards away and fortunately fell between the next block of shops and some houses into an access road and it blew out a crater that they all said was big enough to put a

⁶ 30 min

couple of double-decker buses in. Fortunately nobody was killed, so fortunate circumstances there. Gradually we realised that a pattern was developing which was a bit disconcerting, raising the question that being adjacent to South Ealing Underground Station was it that from on high the underground railway tracks resembled a mainline? Because every bomb that was falling was within a hundred yards either side of the track in our immediate locality, wasn't very nice thought as we lived four doors away from the station [laughs]. Ultimately what we need to call our – the big one, mum and dad were up in the kitchen, no, dad – dad was up in the kitchen and mum was downstairs in – in the shelter, my sister was in the kitchen with her husband who were not – none of them were on duty that night strangely enough and it was about one o'clock in the morning. The story then goes, I was sound asleep, that they heard an aircraft were overhead, they heard a distinctive crack which was strange, unidentifiable and then a momentary pause before a massive explosion. The windows came in and the debris, a blinding flash like Dante's inferno, red glow and down in the shelter it created something of, for want of a better expression, an earthquake effect. All the people in the bunks and chairs were hurled forward in to a confused jumble of bodies on the floor [clears throat] and my first conscious awareness was that my head hurt, my ears hurt and why was I lying on the stone cold floor? I tried to stand up and my leg buckled⁷, you couldn't see because the shelter was full of dust and one end of the shelter had been partitioned off as a coal store. All the coal dust was now mixing in with the debris dust and I can remember that people were passing around flasks of tea and water and then wet handkerchiefs to try to clear off some of the grime. I realise now that something had happened to my leg, it was hurting a bit and I couldn't stand up properly and the big question now was where had this struck? Apparently dad, brother-in-law and sister accompanied by two policemen who were taking shelter ventured outside in to a pea-soup fog and they realised the extent of the destruction and it was wafting from left to right this dust coming from the station area and they begun stumbling over all the shop stock. Debris getting deeper as they passed South Ealing station and started over the bridge but in the meantime they'd been misled by a fire which was down the road opposite caused by incendiary bombs presumably dropped from the same aircraft. A couple of sailors who'd missed the last train went down there to make sure. Strangely enough the lady at the house who hitherto sheltered under the stairs, her son was home on leave and made her come in to our shelter and that house was completely gutted, fortuitous. My sister said afterwards it was the awful silence as they went over the bridge, the wall of the next block of shops they could see and then nothing and it was an eerie silence except for the aircraft. It had totally destroyed six of the seven shops on – on the other side of the little side road was an Auxiliary Fire Service with a couple of vans, towing pumps, that was virtually gone there was a mansion type house opposite in its own grounds, that had virtually gone. The damage appeared to be horrendous widespread and the answer to the big crack was almost certainly that this was one of a – one of the largest devices the Luftwaffe used, not in great numbers, a parachute mine. A one

⁷ 35 min

ton warhead parachute mine, designed to explode on contact thus causing tremendous widespread damage, whereas, conventional bomb will burrow before it explodes this exploded on contact and the undetermined crack was almost certainly the parachute snapping open. Interesting that was. Next morning, I mean, the toll was grim despite people sheltering, seven had been killed, three people were never found from the butcher's shop, which was the point of impact, and twelve were seriously injured and I found documents in the local archives, a succession of reports from the scene. One in particular at two-thirty, an hour and a half later, said 'Water Board assistance urgently required survivors in danger of drowning in cellars'. Another one half an hour later, 'Heavy rescue support required, survivors still trapped'. And our shop was not a pretty sight and extraordinary enough my dad decided to open the shop [laughs]. Rather silly really cos it was open already, there was no windows, no door, the stock was out in the road⁸ and the first thing that happened next morning, a lady came back carrying one of the paraffin portable oil stoves, 'Morning Tom, I think this is yours'. It still got the cardboard label on it attached with string, Bartlett Hardware, and she lived a hundred yards away on the opposite side of the road and it was in her front garden [laughs]. Dad decided, as I say, to open the shop and mum went around stomping, muttering things like, 'The man is mad' [laughs] but typical I guess of the spirit of those days, don't matter what, carry on. Get on with it. Can't let the customers down. I didn't go to school that morning cos I was struggling and I can remember him – a customer actually coming in for something, most of them were coming to have a look and he's scrambling around on the floor trying to find something [laughs]. There's glass and debris, goods and goodness knows what because a hardware shop is like Aladdin's Cave, it sold everything and it's quite remarkable really. So in between times I was obviously a case for the local hospital and dad tried – the bus service had been cancelled cos it went right past the bomb –. Dad tried to get one of the ARP vehicles to give us a lift, that failed they were too busy so I can remember hoping along the road to the nearest bus diversion stop and then coming to the local hospital. Equally that dad was trying to shield me from what was going on because I can still picture the trolleys being wheeled around, blood-soaked blankets and at least one entirely covered blood blanket and, of course, I was very low priority. So we were there quite a number of hours and because Ealing had been hit pretty badly that night diagnosis was that my foot should have been in plaster, there was none left so sticky thick bandage had to suffice. Whether that would have made any difference in later life I really don't know but nevertheless I was lucky one really. Got me out of school for six weeks so that was a – that was one bit towards it [laughs].

