United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Ron WG Jones
July 9, 2012
RG-50.030*0709

PREFACE

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RON WG JONES
July 9, 2012

Interview: Ron Jones (RJ). POW at E715 Auschwitz.

Date: 9 July 2012

Interviewer: Duncan Little **(DL)**

Camera time code start: 01(h):53(m):09(s)

Transcript timecode start: 00(h):00(m):00(s)

Transcript:

[00:00:00]

[DL] Okay, so we're about to do the interview now.

[Camera operator] Okay. Do you want to do the clap? Right in front of the lense

[DL] Okay

*(*Clap*):* 00(h):00(m):31(s)

[DL] That was just to get the sync. Okay. If I could start off by taking your name. If you could say who you are please?

[RJ] I am Ron WG Jones. I live at 4 High View Road, Bassaleg, Newport. Er. NP10 8QP.

[DL] Okay and how do we spell both your first and second name, Ron?

[RJ] My first name is Ronald, my second name is William W I l l i a m Godfrey G o d f r e y Jones.

[DL] And how do we spell that?

[RJ] J o n e s

[DL] And do you prefer Ron or Ronald?

[RJ] Ronald. Ron. Everyone calls me Ron

[DL] Okay. So Ron, when were you born?

[RJ] Er April the 30th 1917

[DL] And whereabouts were you born?

[RJ] Here in Bassaleg.

[DL] Okay. And what was your family background?

[RJ] My father was a blacksmith. An industrial blacksmith. My mother, mother, was a tailor.
[DL] And in terms of your schooling and your background?

[RJ] I went to the local school, then I won a scholarship and went to the grammar school.
[DL] And from there, what did you do?
[RJ] When I was fourteen, my father was trades, all he believed in was trades and he wouldn't let me stop there so they got me out at 14 and they apprenticed me to the local firm Geskin and Nettleford as a wire drawer. I learnt my trade as wire drawer.
[DL] And when the outbreak of war actually happened when you were twenty two, whereabouts were you and what happened to you from there?
[RJ] I worked in Cardiff, Eastmoor, Cardiff, GKN, Geskin and Nettlefold and, er, I got called up in September 1940, which was rather a mistake because I had a reserved occupation – er, cut a long story shot, it was, I had my call up papers but erm when I went down to work to see about it they discovered that my form that I had filled in to say that I had a reserved occupation was some typist put it in the incoming mail instead of the outgoing mail, no record of me at the labour exchange - so I got called up. So I went to the Brecon to the South Wales borders and I was there for about two months and I got called in to the CO as my firm had err tried to get me back naturally. Oh he said, you'll have to serve three months proficiency pay first. I said, yes, okay. So another couple of months went by and I got another call to go in there and his argument then was oh it's changed he said you'll have to serve six months proficiency and then we'll see about it. It was pretty obvious to me that he wasn't going to let me go so, so, in the meantime, they offered me to let me go to a CADRE course and I thought it was a bit more money and so I took it. I had another request from the firm to get me back. And he said, "Oh my God," he said, "NCOs I couldn't let you go. On no account." And within six months I was out abroad.
[DL] So, where did they send you first?

[RJ] They sent me out to Cairo. To the Citadel in Cairo. To make up a battalion of the First battalion Welsh Regiment that got knocked about in Crete.

[DL] And briefly describe your time in North Africa leading up to your capture?

[RJ] I was in Cairo for about four or five weeks

[00:05:00]

[RJ] and then they sent us what they called "the blue" up the desert and we fought our way up to Benghazi and we got up to Benghazi by Christmas, had my Christmas dinner there and then in January, forty five[1], the Russians, the Germans came out there and Rommel circled our camp at Benghazi and caught the lot of us, the whole end block.

[DL] And how where you captured?

[RJ] Er, Sgt Major Convill said to me Corporal Jones Go up the road and take a section up the road and see what is going on. (Laughs). I hadn't gone 100 yards up the road and there was a dirty great tiger tank coming down the road with a big swastika on the side, a big black cross and there was err a fellow, I presume a German officer, sticked up in the turret there and in perfect English he said to me, "Come on boys drop your weapons, for you the war is over." So I was a prisoner of war.

