

Interviewee: Walter Meadows

Interviewer: Malin Lundin

Also present: Marion Glover

Date: 05.10.2010

Location:

Interviewer: And now it should be recording. So this is Malin Lundin doing an interview with Walter Meadows and it's the 5th of October 2010. Ok, can I just ask for your – your date of birth please?

Walter: August 1922.

Interviewer: Ok. So how old were you when the war started?

Walter: In 1939, twenty – I'd be seventeen. Yeah.

Interviewer: And where were you living?

Walter: When the war started?

Interviewer: Yes.

Walter: I was down in London, wasn't I? Yeah. I was in digs in London. Yes, yes, cos I'd gone down - had joined the civil service and they sent me down there and they put me into a – a lodging house.

Interviewer: Ok. So who – were you living alone at this point or were you living with friends or family?

Walter: No, I was on me own and, of course, they – I was found accommodation by the union. That was the civil service union, yeah, staff association that's a better – better name than the union.

Interviewer: Can you remember that – that day when war started on the 3rd of Aug – 3rd of September even, it was a Sunday. Can you remember what you were doing on that day?

Walter: Yes, yes, indeed, yes, I was on Clapham Common [laughs] I was on Clapham Common and they – they sounded an air raid siren and, of course, it was – it was a false alarm. It wasn't real but we – we got to know what an air raid siren sounded like.

Interviewer: Do you remember how you felt that first day of war?

Walter: That first day of war? Well, we were – we were – we didn't really know what was going to happen. Not really. They called us as the war developed, I mean, yeah, the early part of the war was very much in favour of the enemy, wasn't it?

Interviewer: Can you remember, were you scared or were you frightened?

Walter: Well, not just at that time, then, of course, I joined the RAF then. I sort of – I wasn't called up cos they introduced the call up system and I thought I would – I would like to go in the RAF and I went to a place, I've forgotten where it was now. But, anyway, I went to a place where I just joined up as a volunteer RAF reserve.

Interviewer: Ok. So what happened when you had – had volunteered? Were you sent off to training or?

Walter: Well, I mean, I'd been the first to volunteer. I just went back to work, I think, and just waited. I waited for a call up and I was eventually called up. Have I dotted down somewhere where this – when I was called up.

Interviewer: Let's have a look. I don't think it says –

Marion: We don't know where but –

Interviewer: That's fine.

Walter: And what –

Interviewer: So eventually – you were called up and you were sent off for pilot training. Can¹ you tell me a bit about that?

Walter: Well, we went to an airfield in the West Country. I think it was called Cliff Pipers (??), rings a bit of a bell with me as the name of the airfield but it was only a little airfield where they – they did initial pilot training on these old, um, what you might call out of date Tiger Moths. They were called Tiger Moths and they were biplanes. But they were very efficient for training and they were two-seater. The instructor always sat in the front and his pupil sat behind because if there was a crash the one in the front seat was more likely to be damaged than the one in the backseat was the theory. Sounds reasonable to me.

Interviewer: Did you feel that the training that you were given, did that prepare you for what you later experienced in the war?

Walter: Well, the training we were given was sort of initial training and we were trained to – to fly round the circuit, whatever it was called, and you had to do a takeoff and you had to do a landing and if you couldn't do the landing then you couldn't progress. But if you managed to do the landing then you could progress and they formed us up then to send to various places where you could go on what you might call proper training and they did a lot of this overseas and some people went to Rhodesia. I think some people went to South Africa and – and I went to Canada. Canada, a place called Assiniboia, that rings a bell, I've probably got it down somewhere.

Interviewer: Yeah.

¹ 5 min

Walter: Assiniboia, yeah, which was the sort of name that out in the – in the west part of Canada that you might come across that sort of name. Sounds a bit Indian, doesn't it? Assiniboia. Anyway, that was the name of the place.

Interviewer: What kind of training did you receive when you went to Canada then?

Walter: Well, you received the – the amount of training with an instructor. He always sat in the front, you sat behind. You did some – what were called 'circuits and bumps' where you went to do takeoffs and landings and back again and then takeoffs and landings. You did, with the instructor, you did cross-country runs, you know, were you go on bigger trip and you had to do a bit of navigation then. You had to do some map reading.

Interviewer: How did you find the training? Was – was it difficult or did you find it easy to –?