Interviewer: So – yeah.

[Recorder paused].

⁸ 40 min

Roy: It seems likely that the – what I refer to as the earthquake effect down the cellar and hurling people forward, I was sleeping in, I guess the private section of the shelter with my feet maybe a foot away from the brick wall and the only assumption is that relaxed by sleep I was equally hurled forward and my right leg hit the wall with some impact and crushed the cartilage. Now perhaps at ten years old some cartilage re-generated. It wasn't a great problem throughout life. It was always very weak and did cause me problems when I was eighteen when I was called up to the RAF. I did explain to the specialist who gave me the medical what had happened and he was not totally impressed because they heard every excuse in the book and he said something like, 'You can walk can't you?'. 'Eh, yes, sir', 'You're breathing?', 'Eh, yes, sir', 'Well don't come out with these silly excuses. You're A1' [laughs]. The only time that caused me real problems was in the initial training stages, square bashing as they call it, when it gave away and I dropped my rifle [unclear] which is a cardinal sin and I was made to double round the parade ground with full pack. I never dropped it again [laughs]. No [laughs].

Interviewer: So what happened after – after this bomb had – had fallen in Ealing and damaged so much of the houses around where you lived?

Roy: Well, as an aside to that they started clearing up outside the shop⁹ quite remarkable really because the road was re-opened at lunchtime. All the rubble had been cleared away. I can't see it happening in this day and age. It was swarms of people clearing rubbish, there were metal bins placed like skips outside all the shops everybody joined in and then – I did not know this, here again don't let a boy of ten hear things like this. It was many years later that my sister-in-law said, 'Why didn't you mention the ladies hand in the shop doorway?', 'Eh, what ladies hand?' and evidently the three people that were not found this lady's hand was in our shop door way and dad found it. I think it evolved a few weeks later, when I came home from school at lunch time and water was pouring over the gutter on top of the house, I said to dad, 'Did you know the gutter was leaking?' or words to that effect, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah'. 'Yeah', he said, 'Old George is going to have a look at it tomorrow'. Old George, being the local handyman, and he was on the ladder when I came home from school and I was watching him with curiosity and he came rocketing down the ladder and was violently sick in the gutter. Now, I assumed he perhaps had one too many down the pub and I was ushered very quickly out of the way. But I did pick up the gist of it and here again, it wasn't until several years later that my sister confirmed that the down pipe was indeed blocked and when he tried to extract it, it was a scalp and the mane of a woman's hair. So no wonder things like that were kept from me. Pretty awful, really. One can only assume it was the lady from the butcher's shop. [Clears throat].

A lot of our windows were then – if the rooms weren't used much they were boarded up, not much glass was put back. I do recall that in the kitchen, mum's domain, they were boarded up and she found some

⁹ 45 min

bright flowery curtains to put up. As mum said, it brightened the place up a bit and I think then I made my, probably my first, very original joke. My Auntie Emily was there seeing them and she said, 'Oh, I like your mum's new curtains. Are they Hydrangeas?' so I said, 'No, hide der windows' [laughs]. It got to be my first original joke, I think. So here again, made the best of it and it stayed like that for, oh, it must have been years. Virtually I think every window in our house had been smashed and a lot of the frames had been loosened and subsequently they were given a cover up job and it wasn't until, I think, 1944 that it was given a fairly decent overhaul. You just made do.

Rationing was now taking a real hard effect and it seems to me that throughout the war, I can remember that a big black pot simmering on our kitchen range and mum used to put all the little scraps in there, even bacon rinds to make nutritious stew or soup. And I equally I now understand that on many occasions mum would say to me, 'No, that's alright. You eat it, I'm not hungry', I'm sure she was but she was making sure as many mothers would that I got the best of it. I remember being hungry but not to that extent. So I don't think it would have been allowed to go to that situation. As I say, school lessons were very intermittent, although the daylight raids eased off and gave a little bit more respite during the day people were so tired. It was just night, after night, after night, seventy-six consecutive night¹⁰, I think, or technically fifty-six consecutive nights a couple of breaks in the weather than on to seventy-six. There after spasmodically. But even so, you just stayed down the shelter and there were a few people who stayed down their shelter right till the end of the war. Mainly elderly, it became – they called it the 88 club, which was our address and they stayed there right till the bitter end.

Interviewer: How was it having a public shelter where you were living and having all these people coming to what was your home?