[DL] So when you were captured where were you sent?

[RJ] We taken up to Tripoli and we were put in empty little cargo boats that were going out to Naples with equipment for the Germans so I arrived in, I forget what the date was, it was about the end of February when I got out to Naples and the Italians took us down to Camp 065 in the heel of Italy in Brindisi err and I was there for about, oh, going on for nine months and then one day they got us together and put us on a train and took us up to a place I think it was called Tarona just outside Rome

[DL] And when was this?

[RJ] This was something like July, August 43. And then one day, the interpreter came round and he asked for anybody with engineering experience and, of course, a couple of hundred of us stuck our hands up. We wanted to know what

[1] The actual date was January 1942. This correct year is rectified during the course of the interview.

for. He said, “Oh,” he said, “we are short of labour in the car factories in Milan,” and we thought, “Oh that’s a good thing to get out anyway” - cause nobody worked in Italy mind, so, anyway we got on this train now and we travelled overnight and we pulled up in this station in the morning thinking it was Milan and we heard “*Rous! Rous*!” outside and one of the boys said, “Hey, that’s German!” It was the Brenner Pass and they were handing us over to the Germans. The Germans then stuck us in cattle trucks, forty in a truck, and took me then I was in the truck for two days, no food, and we all had the runs, just imagine how humiliating it is in those trucks with no toilets nothing and we used one of the corners as a toilet. We go to, I think Stalag IVB at Moosburg, I think it was, and there they got us out they gave us some food and by this time, don’t forget, we are covered in lice. So they took all of our uniforms and put it in whatever it did, cleaned them up and gave it to us back whilst we were naked they took us through a place where they had like sheep shearers and they took all our hair off, everywhere, up, down below, up on the top, everywhere, and then they dabbed us with what I called was a bucket of creosote, and disinfectant anyway they put us back on the train now and we were on the train again for about another two days and eventually pulled up in a station called Lansdorf, Poland. Err, it was Stalag V111B

[DL] And when, when did you arrive at Stalag VIIIB?

[RJ] Stalag VIIIB? It was in err, I think it was around about the beginning of September 43.

[DL] So when were you captured in North Africa?

[RJ] I was captured in North Africa on the second week in January 45

[00:10:00]

[DL] Sorry, forty? When you were captured, was it 1943?

[RJ] No, forty two.

[DL] Forty two. So, you were captured in 1942 and then ended you up at Stalag VIIIB.

[RJ] I ended up in Italy first and then Stalag VIIIB was close on I think it was, about, the end of, round about the beginning of September 43.

[DL] Fine. So at this point you had spent close on 18 months in captivity.

[RJ] In Italy, in Italy, it was a problem. If it hadn't been for the Red Cross parcels then I don't think we would have survived. All they gave us was a little loaf of bread. We used to call it a Piccolo Parnie. A bit of cheese and stuff like that. And then every day we used to get what we called potato soup, a ladle of soup, that was all we had. If it hadn't have been for the Red Cross parcels then I don't think we would have survived.

[DL] In terms of what conditions were like at Stalag VIIIB, how did the Germans treat you and how long were you there for?

[RJ] Well, the Germans didn't bother us but the British had a bit of a err a centre, like a medical centre, they took all of our clothes and of course by then there was a blue diamond on the back of your coat and your trousers to say that you was a prisoner of war. Err, they sorted us out. By this time I had a beard and they sorted us out but, in Germany, everybody below the rank of Sergeant worked. There was about, as far as I know, 130,000 Prisoners of War, of all nationalities in Poland. They worked on farms, err, one mate of mine, Trevor Manly, lived up the road here, he worked in a coal mine, err, railways, err, then eventually, they picked out 280 of us and sent us out to work at IG Farben chemical industry. That's all we knew.

[DL] And, the British were effectively organizing themselves at Stalag VIIIB?

[RJ] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[DL] So…

[RJ] The guards didn't interfere with us they effectively just patrolled the grounds.