Walter: Well, it was – it was, I mean, it was a completely new experience for somebody from a little place, a little place in Yorkshire. Well, lots of us were like that, from little places somewhere and, of course, I hadn't long been left school, had I?

Marion: No.

Walter: Yeah, cos I went to school till I was sixteen², didn't I, whereas the school leaving age was fourteen.

Interviewer: Mm. So how long did you stay in Canada for?

Walter: It was – it was the best part of a year, I think. I was there for quite a while. I must have put it down in my notes somewhere.

Interviewer: If – if you can't remember any details, don't worry about that and I –

Walter: Ok.

Interviewer: So what happened afterwards, did you return to England?

Walter: Oh, we came back to England. Yeah. And we were sent to a place in the West Country, rings a bell, Cliff Piper (??) rings a bell. Have I put anything like that?

Marion: That's where you said you had your initial training, was it?

Walter: Yes, it was to continue the initial training, it was, wasn't it? Mm.

Marion: I think – is it ok for me to?

Interviewer: Yes.

² 10 min

Marion: You went – Elsham Wolds was where 103 Squadron was based, wasn't it? When you – when you sort of got allocated to a squadron.

Walter: Yes, but I think I'd failed the pilot training by then and when I went to join – you were all sent to join a squadron and, of course, a lot of the squadrons where – bomber command squadrons where in Lincolnshire. What was the name of the place I'd been to?

Marion: Elsham Wolds.

Walter: Oh, Elsham Wolds, yeah, that's right. Yeah. That was in the – what you might call the – the Wash area of Lincolnshire, wasn't it?

Interviewer: So was that where you were based throughout the war or before you – before '44?

Walter: Yes, we operated from Lincolnshire. When I failed the pilot training course, of course, I re-mustered as they called it. You could re-muster as a navigator or a bomb aimer or – or a wireless operator or a gunner, a machine gunner, you know. They had a machine gunner at the back and one at the front and one at the middle as well. The mid-upper [laughs], the mid-upper gunner, Hans Smother (??) he was called. Never mind.

Interviewer: So what did you –?

Walter: That was a bomber aircraft, well, that was the Lancaster but the other big one was the Halifax. Halifax. Halifaxes and Lancasters were bomber command's main aircrafts, yeah.

Interviewer: So what were – what were your main duties?

Walter: Well, as a bomb aimer, of course, on the way, of course, I used to map read for the pilot.

Interviewer: Ok.

Walter: And I – I liked map reading, I was quite good at it because I liked maps. I've always liked maps and they – the RAF were quite good at producing and giving maps to their people because they wanted them to map read. Mm, and from the – from the front of the aircraft there was a very good place to look down and identify places on the ground that you could recognise on the map and therefore you knew where you were. That's always a big problem, knowing where you were. Of course, at night time it was quite important to be able to tell the commander of the aircraft, that would be the pilot. Some aircraft had two pilots, the Americans always had two pilots but we tended to only have one.

Interviewer: So how – how did you identify objects or areas when it was dark outside?

Walter: Well, very, very much from the rivers³. If you could – if you could direct the pilot on to a river and tell him to just follow the river and I would be able to tell him that, following this river, we were just

³ 15 min

passing such and such a town on the left or the right or port or starboard, you know. This was useful to the pilot cos he knew then where – he knew where he was and he didn't have to worry because somebody could tell him where he was.

Interviewer: So how – how many missions or how often would you go out for a mission?

Walter: Yeah, the first missions you went out on you tended to go out as an extra body in – in a crew that was fully crewed up and were experienced. So you went out with an experienced crew, this was after you'd done your cross-country and all that sort of stuff. When you went out to fly into occupied Europe into Germany or France or somewhere but particularly into Germany and particularly when you were going right down into Germany, I think the furthest place we went to in Germany was Nuremburg, which was quite down south. That was about the longest trip we did – to Nuremburg.

Interviewer: How long did that take you?

Walter: It'll be down in me logbook. I've still got me logbooks.

Marion: I've got a little service book but –

Walter, Anyway, but that would be, I say, I think it was the longest trip we did to Nuremburg and we – we – you would – you would be coming back and getting back crossing the English Channel into England in the early hours of the morning when it was getting light.

Interviewer: So how did you feel when you went on your first mission?

Walter: Yeah, I think the first – the first one was only over to – was only over to France and only into the northern parts of France. That's probably the first one down there, Marion?

Marion: I wrote them down here. I don't know if they're in the right order though.