Roy: Initially, a lot of them didn't like coming through the pavement entrance. The wooden stairs were very steep and if you're a little bit elderly it was a bit of a problem. But here again, they got used to it. Initially they would come in through our front door and then down through the internal stairs and – it's worth mentioning that they used to have an awful scroop halfway down – a squeak, wooden stairs and when I was writing the book I went back to the – old house for a bit of atmosphere. Waste of time really because the whole thing has been converted into a double-fronted shop now, incorporating next door. Doors have been knocked through walls, others had been blocked up, my mother's kitchen, scullery, where the old sink used to be and her copper were she used to boil the clothes and that, is now a computer room. My bedroom turned out to be a computer room and it now has stairs going down where the window used to be into the backyard which is now a car park. I was totally disorientated. But the chap who runs it now was very interested when we went down the cellar and incredibly the stairs still creaked, very eerie. I was able to explain to him, which had always puzzled him, why was there a coal chute at the

¹⁰ 50 min

front and I was able to explain that that metal cover was the old entrance to the air raid shelter and that the screw plate at the top of it was for gas attack. Screw plate with a rubber shield that could be closed up. And why was the ceiling all chunked with holes drilled through it? That was the support bolts for the up-rights and then the chunky marks where grappling irons had been bashed in to support the other roof and the new brick work on either side was the access doors into the other cellars. So he was absolutely fascinated, he had no idea at all and it was very – for me it was a very eerie experience. It was dimly lit down there and his store shelves and the creaky stairs to me took on the original images of people. It was very creepy [laughs]. I'm glad I did it though.

Interviewer: Was there ever any talks – talk about you being evacuated when the Blitz started?

Roy: No. No. I think there were other people did get away but there was no organised scheme at that time. I don't know what the reaction of my parents would have been. I never heard it mentioned to my knowledge. There was another evacuation scheme when the flying bombs started and – but I was much older then and I was at work. I started work at fourteen. But reverting back, I've sort of chatted about our bomb and I've also said that a pattern was beginning to develop and here again, I mean, this one was the closest to the railway, no more than twenty yards, then one morning we went to school and just around the corner, police cordon, an elderly copper, 'Can't go down there lads, it's an UXB'. unexploded bomb. We looked at this massive great crater in the road, dead centre of the road it hit, the crater extended into the gardens on either side¹¹. 'Unexploded bomb?', we said, 'Oh, with that bloody great hole good job it didn't go off' [laughs]. The bomb disposal lads arrived and we were still there when they arrived and they quickly took the barriers down and it had gone off and we were chatting to them and the blast did strange things sometimes. Their conclusion was it burrowed deeply and the blast was confined by the crater it caused and went straight up in the air. So there were only a few odd windows broken. The biggest complaint was a lady shop customer she just planted all her vegetables, they were blown out of her front garden [laughs]. So that was a pity really cos we had to go to school next day [laughs]. Ultimately there were six bombs in the immediate vicinity either side of the railway, so whether that was just potluck or whether they were identifying it as a legitimate target one will never know. The accuracy of the bombing those days tends to doubt that because it wasn't very sophisticated. Another interesting anecdote from the lady I met, she told me that at the beginning of the bombing if you hadn't got an air raid shelter at that time, the Andersons were being installed in the back gardens and the Morrison shelter indoor were being delivered, the safest place was under the stairs. Now, apparently, her granny was staying with her and as usual and indeed today people hadn't quite got round to clearing out under the junk – junk hidey-hole under the stairs. So they sat on the stairs, probably the most – the least safest place. It was freezing cold cos that was a very, very cold winter 1940 and she said, 'I was sitting on the stairs, I was so cold I was shivering and I said to my Nan, I'm so cold. My teeth are chattering, are yours Nan?', and she said, 'I

¹¹ 55 min

don't know, love, they're upstairs in the glass' [laughs]. I hear some lovely stories when I talk to these various organisations [laughs].

Interviewer: Yeah.

[Recorder paused].

Roy: Have you started it?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Roy: I guess it must have been quite a bit later, I was – I got some mobility back again. I was out on my bike which suggests either a lighter evening or weekend, I really don't know on this one. But as always if I went out anywhere to meet mates I get a finger wagging from mum, 'Now don't go far away. If the sirens go you get straight back home. Do you hear me?!', 'Yeah, yeah, yeah. Ok, mum'. I went out, I duly met my mates, the air raid sirens went so, yeah, we dispersed, 'Ok, see you later', [claps hands]. And I cycled leisurely home and got fairly close to home when there was a thunder roar of aero engines from somewhere behind and I turned around in some alarm as a German Heinkel bomber came low over the roof tops and I threw myself off the bike as machineguns opened up and a line of bullets stitched its way down the centre of the road where I just been cycling. I'd by now reached the shelter of a garden wall and these bullets were ricocheting in all directions. Tarmac chipping and stones were flying in all directions, windows were being smashed and tiles. I was absolutely petrified and ashamed to realise I was sobbing with fright so I went and hid in an alley until I was sufficiently composed to go home and as I turned the corner I realised – I'm thinking 'Why is he shooting at a kid on a bike?', there was nothing – as I turned the corner there was an army convoy halted in the main road. That was almost certainly his target than just wayward shooting¹². When I got home mum said, 'Did you hear the machinegun?', I said, 'Yeah, I wonder where it was?'. If I would have come clean she never knew till this day. I'd never been allowed out again [laughs]. Very frightening. That is the one instance that I do recall being petrified [unclear]. But I can remember looking up as this aircraft went so low over and seeing the black crosses on the wings. That's the mental picture, the black crosses. Just something that popped into my mind there, cos I was imagining the road where the army convoy was. There was a very effective housewives grapevine and with food being in such short supply and one day, I guess, a woman came running into the shop saying, 'Oh, Mrs Bartlett, there's a queue forming at the fish mongers!', they would tip each other off where queues were forming. Dad was nowhere to be found as usual so mum with no further ado evidently shut the shop and went dashing off to join this ever lengthened queue. Fish was not rationed only by great scarcity and the normal allowance would be one fish, whatever the breed, potluck. As she's queuing word filters down the queue, 'It's whale meat', I remember mum saying afterwards she thought, 'Whale meat! If