[DL] So how did you go from Stalag VIIIB to…

[RJ] They took us on an ordinary civilian train, err, and *(phone rings)* we were on the train for several hours and then we pulled up in the station and we marched down to our camp. On the way down, we saw all this high barbed wire and men in pyjamas digging trenches. Now, don't forget this is October and it's pretty cold in Poland in October so I said to one of the guards, "Who are they?" And he said, "Juden!" I said, "Pardon?" And he said, just how I'll say it, "Jews!" Like as though we should have known. It took us a couple of days to realize that it was

Auschwitz. We didn't know what Auschwitz was in those days but it didn't take us long to find out what was going on. We went down to the works and found out. The first thing we noticed was a terrible smell and the Jews in the works told us it was the crematorium. We didn't know what they were talking about to start with but after a while we realized what was going on.

[DL] When you got to Auschwitz, your first POW camp there:E711.

[RJ] Yes, yes, they took us into a camp called E711. It was pretty primitive. The toilets, for instance, were just a hole in the floor over a cesspool and we were there for two to three weeks and then they sent us over to E715 which I presume was a, a camp built for the Hitler Youth. There, of course, the facilities were totally different, we even had showers and flushed toilets and a place where you could do a bit of cooking.

[DL] And the actual location of your first camp, E711, compared to Monowitz. Whereabouts would you say?

[RJ] I think. We didn't march there. We just sort of strolled over to the new place so I should imagine that it was attached to it but I am not quite certain of that.

[00:15:00]

[DL] But within the compound of Auschwitz itself *(Ron: yeah)*, within the actual wired facility *(Ron: yeah)* that was Auschwitz *(Ron: yeah)*?

[RJ] I would think we were about two to two and a half kilometers from Birkenau which was the death camp.

[DL] And whereabouts was E715 Auschwitz?

[RJ] It used to take us about 10 minutes, quarter of an hour to march there so it must have been quite close to IG Farben.

[DL] And, what was the average day like for yourselves? In terms of…

[RJ] We got up at half past five with a cup of Ersatz coffee, burnt acorns as they called it. (Laughs) Er, that's all we had then, then we, oh, they used to give us a piece of bread, with, we used to have cut up a loaf of bread which we would cut up between eighteen of us, just one thick slice. And then we used to get, what they called a piece of cheese, it was like a round, err, how could you call a round pasty of cheese? You could see fish scales in it and it stunk like all the heaven.

But when you're hungry then, believe me, you'll eat anything. Err, and then we had sometimes a bit of, sometimes, a bit of jam to go on your bread. That was the rations you had then you marched to work, you got into, marched about six o'clock, then you got into works about ten to quarter past six and then they used to hand us over to the civilians. There were nine of us in a little gang and they they, they handed us over to a fellow called Master Beaver. He was a a a German civilian. In fairness, he was pretty fair to us. He'd say like, I want this, we were, we were constructing, err, I worked on a place, there was synthetic petrol, when I got there it was only just being built. They had, what they called, the Germans called "kramers"[2] – it was like, erm, an iron pipe about sixty feet high. There were three of them there and they were full of clay filters and the petrol used to go in through the top and down through the filters but we used to move err machinery and rails and, fair play for Beaver, he used to say "Get this done, get that done and you can go back to the camp." So, occasionally, instead of going back to the camp at six o'clock, we went back at three o'clock in the afternoon. When we had completed what he wanted us to do.

[DL] And what did you actually witness when you were at IG Farben when you were working in there with the slave laborers around you? How were they treated and what did you witness when you were there?

[RJ] Well, we saw, all these Jews working there and they used to be digging trenches and laying cables and all what we would used to call the menial tasks. You know. Err, to give you an idea, one of them, I had some, we had some food parcels in, so we didn't eat the German rations so I had a piece of sausage and I took it down to the works one day and I gave it to one of these Jews and he said his name was Josef, a couple of days after he gave me that ring[3], he said he made it out of a steel pipe. I stuck it on my finger and there it's been ever since. About a week after that, he disappeared, so I said to one of his mates, "Where's Josef this morning?" and he said "Oh, gas chamber. Kaput." That's just what he said. The life of the Jews in the camp, they were in such a state, they were

[2] transcribing note: phonetic spelling
[3] A separate cut away of the ring was filmed at the end of the interview.

shambling about, bent up, couldn't stand up straight and there lives at the works was about a month and when they couldn't work they stuck them in a trolley *(interrupts himself to correct)* in a lorry and took them to the death camp to the gas chamber. So the fellow who made that ring for me went to the gas chamber.