Interviewer: Oh, that's your – your earlier missions.

Walter: Earlier missions, oh, well, yeah, well, these were apart from sort of training missions. These were the first, Essen, Germany, Nuremburg, right down the bottom of Germany. Oh, no, we was all – that was – I can't seem to have the vaguest where [unclear] was. I don't think – I think it was in France rather than Germany. Aachen that was Germany, ah, Rouen, that would be France, wouldn't it, and Cologne that was Germany. Mm, and then, that's right and we were eventually shot down on the Dusseldorf trip, which is not one of these. They were earlier missions but the last one was Dusseldorf and shot down 22nd – 20th – spring time.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit about that, when you were shot down in April '44?

Walter: [Pause]⁴. Yes, I think, well, the aircraft had been attacked and it had been damaged and it had been damaged such that the – the pilot, who was the captain of the crew, had to give the orders to

⁴ 20 min

abandon ship, you know. To bail out as they call it, mm, and in order to bail out from a bomber aircraft you had to go down halfway down the aircraft. The rear gunner had to come up and the others, we had to go down. Halfway down there was a – a door where you could jump out and, of course, jumping out in the middle of the night, the middle of the night from about twenty thousand feet and was a bit scary in a way but not really because you knew if you stayed where you are you were a gunner. If you jumped out with your parachute and the parachute, the pilot used to sit on it, see, but the rest of us had the chest parachutes. They used to – you had a harness with two clips and you clipped on the parachute and there was a handle where you could pull the ripcord and you jumped out with that and, of course, you didn't pull the ripcord until you were well clear of the aircraft. I was unfortunate in the sense that in the hurry – in the hurry to clip mine on one of the clips had not fastened properly and when the parachute – when the parachute came out only one clip held and the parachute blossomed out above me and instead of having two harness straps, there was only one. But it was good enough, it was good enough, and I just floated down. Once the parachute was out, successfully, and you were floating down by parachute, it was a marvellous experience really. Your main concern, really, was whether you were going to land in Germany or whether you were going to land somewhere safer. Also whether you would land somewhere where the people, where you landed, might – they wouldn't welcome you very much but they – they might be – become a bit belligerent and want to attack you. But of course the Germans they knew that they had successfully attacked an airplane, one of our bombers, and, of course, they were big airplanes these bombers and they knew that they got a crew aboard of several people and they were looking to round them up. And, of course, they had a system where they knew roughly where people who parachuted out from one of these attacked aircrafts, roughly, where they'd be coming down⁵ and they were looking for them. It didn't take them long to find you. Once they found you, of course, the people found you were people who knew what they were doing and their job was to get you rounded up. You were soon rounded up one by one and taken to a place where the other people that you knew from your crew were already there or coming in and once you became part of a little bunch like that and you knew that you were in the hands, not of the Gestapo or anything like that but were in the hands of the German air force, the Luftwaffe. They – they, of course, the Luftwaffe were in the hands of the – they were the sort of people who sending aircraft out on to attack other countries as well as being - receiving attacks in their country. There was a recognised system that aircraft crew were bailed out and were picked up were – become prisoners of war and were entitled to the prisoner of war – what was the system? What was the name of the – Geneva Convention, I think it was. Anyway, they were entitled to protection of the – the rules of war. Geneva Convention I think it was called.

Interviewer: So what happened when – when you were taken prisoner? When you were a prisoner of war?

Walter: Yes, of course, they had to – they had to take us to a place where we could be put into a prisoner of war camp. The first place we went to wasn't where we eventually sort of joined a prisoner of war camp properly. The first place we went to was just a holding place and they put us on from

⁵ 25 min

there. They put us on trains to take us – we called them cattle trucks, but they were the ones – they got the doors at the side and they just told us to get inside and they put enough of us and when they got the required number inside they shut the door and they filled up the next one. The trains, they got a number of these sort of cattle trucks attached to the train and the – and the train would go off and take us somewhere. Vaguely – I may have written things down, you know.

Marion: Well, Stalag Luft 6 was the first one, the main one, wasn't it?

Walter: Stalag Luft 6 was the – yeah.

Marion: Up on the Baltic Sea.