¹² 60 min

it's one each today I've got to get a bigger shopping basket' [laughing]. It's quite tasty actually. Advice had been given that now it was becoming available, something like, if you put it in the oven with a drip tray underneath on low gas the oil content would drip out leaving a fairly firm redly coloured steak. It was being sold in portions, of course, and the oil could then be used for other frying purposes and chunky meat that was left could be treated almost as a roast or with chips or whatever. As I recall, it wasn't too bad.

Interviewer: No?

Roy: [Laughs]. There were other stuff available later on called snook, which turned out to be barracuda and they gave it that obscure name because people would have some reservation about eating barracuda. Where they got snook from, goodness knows.

[Recorder paused].

Roy: After the Blitz gradually died away, we had a reasonable period of peacefulness and – until the – what they called the, Little Blitz, developed in the spring of 1944 which gave us another different type of experience. Although I was only young with my dad being a warden and mum in the WVS and the – the lectures on home defence and all that were held at the school so it was natural really, I guess, I went along with mum and dad to all these lectures and became something of an expert on aircraft recognition and certainly fire fighting with a stirrup pump. It was always great concern with mum and dad, because being a hardware shop in a little glass-top outhouse, they had two-fifty gallon paraffin oil tanks. Not a terribly consoling thought if a fire developed in that area. During that period, I'm sure it was a Friday night, by an association of ideas, Friday night treat was scrambled egg on toast, not real egg, powdered egg, which I quite liked, and I know that's what I was eating down the shelter. Mum said something like, 'You take it down shelter cos the sirens have gone. I'm just finishing off dad's sandwiches. I'll be down shortly'. I'm down the cellar chatting, the anti-aircraft guns are going, planes are overhead. All the usual noises going on and suddenly mum's very excited voice from upstairs, yelling and bawling about something or another¹³, obviously wasn't dad's sandwiches. I went up the stairs. It was an incendiary bomb that had landed in the back garden. Mum was heard it and then heard the fizzing and she was yelling and shouting for me to come up. Something I trained for, yet, I guess, secretly worried about, I had to be the man because dad was missing. Everybody was missing that night and there weren't too many down the shelter and nearly all women and mum had already grabbed the tin hat and the stirrup pump, got a bucket ready and the big concern, as I say, was the – don't let it be near the paraffin oil tanks. Ease open the back door and thankfully the glare was away to our left in the garden. And I'd got a dustbin lid in hand so peeping around that cos the glare from the incendiary bomb is quite intense, white magnesium glare. But

¹³ 65 min

peeping round the dustbin lid, I could see that it was fairly harmless in the vegetable patch but the problem was the fence – dividing fence was already alight and it's not a good idea to have things burning on the ground. It can be quite an attraction to those above and I sort of adopted the training approach with the stirrup pump hose. I was the hose man, mum was pumping away and you tend to forget what you'd been taught, initially I directed a jet on to the fence and it wouldn't go out. It's magnesium globules which died under at a gush of water and flare again cos the intense heat. And you're thinking all sorts of wild things. 'I'll change to fine spray, obliterate the air supply. That's what they told us' and it worked. You hold it steady and it works. Having got the fence under control mum was yelling, 'Get down lower, get down lower', I couldn't get any lower, I'd be underground [laughs] crawling on hands and knees. Put the spray directly over the bomb and, yes, it did seem to suppress it which didn't quite – and then, of course we ran out of water, a bucketful doesn't last very long. In the mean time, a lady had come up from the shelter and she was filling up the kitchen bowl from the scullery tap but by the time she tried to fill our bucket in the dark, she trips over and chucked the water everywhere, it was complete chaos. But eventually we got the thing under control and then grabbed a load of sandbag which was kept handy and she managed to throw it over the thing and it was on its last legs, though we hosed everything in sight. At some time during that episode I must have yelled out, 'Water, water, we want more bloody water', and afterwards mum said, 'You better get out of those wet things, we'll have a cup of tea'. About an hour later she pulled me to one side, she said, 'I rather you didn't use that word, you know, it's not very nice'. Even under those circumstances mum's sense of propriety did not falter [laughs]. So yes, because they turned a little bit it didn't last very long but they used more powerful high explosives and the larger incendiary devices so the attack was quite devastating. On one particular night I understand that one third of London's streets were impassable. Now that was in 1944 when everybody thought, you know, we're getting somewhere, it's probably all over.