[DL] Did you see any high ranking SS officials?

[RJ] Er, yes, we used to watch Kramer, I presume it was Kramer, someone said his name was Kramer. He'd been walking around the works with a gang around him. Fortunately, unfortunately, if a Jew got in his way then he's just kick them out of his way and twice I'd saw him actually take his Luger out and shoot two of them. Different times. I'd actually seen him shoot a couple of Jews.

[00:20:00]

[DL] When you saw that, what was your reaction?

[RJ] Oh, crikey. Disgusted. It, it, it, if it had been in civilian life we would have mobbed him but what can you do against Germans that were armed? We, we, cat called, we shouted but he didn't take any notice of us.

[DL] How were you treated? How were the British POWs treated?

[RJ] In fairness, the Jews *(corrects himself)* the Germans treated us alright. We never had really any problems. There was only one incident. These iron cylinders, the Germans used to call them "kramers."[4] One day me and Reynolds, err, Corporal Reynolds, was err, asked to go up and change over the pipes at the top because they occasionally flushed them, clean them out but Reynolds not able to speak enough German tried to explain that he did not have enough clothes or the right clothes. He said he was a bit hairy of heights, that he'd fall off, he kept on arguing and old Beever then sent for a guard. Unfortunately, it was, err, I don't know his name but he was an Under Officer,[5] like a Sergeant to us, three stripes. An argument, and he astonished me, he pulled his Luger out and he threatened Reynolds and Reynolds says I can't go up there and he shoot him. You should have seen me go up there. I went up there like a monkey. *(Slight quiet laugh)*

[4] transcribing note: phonetic spelling
[5] Transcribing note: Jones used the German word. Assumed translation is Under Officer.

[DL] What was your reaction when, when you saw?

[RJ] Oh, terrible. We all got together. A crowd of us got together and remonstrated but when we got to camp that night that Under Officer[6] had disappeared. When we enquired what had happened to him because we wanted the Red Cross to come there they said they'd sent him to the Russian Front.

[DL] So you said that you wanted the Red Cross to investigate the shooting?

[RJ] We wanted the Red Cross to investigate it because, let's be fair, the Germans weren't like that, they didn't, they didn't treat us bad at all.

[DL] Because they treated the Jews badly.

[RJ] (*Jones does not hear and continues interview and ends reference to the Reynolds shooting by saying: That was just a one off).*

[DL] In terms of an actual war crime against the British POWs, as far as you're aware, that was the only war crime which took place?

[RJ] That was the only war crime which I spied myself.

[DL] Okay. What was your initial impressions during your first few weeks at Auschwitz?

[RJ] We couldn't get over this smell and, and, and they were burning fellows, they were burning the Jews. It was astonishing. We just couldn't believe it but, eventually, we knew it was right. That's what was happening. It shook us rigid. We just didn't know. We just couldn't understand it.

[DL] In terms of the crematoria, how did you know, what?

[RJ] Occasionally, we would see smoke coming up and we'd say to ourselves that's some more poor buggers burnt to death again.

[DL] Were you scared of the crematoria?

[RJ] Of course we were. We thought if ever they got desperate then they'd put us in there.

[DL] So that was a very genuine concern?

[RJ] That was a genuine scare. Yeah.

[DL] Even though the Geneva Convention supposedly…

[RJ] Even though, there was always that danger.

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[6] See footnote 6

[DL] Okay. How did the British POWs cope, how did you cope, knowing that the gas chambers were, were on site and what was happening to the Jews.

[RJ] Well, well, we just carried on working and I, I just can't remember. We were alright. Prisoner of war life wasn't all that bad. Err, we suffered malnutrition. To give you an idea we suffered with our teeth. Used to chip and enamel would come off with malnutrition. Err, and err, once every week on a Wednesday, a guard was allowed to take three or four of us err up into Caravichi[7] to a Polish dentist. (*Laughs*) Laughable as I was on this and Wally Martin and two fellows went up to this Polish dentist one day, and the guard knocked on the door and the dentist came to the door but there was two German soldiers sat inside waiting their turn and, of course, immediately they jumped up, clicked their heels and "*Heil Hitler!*"

[00:25:00]

[RJ] and Wally Martin, as quick as a flash, said "*Larry Adler!*" so that became our signature tune. Ask John Bishop *(corrects himself)* or Brian Bishop, I'd expect he'll remember.