Walter: Stalag Luft 6 was – Luft was air force, you see, and was the German for air force and Stalag was the – the prisoner of war camp, you know. So Stalag Luft was an air force prisoner of war camp and Luft 6, was for, well, Luft 3 was for officers and Luft 6 was for other ranks. But, of course, the RAF they had a recognised system that all the people they sent on these sort of bombing missions, all the – all the RAF people sent out on these missions were all given, at least, non-commissioned officer status. At least to sergeant and then, I think, after a year, I think, I became a flight sergeant, something like that. I think I finished up as a warrant officer because you – the – the RAF progressed you so that you moved up the scale of rank. Mainly for pay purposes, you see. Yeah.

Interviewer: So how were the conditions in the camps that you stayed in?

Walter: What, the prisoner of war camps? Well, when – when you got to your prisoner of war camp they tended to, sort of from the railway station, they would form you up and they'd march you in. As you marched in they opened the gates of the Stalag Luft 6 or whatever it was. They marched you in and waiting inside were people who had already become prisoners of war and were looking for people they knew and one of the ones who was looking for us coming through or for me coming through, particularly, was one of our crew, our bomber crew, who had been sent off on his own with another crew just to see what things were like and he saw what things were like in the sense that his aircraft was shot down and he was – became a prisoner of war. When he'd been processed, they always process you, the Germans, through their system. When he'd been processed and sent to the prisoner of war camp he was one of the ones that was always looking for people who were following on at a later stage [laughs] to also become prisoners of war and, of course, we were right out in – in sort of Poland weren't we? What was the name of the place?

Marion: Well, the first one was this Stalag Luft 6 but then you went to – you went to Thorn in Poland.

Walter: Oh, yeah. That's right. They – they sent us to –

Marion: This is the first one and that's the second one.

Walter: Yeah, the Thorn and then we were sent right up –

Marion: No, that was first.

Walter: Yeah, that was – that was quite a long journey that was.

Marion: That was first.

Walter: Sent up to Stalag Luft 6 was right up on the Baltic coast because the Germans at that time had taken over these little Baltic places like Lithuania, Latvia etc. They set up a prisoner of war camp in Lithuania and that was quite a long train journey that was in these cattle truck type things, you know. But anyway – yeah.

Interviewer: So how were the conditions in – when you were going up in the cattle trucks in the trains?

Walter: Well, in – in the cattle trucks, I mean, you just sat on the floor and just made yourself as comfortable as you could. They tended to put some straw on the floor, you know. Yes, I mean, the Germans were – were civilised people, you know. I think – I think people who were taken prisoner by the Russians tended to not get such – what you might call sympathetic treatment, whereas with the Germans, at least the Germans were losing prisoners to the west sort of thing, to the western part and, of course, were taking prisoners and I was one of the ones who was taken prisoner.

Marion: Yeah, your main problem was shortage of food cos you were in the last year of the war, weren't you?

Walter: Well, of course the Red Cross was very important and, of course, the Red Cross had a system whereby they had a presence in the prisoner of war camps. They were responsible and the German prison authorities accepted that the Red Cross consignments were not to be tampered with and they were to be received by the proper people. And, of course, there was a system for receiving the parcels and, of course, what to receive in the consignment and, of course, some of the consignments were individually addressed parcels which your mum and dad would have sent. All the time I was there I think I only ever received one parcel.

Interviewer: What was in that parcel?

Walter: Oh, well, the – the parcels they tended to be made up by – not by the individual people who sent them but by the, well, it would have been the Red Cross people who organised and made these dispatches of parcels.

Marion: Don't you remember what was in them at all?

Walter: Well, there was the sort of food in these parcels. There would have been other stuff beside food. But the food in the parcels would be the sort of food which would stand the journey and, of course, that dried milk. But we came – we became very familiar with dried milk.

Interviewer: Did you receive any cigarettes or chocolate or cocoa?

Walter: Well, cigarettes were sent. If you received them you were lucky but I – I don't think I smoked in those days though. Don't think I smoked in those –

Marion: No? You were smoking sort of, you know, when you met mum.

Walter: Sorry?

Marion: You were smoking when you met mum, cos, you know, cos you gave up about when I was a baby, didn't you? A lot of people in the wartime smoked.

Walter: Well, that'll be after the war, wouldn't it?

Marion: Well, yeah.

Walter: Yeah, and of course I – I packed up smoking as well because I was picked up on the mass – this is after the war – I was picked up on the mass radiography were they used all these mass chest –

Marion: For T – screening for TB.

Walter: Yeah, that's right.