And then came D-Day and that really got to be the beginning of the end, quite euphoric. Early in the morning we'd heard, obviously masses of aircraft early in the morning and I can recall going out the back and the front and seeing in the distance these aircraft, some of which were Towing Gliders. But the intriguing feature was that you could determine the white bands painted on them so that confirms¹⁴ it's got to be the invasion. And somewhere about nine o'clock, I think it was, came the announcement that allied forces had landed on the mainland of Europe so everybody's euphoric. It's happened, at last [clap hands]. Now, the end is now in sight. Seven days later I'm out with – no, prior to that all day long the sirens had been going. We were up and down the shelters at school like yo-yos. We thought, what's going on? They've got to be far too busy. Nobody had seen aircraft, no anti-aircraft guns, nothing, and I think on that first day the sirens went something like seven times. 'What is going on?', then all the rumours started. 'They're sending over pilotless planes', not so far from the truth really. 'They're shelling London with a

¹⁴ 70 min

long-range gun', yeah, but how do they know when to sound the sirens. That doesn't make sense. Rumours were completely rife. I think on the second day when the same sequence had happened, we intended to ignore the whole silly affair. I met my friends down in South Ealing and we were chatting on the street corner when we heard this strange aircraft noise. This pulsating throb, getting louder and louder and louder, 'That's weird, what's that?', and then over the roof tops we saw this small aircraft hurtling along at a speed which was, you know, quite uncommon to us. 'What is that?!', 'Hey, look its tail's on fire!' cos the pulse jet was spurting fire. 'Oh, that's weird, what is it?', 'Don't know', passed over, we listened to it like a heavily laden motorbike going uphill. 'Wow. That was weird', 'Hey, it stopped. Is it gonna crash?' and then twelve seconds later, whoomp. 'Wow', we hadn't got a clue, didn't know what it was. Well, we'd actually seen the first of the V1 flying bombs to reach the western suburbs, of which ultimately twenty-five fell on the borough of Ealing and that was the first one. So once again, the shelter was packed and the whole school programme went to pot again because they were coming over with increasing regularity and it was not unusual, I mean, you go to school at nine o'clock and there be seven or eight or nine separate air raid warnings. We were just up and down, up and down, didn't learn a thing again. Very weird. There were quite a number in Ealing, as I say, twenty-five all together and one in particular that is quite significant in this area, in West Ealing, where we live, in 1940 during the main Blitz, one of these parachute mines had fallen there and caused absolute devastation to two roads. There were quite a number of people killed and they say lightning never strikes twice in the same place. It almost did, during the flying bombs. One hit the end of those two roads, the main road on a Saturday morning when people were shopping and that caused tremendous devastation so within – that was the biggest incident in Ealing and very close to being an identical double-strike. There was a big, used to be quite famous in those days, not so much now, Abernethy store and one of mum's stores because they sold all the school uniforms and everything and a little anecdote. Mr Abernethy was distributing the staff wages and he was one of those killed¹⁵. That was very sad area that, incidentally mum didn't know anything about it. We didn't know where things fell and she went that morning and it sounds silly, I know she was looking for darning wool and she was going to West Ealing and I can still see her coming back and standing in the shop doorway and she said, 'It's gone!', 'What do you mean it's gone?'. 'Abernathy's, she said, 'I can't get anywhere near it. It's been a flying bomb'. She said, 'I'm absolutely sick of it', she said, 'I can't believe it', she said, 'Bloody Jerries'. I'd never heard mum swear and I can still see the shocked look on her face. It tends to put things in perspective. She wanted darning wool and couldn't find any [laughs]. I'd started work by now, I mean, you started work at fourteen and I was working in the stores at the AEC factory which prior to the war were makers of London buses. But, of course, during the war they took on lot of – they were making matador gun-towing tractors and producing diesel engines for all the tanks. Prior to D-Day we were making a lot of the secret equipment that was used, including flails to go on the front of a