[DL] Did you take part on any acts of sabotage that the British undertook?

[RJ] The only acts of sabotage that I did, when we use to go up to on the top *(of the chimneys)* to change these, we use to take a handful of sand and put a handful of sand, that was the only sabotage that I could get too. But I heard some of the boys when they were building things they used to disturb it and create all sorts but that's the only kind of sabotage that I was involved in.

[DL] So, how did that work?

[RJ] We used to put a handful of sand when we were changing the pipes over. We'd stick a handful of sand in there.

[DL] So, the pipes would become blocked?

[RJ] Well, I presume that the synthetic petrol would wash it down into the others, so…

[DL] And did you find that your fellow POWs didn't want you to become involved in acts of sabotage?

[7] transcribing note: phonetic spelling

[RJ] No, because, we were all of us of the same opinion, I think. There was all sorts of sabotage that went on because they were still building it.

[DL] And did you find that being married made a difference at all?

[RJ] Yes, because I was married they didn't allow me to be a member of the escape committee. They wouldn't allow it because I was a married man.

[DL] We've already touched on Master Beaver who was in charge of your working group you were in. How large was the working group that you were actually in…

[RJ] There were nine of us who worked for Master Beaver.

[DL] And in terms of the actual work which you undertook apart from cleansing out the towers, what other types of work did you undertake?

[RJ] Oh, we used to move machinery around. As a matter of fact, the nail on my left foot is like a great big claw because I dropped a rail on it one day. We were moving rails for runners and things like that, all sorts of machinery.

[DL] And in terms of the British and their attitudes towards you for medical help in that sort of situation. What sort of medical help was there for you at E715 Auschwitz?

[RJ] All we had was a er, as far as I know, he was a South African doctor and that's all we had. I think he had a fellow that used to assist him but I'm not quite sure.

[DL] And what were conditions like in your medical facility there?

[RJ] Erm, well, to get a day off as, one thing, we were covered in boils, I used to get boils and carbuncles and even when I came home I had them. And when I say I had a boil everywhere, I mean everywhere. I used to get terrible carbuncles and boils, I presume it was malnutrition. I don't know.

[DL] And the actual medical facilities on site at E715?

[RJ] Oh, poor. Poor. They never had the equipment, they never had the drugs as far as I know. Don't forget, we were all reasonably fit men so I don't suppose we needed that kind of thing.

[DL] And in terms of your relationships with the Jews, how did that work? Did you build any type of relationship with them?

[RJ] No, you weren't allowed. They had Capos with them so you had to watch if he turned his head and you wanted to talk to a Jew, if a Capo saw it he'd go straight to the Jew and belt him with like a truncheon he used to carry. The Capos were as far as I know, they were Polish political prisoners and they used to wear an arm band with Capo on it, always in charge of the Jews. Why they treated the Jews like that, I don't know, but they were sods, the Capos.

[DL] In terms of what the British actually did to try to alleviate the suffering of the Jews, in terms of providing food or…

[RJ] If we had any food cause when we had Red Cross parcels in we wouldn't eat the rubbish that the Germans gave us so we always took it to work and gave it to the Jews when the Capo wasn't looking of course.

[DL] So, how would you give you're your food, this is the soup.

[RJ] Yeah, yeah, just give it to a Jew.

[00:30:00]

[DL] And what difference did that make do you think?

[RJ] Made us feel clever, made us feel good that we were doing something.

[DL] And how did the Jews respond to it?

[RJ] Of course, they used to be overwhelmed when you used to give them some food. Poor buggers were starving, of course.

[DL] So, their condition. How would you describe their condition today?

[RJ] Terrible. Terrible. One day, er, they didn't bring the soup for us so someone gave us what the Jews ate and it was just plan cabbage water. That's all it was. Oh crikey, it was terrible. I'd take a mouthful and spit it out. Terrible. So that's all the Jews lived on.

[DL] And were the British able to pass cigarettes as well to the Jews?