Marion: Which may have been due to, you know, the conditions and lack of good food and –

Walter: Could – could have been, couldn't it? Could have been –

Interviewer: So what were you doing in – in the prisoner of war camp? Were you working or?

Walter: No. We weren't. The – the Germans, of course, I think one might say they were perhaps more civilised. They – they were more keen, I think, to the people that they were holding as prisoners. I mean, they may – in the sense that they, the Germans, became more with the Russians as well. They may have treated the Russian prisoners a bit more severely than they treated us. But, of course, knowing that Germans – Germans had attacked and some of their people had been taken prisoner over here. I would – I think, and of course, I think the Germans were – they were less inclined to – to treat their prisoner of war. They may have treated the Russians differently but the British and the Americans, they – they would have been wanting to treat them – us – Geneva Convention prisoners of war. The Geneva Convention was the bible, really, so far as prisoners of war were concerned.

Interviewer: Can you remember what – what you did on a normal day in the camp?

Walter: Yeah, well, the – in the camps you – we were in these huts, you know, and we had these bunk beds. I seem to remember in one place – there were usually two bunks, one up and one down. There was one place we went to where there were three, one, two, three. But, anyway, when – when you were – when you got to a prisoner of war camp and you were allocated to one of the huts then when you went in the first thing you had to do was to grab hold of your bed, your bunk. I think the one we went to initially were just one, two. One up, one down, and some people liked the upper one, some people preferred the bottom one. But, anyway, one should, in effect, reserve your hut and you had a locker to go with it. Then that was all it was and there was no – there was no real trouble with people wanting to pinch somebody else's bunk. I mean, once it was occupied and you got your locker and you got your belongings there and you're alright and you could safely – you had to go out for your

morning roll call and that was part of the ritual. You had to be counted. I think they went mainly, not on names, numbers. They could count the numbers and – and the ones who used to do the counting would report to the officers who took the roll call results and if there was any problem then, of course, then they would have to call in the sort of professionals who would - whose job it would be to find out who was missing and, of course, finding out who was missing would be their first problem.

Interviewer: Did anyone ever go missing? Did anyone manage to escape from the camps that you were in?

Walter: Well, I can't remember anybody that I knew who'd escaped and got back to England. I think anybody who escaped, I mean, there was a system where you were supposed to try to escape, you know. There was a system whereby you could contact a little group whose job – whose self-appointed job was to assist people who volunteered to try to escape. And, of course, one of the things that – that I think they – they used to do was to find them clothes. And once they got out, I mean, they had to make the best – the best way they could and I think there were – there were trains whereby they – they could jump the trains, you know, get onboard the trains. Cos a lot of these trains in Germany at this time had got these wagons, you know, where they used to trans – they used to transport goods and people on these trains and, of course, they would transport prisoners of war like that in these trains.

Marion: Yeah, you were saying that because it was so late on in the war people were looking to escape by then. Particularly –

Walter: Well, that's right. It was 1944, that wasn't it? And, of course, the Americans had joined the war and – and the Italians had joined the war and the Germans were being attacked from all sides and, of course, the Russians started attacking as well from the – I mean, the Germans were under attack from all quarters, weren't they?

Marion: And you were getting news, someone had radio, didn't they?

Walter: There was a system whereby there were people who had radio receivers and there was a news broadcast at a certain time and they – they would be there at the recognised time to receive the broadcast and they would do that in the huts and the people in the huts would be on watch for any problem of anybody coming who would want to pick up anybody who was receiving radio messages.

Interviewer: So you were not allowed to have any radios by the Germans?

Walter: Well, no, if you would, well, we certainly didn't have any radios. The only radio messages that we got was these – they used to – we used to get them from these people who had receivers. Where they got them from we don't know. I don't know. But they were able to receive these broadcast messages and, of course⁶, the broadcast messages would be bulletins which explained what was happening on the – on the warfronts. How the – how the Russians were advancing, how the western

⁶ 50 min

powers were advancing. How – what was going on in Italy and what was going on in North Africa. Messages used to come through and they used to read out bulletins.

Interviewer: So do you remember how you felt when you heard these broadcasts and –?

Walter: Oh, well, yes, well, it was – you felt that, you know, you knew what was going on. You weren't exactly – you weren't in the dark. It was important to know what was going on. It was important to know that the Germans were under attack from the north and from the east and from the south. There was – they had marvellous really, what they call it – services, you know, wartime services, the Germans, yeah. They were very efficient. Sorry –

Interviewer: No, no problem. So were you held a prisoner until the end of the war then?