¹⁵ 75 min

tank for mine clearance and they used to test these out in the sports ground and made a bit of a mess of it [laughs]. And I was driving a little interdepartmental electric truck dashing about doing wheelies and taking goods from A to B and B to C and that [coughs] and that was at the height of the flying bomb era. One morning I'm cycling to work and the main Uxbridge Road was cordoned off, copper said, 'You can't go down there mate. Unexploded V1', 'Oh', 'Hang about, are you going to the AEC?', 'Yeah', 'Oh, you can go. We're letting AEC go through'. 'Are you sure about this?' [laughs] 'What do you mean unexploded?', 'Oh', he said, 'It's alright it's been de-fused now'. Well, I still went faster, I'm sure, on my bike I could have had 97 miles an hour [laughs]. But it was in the grounds of St. Bernard's Mental Hospital and it had skidded and hit the wall because as I approached, I could see all the wall brickwork over the road and it was being loaded, it was pretty battered obviously, being loaded on to a lorry. Now at that point in time to get hold of, not necessarily intact, but basically intact secret weapon was very useful and officially it never happened. There is no record of that incident and by lunchtime the wall was being rebuilt. It just never happened [laughs]. Because they didn't want it to get back, by any means, that we actually got hold of one. It must have been very valuable. Again at work, you see, you didn't – you didn't go down the shelters when the air raid sirens went. There was spotters on the roof who would sound a loud, blaring claxon if they deduced immediate danger. The factory had been a specific target in 1940 and the service station where I worked one bomb got an absolute bull's eye. It actually hit the centre supporting girder and if he'd measured it, he would have got dead centre of the building. It could only have been by luck. Fortunately all the staff were in shelters but it caused tremendous damage internally and although it was a reasonably small bomb, possibly a five hundred pounder, what did happen sheared internal components and things like a differential unit which goes on the rear axle of a vehicle has a phosphor/bronze gear in it¹⁶ and it tended to shear all the teeth off of these whereas the outside looked completely intact. So every single component had to be totally dismantled and start again. Very weird and –. So when the flying bombs came you would carry on work if the sirens had gone, if the claxons went then you gotta move on, because if the spotters on the roofs had determined immediate danger, it was. We were in the yard one day, we were kicking about with an old football and everybody – it was a nice sunny day actually. Everybody sitting in the sun having their sandwiches, sirens had gone, we heard a flying bomb coming and we're all looking up over towards London, it's the same direction every time. 'There it is, there it is', 'Blimey, he's coming straight over – straight for us', you know and he got nearer and nearer and it was quite low and it passed directly overhead, 'Phew'. Well, if it had come that far, that's a long way because I'm talking about Southall so you're adding on another three or four miles and right at the extent of its capabilities and it's wobbling so there's something wrong with it. We looked – we'd all gone to the entrance of the shelter and now we're back watching it go away and suddenly it starts to turn, it shouldn't do that, they don't do that and it came back on the same track and it's heading for us again. Wooooohhhh!

¹⁶ 80 min

It passed just overhead, as we could then see the spluttering pulse jet flame, it cut out and dropped straight down behind our works in the area of Norwood Green. Roughly where we knew there'd be houses and one of our work colleagues, he rushed out the gate, shouting and screaming, he said, 'She's at home today, my wife's at home today. She's sick', justified. She was dead. Yes. That was awful.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Roy: In the afternoons we used to sing along to the 'Worker's half hour' programmes, very subdued workshop that day. It had indeed hit the houses where we suspected it must have gone. Oh, that was very sad. Mm, actually my last day school, one you never forget. That was the flying bombs and in the afternoon we'd heard a fairly nearby explosion, just enough to take the vacuum in the ears which sign – always signified a close one. But only faintly so some distance away and in due course one of the teachers came and called a little girl in my class and we almost guessed what this meant and by then another teacher had come and took her away with her arm around her shoulder. Yes, her mother was dead. Oh, very sad day for the school. Gradually we began to realise that the V2 – V1 attacks were diminishing as the allied forces strengthened the bridgehead in Europe. They were overrunning the launch sites. Others were now being openly identified by the French resistance and bombed. For a short period the Germans overcame this by releasing V1 flying bombs slung under aircraft and one of those, in fact, hit possibly one of the on—only military targets in Greenford, which is fairly close to here. It hit an ordinance factory, sheer potluck but at least it was a military objective and that apparently was from an aircraft slung¹⁷ flying bomb. So for a temporary period they were able to keep the attacks sustained. But in the mean time many devices were used to try to combat this menace. Initially the aircraft – the flying bomb be intercepted out in the channel by now we had faster aircraft, the Tempest, and – I think it was a Tempest they were called. A lot of enterprise – they weren't inclined to shoot these things down because an explosion at fairly close proximity wasn't necessarily a good idea and many enterprising pilots would fly alongside and tip the wings and the gyroscope in the flying bomb would go out of action and they would go in to the sea. They had assembled – they normally flew at a height that was too – too low for the heavy anti-aircraft guns and along what they called flying bomb alley, they assembled hundreds of medium anti-aircraft guns. So if that first out-in-the-channel effort failed, they would then fly on straight and true into an absolute curtain of gunfire. If they got through that there was a line of barrage balloons and cables and I think, just round figures, there were over eight thousand ultimately launched of which four thousand, there are exact figures, I do know them but not in my head, almost exactly half were destroyed which was pretty good. Ultimately, once they got a hang of it.

When these diminished we thought that's it, it's got to be over. D-Day invasion is going well, no more flying bombs, or few, and one Sunday evening we were actually sitting down having tea and there was