[RJ] Yes, if it was possible then we would. I wrote home and told my wife once that, err, cigarettes was currency so I think she used to go to Smiths in Newport and they had some scheme where you paid your money and they sent us parcels of cigarettes so I had quite a few parcels of cigarettes. One day, of course we used to take cigarettes down to the works and we used to barter for a bit of white bread and eggs and I had half a dozen eggs one day, coming back to the camp

and we used to walk into the camp like this, you know, and the guard's run his hands down to see if there's anything and, this one day, I'd done it before but the guard went right down and found the eggs and he said, "Oh, I am, mein libre[8]" and squashed the eggs around the leg and then took me into the guard room and then shoved me into a, in a civilian prison for three days.

[DL] And was this prison on site in Auschwitz?

[RJ] No, up in Auschwitz.

[DL] No, sorry, up in Auschwitz?

[RJ] No in the civilian part of it. Up in the town of Auschwitz, it wasn't called Auschwitz, we called it Auschwitz but I think was…

[DL] Oswiecim?

[RJ]. Oswiecim. Something like that it was.

[DL] So it was actually in Oswiecim .

[RJ] In the village, yeah. It was just a police place, you know.

[DL] And what were facilities like in the cell there?

[RJ] Bread and water, *(laughs)* that's all I had for three days.

[DL] When you were back at E715 Auschwitz, did you witness atrocities happening around your POW huts there?

[RJ] There were no atrocities in our camp there, no.

[DL] But, in terms of the Germans, bringing people, you talk about, the British cesspool being pumped out on one occasion and then the following day…

[RJ] Oh that, yes, yes, they brought, they used to bring a a a horse and cart in those days of course and then they'd bring in tanks and pump out the sewers to empty them and one day, they went out in the fields opposite with these carts, knock the bung out the back and walk back and forth dropping all our muck in a field. And a couple of days after, a lorry pulled up, with, I presume, Jewesses on, and they like had a bag around their waist full of potatoes and a little mattock and bear feet and they walked through dropping a potato in it and of course, they were women, and we were all eyes naturally *(laughs).* What a disgusting thing, couldn't believe it.

[8] transcribing note: phonetic spelling

[DL] And how did the POWs, how did yourself react?

[RJ] Well, we were crowding round and shouting and cat calling and booing. *(laughs)* I think the woman in charge of them was Irma Grese but I'm not quite sure. Someone said, "That's Irma Grese" but I don't know. I think after the war, I think they recognized her from Nuremberg and someone said when we had our reunion, "Hey, that was Irma Grese with those women." I don't know.

[DL] And how did she treat the women who would…?

[RJ] Well, whipping them, what do they call it? A leather thing and she used to shout at them. Treat them terrible. Terrible.

[DL] What were the guards like? Both in terms of what you have just described there and also in terms of…

[RJ] I would say that 90 per cent of the guards were all men with patches on their eyes and wounds on their arms…

[DL] I'm sorry, these are the guards who were?

[RJ] These were our guards…

[DL] At E715?

[RJ] I think 90 per cent of the guards that we had had either been injured on the front or were too old to go to the front.

[00:35:00]

[DL] So these were the guards that were therefore in charge of yourselves, were….

[RJ] In charge of us, yes.

[DL] Were members (Ron: yeah) of the German Army effectively (Ron: yeah) who were too poorly to fight…

[RJ] The verntabel[9] who was in charge of course was a normal verntabel[10] he wasn't injured but occasionally we used to get the Gestapo who would come into the camp and search because to start with they knew we had a wireless and to search for the wireless and if they knew we had cigarettes then they'd pinch them

[9] transcribing note: phonetic spelling
[10] transcribing note: phonetic spelling

but we used to shove them in all sorts of places we used to hide everything more often than not we knew they were there

[DL] Were they Gestapo or SS?

[RJ] I wouldn't know, we used to call them Gestapo but I they did have SS on their collars. I presumed they were all one in the same.

[DL] How did you know when the SS came into your camp?

[RJ] Oh, there was, a car, posh car pull up with four or five men, so you knew: Watch out! Gestapo about!

[DL] And how did the guards change in their behaviour?