Walter: Well, yes, I mean, what – what happened, we – I was in a prison camp which had been set up well to the east, near Warsaw, wasn't it?

Marion: Thorn in Poland.

Walter: Oh, Thorn in Poland, that's right. Yeah, well, that was to the east wasn't it? Well, other prison camps, of course, were set up elsewhere but this particular one was an RAF prisoner of war camp, wasn't it? Stalag Luft –

Marion: That was 20 I, that was the Thorn. Stalag Luft 6 was the first one.

Walter: Luft 6, Luft 6, that was the one cos the Germans, of course, had – had occupied Norway, didn't they, and they had set up a prison camp up near the Baltic coast and I think that was Luft 6.

Marion: That's right, yes.

Walter: Yeah.

Marion: But then did they move you when – when the Russians were approaching from the east, did they – is that why they moved you to the next one? To Thorn.

Walter: Yes, they did cos they had to abandon Luft 6, which was a – it was vulnerable so far the Germans were concerned. Cos the Germans occupied Norway as well, you see. Makes you wonder in a way looking back now, why the Germans wanted to occupy Norway but I think it – it was it was probably a recognised attack place from which they could attack across to the UK, couldn't they? And, of course, the U-boat could occupy – they could operate from Norway, I think they did.

Interviewer: So how – so what happened at the end of the war? When the Russians –?

Walter: Well, the Russians were coming from one direction; the allies were coming from another. We – we were – we were in a camp, I've just forgotten for the moment what it was called. Anyway, it was a camp where the Germans, they – they formed us up and they marched us out to march us somewhere and having marched for a time the Germans, they – they seemed to give up the coast

and they marched us back again. We finished up, I think, we finished up coming back into the camp. I wonder whether it was the same camp or another one but they gave up the coast. I think they, the Germans, the German guards, which were mainly elderly men, they got to the stage where they were looking to just save themselves. The last thing they wanted was to be captured by the Russians as well [laughs].

Marion: So when they marched you back there they just left you, didn't they?

Walter: They – yeah, they marched us back into this sort of camp and they just – they just disappeared. They just left us.

Interviewer: So what happened then? What did you do when you were left in the camp?

Walter: Well, we just – we found ourselves accommodation in the various huts, as they – we called them huts, you know, and, of course, in there, there was a – there was a sort of a fire in there, a brazier type thing. And you find – you found your own bed and that became your billet and I think – so I seem to remember we had some sort of a locker there.

Interviewer: So how – how did you return to England then? So you were left in the camp when the Russians – the Germans marched you back? How did you get back to Britain?

Walter: Well, of course, the allies were advancing from various directions and our camp was taken over by the British, not by the Russians, not by the Americans, not by the Italians but we were taken – we – we were taken over by the British. I'm not sure whether it was the army or the British – whether it was the air force men but anyway. I mean, their main – their main occupation, their main purpose as indeed all of them were all these prisoner of war camps which had been liberated and all these people were sitting there waiting to be dealt with. The last thing that the armed forces wanted was to have to take into their operational units all these old prisoners of war. Some of them had been prisoners of war for a few years. Some had been prisoners of war since the first year of the war. They were taken prisoner in the first year of the war and they'd been prisoners of war ever since. The – the thing – they would – they were just, in a way, a nuisance in the sense that, 'What are they going to do with them?' I mean, they were just sitting around, just waiting to be sent somewhere and a system was set up where we were sent to places where we were put onboard aircraft. Not to bomber aircrafts or fighter aircrafts or anything like that but transport aircraft. We were put aboard aircraft which would fly us back to England. We were flown back to England to places where they had set up a system to receive us and, I mean, received us. The first thing they wanted was to get rid of us by sending us home on leave, giving us a – a railway pass to go home on leave or something like that, which we did. And, of course, our relatives, I mean, when – when we – when we got home they were surprised to see us so quickly [laughs]. They thought it would be a long time before we ever got back home. But, of course, there was so many that the best thing was to get rid of them and send them back home until they could be processed in the sense of being demobbed and sort of ceased to be part of the RAF as – as we were a part of the RAF.

Interviewer: So when were you demobbed?

Walter: Well, it wasn't long before we were demobbed. I may have made a note of it somewhere.

Interviewer: How did you feel returning to England? Had it changed much?