¹⁷ 85 min

this loud rumbling explosion. 'What's that?', 'What? It could be anything. Don't worry too much'. Next morning everybody coming into the shop is talking about a gas main exploding, in Chiswick, 'Oh, that's what it was', 'Big bang for a gas main'. At work all stories are the same, everybody's chatting about this gas main. Now, for some explicable reason, in the evening – we'd been fed many rumours and stories about the flying bombs and for some explicable reason mum and dad and my sister we decided to go, well, we decided – they decided and I went along, to go and have a look. I don't think this was to gawp we'd seen enough. It wasn't necessarily curiosity – curiosity perhaps, I don't know. We went to Staveley Road in Chiswick and the only expression is, 'That's got to be some gas main!'. I mean, there was an area of total devastation and so the rumours continued, people heard these explosions and it was put about as another gas main. Well, by the time Winston Churchill announced, some many weeks later in the House of Commons, that it was, in fact, an advanced form of ballistic missile. There were over a hundred had fallen on London which gave the Gas Board quite a bad name [laughs]. It was interesting that I ferreted out while looking through the archives and realising that the only known malfunction of a V2 rocket occurred over Ealing and explained the mystery that had baffled a lot of us for many, many years and particularly when I'm talking to the senior citizens groups, many people remember this because it was so strange. It would appear to be about nine-fifteen in the morning because a lot of it tallies with school assemblies. Now, I'd left school for work but one chap said to me, 'Oh, yeah', at the little Ealing Junior School which I used to go to, he said, 'It was so weird! It was although somebody had thrown a heavy blanket overhead and was pushing down on it. It was a very, very weird explosion and¹⁸ it caused some minor panic and the headmaster said something along the lines of, 'Now steady on boys. Keep calm and let's pray for those perhaps less fortunate'. Then a lady joined in the conversation and said, 'Oh, we were all screaming', she said, 'I remember that, about nine-fifteen in the morning? We were at school assembly' and she said, 'Oh, there was sheer panic and it was weird, this heavy pushing down'. I was at Southall, as I say, at the AEC and here again it was a weird kind of explosion, out of the ordinary. You could not figure out what it might be. Mum and dad's story tallied, all the shop shelves were shaking and things falling off them and they felt this heavy oppression and it was an unanswered problem because the facts were not released until many years later. Evidently a V2 rocket had exploded on entry to the earth's atmosphere simultaneous with the sonic boom creating a double whammy and parts of the rocket casing, the lighter outer casing, was scattered all over South Ealing which we didn't know and the main engine components in West Ealing, Ealing Broadway. Now, that was kept secret for many, many years but almost certainly solves that mystery because for days afterwards we was like, 'Did you hear anything?', 'Where did it fall?', 'What did it do?', 'Don't know'. Nobody could ever find out anything about it, it was weird.

Interviewer: So when did you find out?

¹⁸ 90 min

Roy: Not until fairly recently actually, yeah. Yes, some research came to light then I found more documents in the Ealing Archives and gradually pieced together that picture. So probably about four years ago.

Interviewer: Ok.

Roy: It had been kept secret and, of course, then we didn't know that the rockets existed anyway. We still didn't know what they were because at the AEC – one day we came out and we were kicking about with a football and there was this big double boom and we looked all around and saw this column of black smoke rising from Great West Road, where all the factories are. And we all jumped on our bikes, in about a mile away and dashed off to see if we could help and it had struck, it's quite a famous area called Gillette's Corner and it had struck the Packard Car Company and it was too late for us to be of any use because the American Army were established quite close there, in Osterley Park and they'd responded almost immediately and set up a field hospital, very efficient, and they were swarming all over it. Here again, a memory which I will always have and if I go down the Great West Road in the car, I can still picture it. The bodies being laid out on the pavement and I – I guess, mums and dads who wouldn't be going home that evening and there was just rows of them. I never did find out the casualty figures, sometimes they were suppressed, perhaps for morale obviously. But there was still that sort of dry, sulphuric taste and I stood on the other side of the road, I'm not ashamed to say I was crying. No, fourteen year old boy and crying, it was awful. But that was virtually the last throw of the dice and one can only wonder that if those secret weapons had been developed just a few months earlier and aimed shall we say at the invasion ports, Southampton, Portsmouth, wherever. It could have made some difference, very fortuitous¹⁹. Finally, of course, it was over. Mum and dad, we lived on the main road, of course, there was street parties everywhere, flags were appearing as if by magic, people had hidden them away. The streets were becoming festooned and, of course, mums had secretly stashed away little bits and pieces towards the end of the kids' parties. Mum and dad were invited, there wasn't one in the main road of course, but they were invited to many of the side roads and indeed was I. I was quite lucky really cos I guess I was what – maybe termed a tweeny, you see, I was – still looked quite young and could arrive at the children's parties in the afternoon and as a young looking fourteen year old and still nick a few sandwiches and goodies. Then in the evening being out at work, a more mature fourteen year old, I could drink the beer and so [laughs]. So I got the best of both worlds.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Roy: And again from that I remember the street lights coming on and that was fantastic. Little things please little minds. We could not believe it, you know, six years of just blackness and all the street lights

¹⁹ 95 min

came on and people saying things, 'Hey, you can – look you can read a newspaper' [clears throat]. What a thrill. We had a bonfire round the next side road that was so fierce it burnt all the tarmac away [laughs]. People coming down our shelter that day and taking away the remaining goods, people wanted to just clear everything. It was over, let's get rid of everything that reminds us. I can remember mum and dad being down the shelter and sort of looking around, saying, 'We're going to miss all these people aren't we?', hmmm. Mum said something like, 'This place needs a good sweep up now'. I'm sure at that point dad found something else to do [laughs]. The street party, I can recall seeing two huge searchlights. The searchlights were waiving all round the sky in celebration, making a huge 'V' over London. I went home again and when I popped home I went up to the top of the house to look around and see this massive great 'V' with all the others dancing all around waiving, it was lovely, and by then it was reminiscent of the Blitz. You could see the red glow beginning to take hold, some of these bonfires got a bit out of control, because in our own particular instance and shared by everybody else it was the opportunity to rip down all the blackout curtains, all the boards that had been put up at windows and just chuck them on the bonfire. So they really – they were pretty massive some of them [laughs]. But at the end of the day we were very happy. Quite a euphoric atmosphere. Tomorrow is a new experience.