[RJ] Oh, crikey. They were frightened to death of them (laughs) so they were a bit keen at that particular time and once the Gestapo, of course, had gone they'd relaxed again.

[DL] And these were your guards, members of the German army who were too ill to fight?

[RJ] In fairness, in fairness, we got friendly with a couple of guards. They they they didn't they didn't want war no more than we did.

[DL] And in terms of what you witnessed with the SS guards, erm, at IG Farben and in Auschwitz itself. What were they like?

[RJ] Oh, the SS. Terrible. Strict. Military.

[DL] And what did you see them do?

[RJ] Er, they used to walk around the works and er, used to push the Jews out the way but apart from when Kramer came round with half a dozen fellows with him there wasn't that kind of problem as they were just building anyway, a lot of the works had just been reconstructed.

[DL] You talked about the wireless, how did that actually work? Where did you find a radio from? How did you get it into your camp?

[RJ] I wasn't involved but, er, evidently they got a wireless down in the works and they broke it up into little parts and some fellows brought it back in. Don't forget there were all sorts of technicians in the prisoner of war camp and they put it together. I believe that Coward, Charlie Coward, CMS Coward, used to have it inside a Red Cross parcel in the Red Cross stores and he used to go in there

every night and get the latest news and then come round the camp and tell us what was going on so we knew exactly what was going on…

[DL] And are…

[RJ] We knew about the second front, we knew about the Russians coming in.

[DL] And are you aware of any of the British POWs trying to then disseminate that information to the Jews?

[RJ] Not as I know of. They might of but I I I the nine that I was involved in, we didn't see much of the Jews at all. There was one incident that I'd like to tell you about. Master Beaver came to me one day and he says er he used to call me Jonas, not Jones, Jonas you get er tins of meat he said in your parcel don't you? Bring one to work one day so I took this tin of bully beef to the works and he borrowed some bikes and three of us and Beaver went done to his cottage and he made us a big stew.

[DL] And the cottage was within the perimeter of…

[RJ] It was within in the perimeter of the erm…they encircled a village

[DL] So it was within the perimeter of the Auschwitz camp

[RJ] It was inside the perimeter of the electric fence

[DL] And how did Master Beaver who was a civilian engineer, from what you're saying there he seems to have treated you quite reasonably

[RJ] Yes he treated us very fair

[DL] And how did he treat….

[RJ] We had no problem with him at all. The only incident we had and he was as shocked as we were was when Reynolds got shot.

[DL] And how did Master Beaver treat the Jews?

[RJ] I wouldn't know, as far as I know I don't think I see him in contact with any of the Jews.

[DL] Did the Germans ever plant anyone in your camp to effectively spy on you?

[00:40:00]

[RJ] Well there was a rumour which went round the camp one day A fellow came in he said he had come from Stalag VIIIB and, er, well there was a bit of a doubt, I don't know why, but there was a bit of a doubt about him. And after a couple of

weeks, I heard that they killed him and dumped him in the cesspool whether that's true or not I don't know I wasn't involved myself, I only heard it.

[DL] The facilities at E715 Auschwitz, what were the facilities like there?

[RJ] They were alright. We had proper toilets, we even had a proper shower. We used to walk across and have a proper shower occasionally. We were pretty good there, it was alright. All the huts had, er, hot water pipes around them, it was a bit cold at times but, er, don't forget that in winter out there the temperature used to drop down to sometimes around 15 below…

[DL] There was also a library?

[RJ] Yes, we also had a library there. Some of the boys built up a library.

[DL] And you also had a mending facility for clothing?

[RJ] Yeah, yeah. Another thing we did was on a Sunday afternoon, we'd play football and when the Red Cross used to come there occasionally and inspect us all and found out that we used to play football there on a Sunday afternoon. I don't know where they got the ball from, I'm not sure and we used to play on a Sunday afternoon and there was crowds – some of the, er, slave labourers from the different camps used to come and watch us and guards used to watch us, er, but once the Red Cross found out we played the next thing was they brought us four lots of shirts – English, Welsh, Scots and Irish and so we sorted ourselves out. There were eleven of us but we weren't all, er, er, Welsh. Do you want to see a photograph?