Walter: Well, I mean, when I got back home, I mean, it was much the same as it ever was. I mean, me mum and dad were there [laughs] in the same house.

Marion: You had nice surprise when you had your back pay, didn't you?

Walter: Oh, that's right. Well, yeah, one of the [laughs] one of the things when – when we were being processed by the people back in Europe now, you know, when were being processed, oh, no, this is when we got back to England. One of the first things we sort of asked the – the people who had received us up these receiving places before they sent us home on leave was, 'What about our back pay?' you know. Then they – they, I think, they got a bit shirty that people were – all they were worried about was getting hold of their back pay [laughs]. They – they just assured us that 'it will all be taken care of, but just find your time you'll get your money'. And, of course, I – I, of course, the RAF, they – all their aircrew, was all – they were non-commissioned officers but – but, of course, we were mainly non-commissioned. You started off as a sergeant and then you even – then you became a flight sergeant and then eventually you finished up as a warrant officer. They were the three ranks and in due course you – you're a year as a sergeant and a year as a flight sergeant. I think I finished up – I finished up as a – back as – came back to England as a flight sergeant. I got a vague recollection, I ventured into – to one of the recipient people, 'Oh, I'm due to become a warrant officer [laughs], when my time comes' [laughs] and he – he didn't like it much. He thought I – I should think about other things and that. All vague memories.

Interviewer: So you were just a teenager when the war started, how did you feel the war had changed you? Cos you came home a man and having served in the air force and being taken a prisoner of war.

Walter: Well, I was still quite young, wasn't I? And, of course, I had to – I had to contact – I was in the civil service, wasn't I? I had to – I contact the civil service and tell them that I was back and I was ready to start work again.

Marion: Yeah, you were only twenty-one when you were shot down, weren't you?

Walter: Yeah.

Interviewer: If you could summarise your war and your experience of the war in a few words, how would you summarise it?

Walter: Well, it's quite an experience, really, wasn't it? I mean, for somebody who the amount of travel he had ever done [laughs] was on the – the local train up to Barnsley [laughs].

Marion: Yeah, London to Barnsley was it, was it? Pretty much.

Walter: Well, I mean, I mean, I was a local boy. I went to school at – of course, I went, I passed the scholarship and went to Barnsley Grammar School, didn't I. I used to go on the train to Barnsley and that was a little train. I used to walk to the station and catch the – the train to the station at Barnsley.

Marion: So the war, you know, you been to Canada, to Germany, to Poland.

Walter: Well, that was it, yeah. I'd forgotten about going to Canada. Yeah, I went to Canada, didn't I? Well, that was quite a trip as well, wasn't it? Because we went by ship, didn't we?

Marion: So you did all these things that you would never have done.

Walter: Oh, well, yeah, and the ship we went out on to Canada went out in convoy, didn't it? Yeah, we picked up a convoy and we were in convoy but when we came back from Canada we picked up a, what you might call, a fast ship. I forget what it was called now. I probably dotted it down somewhere. But this was a fast ship and it – it was fast enough to sail on its own and it avoided, well, it avoided the German u-boats and it did go in convoy cos they used to form up the convoys and the convoys had their escort ships and, of course, the German u-boats used to attack the convoys if they could. But this particular ship, it was a French ship and – I forgot what it was called for the minute. But, anyway, it was considered fast enough to go on its own. We just came across on our own and landed somewhere. I forgot where we landed. They [pause], of course, this was after we'd been training in Canada, weren't it?

Marion: Yeah.

Walter: Yeah. When we came back from the prisoner of war camps they – they flew us – they flew us back, didn't they? Yeah, that's right. They – they had a system where they wanted to get these people out of the way from – from the – the vicinity of the operations and they – they allocated a lot of transport aircraft to fly us back. It's funny though, isn't it? Of course, I'm eighty-eight, now, aren't I? And, of course, your memory gets a bit – woolly [laughs].

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, I don't have any more questions. Is there anything that you feel like you didn't have a chance to talk about that you would want to add?

Walter: What about? The –

Interviewer: If there's anything that you feel you didn't get a chance to discuss today, that you would want to add? If not, it's no problem at all.

Walter: Yeah. No, I've forgotten who you were from?

Interviewer: From the University of Greenwich.

Walter: Oh, yes. The University of Greenwich, oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Ok. Well, thank you very much for taking your time and I'm going to turn this little thing off now.

End of Interview.