Interviewer: Did your brothers come home from the war?

Roy: Yes, my oldest brother, he was very fortunate, he stayed in England all the time. He was in the RAF regiment initially and working on a secret form of airfield defence. When he came home we'd say, 'What have you been doing?', 'Oh, not a lot' and he wouldn't tell us until after the war. It was some form of rocket with a wire attached and he never fired them in anger. They might have been useful in the early days when the German Air Force was attacking the airfields but they were developed later. My brother, yes, I guess he was – he got married actually. It was inevitable that – I digress slightly, he was amazing. Bern was always considered the black sheep of the family, he was the one always getting in to mischief and getting himself into scrapes and problems and mum's phrase, 'That boy's done it again!'. He immediately became a Corporal, a Sergeant, a Regimental Sergeant²⁰ and mum and dad couldn't believe it. A Regimental Sergeant Major [laughs] and finished up as a Warrant Officer and, I mean, on one instance, in the early days, when he was a corporal he came marching in the shop with thirty other drivers, he was in the Royal Army Service Corps, and he was the lead driver of a convoy and he said, 'Hi mum, I brought some mates with me. We parked all around the corner', he said, 'I told them where we could get a good cup of tea and a civilised wee' [laughs]. But he brought all his mates in and, yeah, mum made them all tea and she was happy afterwards, she found four complete packets they left behind [laughs], cos tea was on strict ration and they knew that. He was in West Africa which was the quietest part and the one funny story he told us there was that as, now, Regimental Sergeant Major, he had an

²⁰ 100 min

African as a batman kind of character, who became very attached to him and they were being transferred towards the end of the war up to the Far East. It was not a good prospect, you know, going out to fight Japan, and he's on parade, as a Regimental Sergeant Major, and this young African came running on to the parade ground and threw his arms around Berns legs, trying to stop him from going. What an embarrassment for a Regimental Sergeant on parade [laughs]. Anyway, he was shipped out and I think he got as far as Burma when they dropped the atomic bomb and Japan surrendered. But he was away after being married, in 1940, he had two d – three days embarkation leave, that's all and they had a very, very austere wedding and the cake was a cardboard lookalike for the lower tier. Made of sponge on the top, I think, it was very tiny, the top tier, but that was a little sponge cake with a thin layer of icing. What my mother produced for the rest of the meal, I have no idea. It was just a reception at our house and a registry office wedding. Very austere, and after these three days he disappeared for six and a half years. Though came back to a very belated honeymoon. My sister-in-law is the only one of our family now still alive at ninety-four.

Interviewer: Wow.

Roy: She's still very coherent and has filled me in on a lot of bits and pieces really [laughs]. Brother-in-law, Arthur survived the Blitz, left the fire service and went on to work at a bus garage. My sister left the munitions factory. I haven't talked to you about Stripy the cat after his initial episode and it reminded me, cos kids always ask me this. He figured out his own private air raid shelter during the Blitz, he got fed up with under the kitchen sink and he became, you see, right at the beginning of war, a form of early warning. On official advice, I think the first week of the war 400,000 pets were put to sleep. Two factors being that they'd be terrified by the bombing and what would you feed them on? Because in those days you didn't have cans of Boneo or whatever they call them, they were fed on scraps and theoretically would there be any scraps? No, they'd be in my mum's big cooking pot making soup. I flatly refused, no way is Stripy going to suffer that fate and he became quite a good mate and an early warning system. As I say cats hearing is nine times that of a human and he would come racing in and sit under the kitchen sink at that stage so we knew. He's heard distant sirens and ours would go in the next minute or two or three, that would give us a sporting chance again. Ultimately during the height of the Blitz he figured out his own air raid shelter, upstairs²¹ in the bath. No amount of coaxing would get him down the shelter. 'No way, I'm going upstairs'. So, alright, fair enough, do – do your own thing, which was fine until the day mum was running a bath, you know what's coming [laughs]. Whether she was adhering to the strict instructions of four to five inches of bathwater I shall never know and you had to take a bath whenever the opportunity – you felt the opportunity was right because inevitably you'd run a bath, you get your clothes off and the sirens would go. Well, that's exactly what happened, in the mean time Stripy the cat came in,

²¹ 105 min

hurtled upstairs and leapt straight over the bath side in to the hot water and this bedraggled excuse for a cat rocketed through the house a hundred miles an hour skidding around my bemused mother. Back door was shut so went out through the shop door never to be seen again for two days [laughs]. And thereafter he went back to the kitchen sink. Children always say to me, 'What happened to Stripy?' I said, 'He died shortly after the war from boredom'. He was good.

Interviewer: Ok. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me. I'm going to turn this little thing off.

End of Interview.