[DL] We'll have a look at the photograph at the end. So it wasn't just guards, and other POWs and local townsfolk, there were also concentration camp?

[RJ] Well, of course, other than our camp, there wasn't guards around other camps.

[DL] No, but in terms of those who actually watched and spectators.

[RJ] Yes, it was slave labour but some of them were Poles, Ukranians, there were all sorts of different people.

[DL] So, the Jews weren't allowed to watch?

[RJ] No, no. The Jews weren't. The Jews weren't allowed to go outside their camp – only to go to work.

[DL] But some of the other slave labourers who were in a different category?

[RJ] Yes, yes, sometimes on a lovely afternoon, they'd be a crowd around, cheering and shouting.

[DL] So other slave labourers who were in a different category…

[RJ] And in different camps

[DL] And in different camps were…

[RJ] But they were free, you know, they used to walk up and down the road, you used to see gangs of women, all sorts walking up the road, between us and IG Farben, the camp.

[DL] And these football matches: how often did you play?

[RJ] Sunday afternoons. That was the only time we were allowed. In the summer. We couldn't play in the winter because it was too cold then.

[DL] And how long would these matches actually last for?

[RJ] Oh, we were out there for a couple of hours.

[DL] And how important were these matches for British POWs?

[RJ] Oh, terrific in importance (laughs) you used to get rivalry but it was all for basic fun.

[DL] In terms of the *(pause)* atrocities that were happening against the Jews, we've already touched on the food which you tried to supply to them. Were there any other ways in which the British tried to elevate the suffering of the Jewish people?

[RJ] Not as I know of. We used to pass them food but there was nothing else we could do.

[DL] And, in terms of your own treatment, you talked earlier of the Italian camps and how difficult facilities were for you there and that at E715 Auschwitz: did you feel that facilities were better at E715 than in Italy?

[RJ] Oh, definitely. Yes. Yes, we were alright there just because we were prisoners of war, it didn't make everything bad. We used to make the most of everything.

[00:45:00]

[RJ] We didn't have the food we wanted naturally but, er, other than that, we used to make packs of cards out of cigarette packets – there was always something going on and then we had, we also had with us, Wally Martin, who was a small time producer with the BBC and he used to put plays on at night time and the Germans always kept the front row for the Germans.

[DL] You were in one of Wally Martin's plays called Sweeney Todd.

[RJ] Yes, yes, he put a play on called Sweeney Todd. I was the Police Sergeant.

[DL] And you acted alongside Arthur Gifford England who was in the same play.

[RJ] Yes, yes.

[DL] How long did the play last for, not just in terms of its duration.

[RJ] We used to put it on for about two to three nights.

[DL] And how popular were these plays?

[RJ] Oh, everybody used to go to watch the plays. I can't… We had one hut which had a stage and the hut was full. Always.

[DL] So, how many people would you say?

[RJ] A hundred or more I'd expect. Sure to be.

[DL] And what difference did these plays make for yourselves?

[RJ] Oh, it used to create all sorts of excitement. First of all there were the rehearsals and then there was the wigs. We used to make wigs, erm, we took the string from the Red Cross parcels and used to take us hours to thread it and make a wig, to make a brunette, we used to dip the wig in indelible pencil in the bucket to make a black one (laughs).

[DL] And when the Nazis came to watch these plays in the front row…

[RJ] It wasn't Nazis that came in to watch the plays, this was the German guards.

[DL] The German guards.

[RJ] I wouldn't call them Nazis.

[DL] Why wouldn't you call them Nazis?

[RJ] I don't think they, the only people we called Nazis were the Gestapo and the officials.

[DL] So, in other words, members of the SS.

[RJ] The guards weren't like that. For instance, if you get a guard on his own then he used to call Hitler and all these, "silly buggers" and all. They didn't believe in it no more than we did. They could see what was happening but they were controlled by the Nazis, weren't they? So they didn't have a chance.
[DL] And do you remember, a censor watching the plays at the same time as you were on the stage?
[RJ] Might have been, I'm not sure.
[DL] So in terms of where you would have preferred to have been between E715 Auschwitz where the conditions were better for yourselves in terms of shower facilities and toilet facilities (Ron: yeah) but where you were constantly afraid that you might end up in the gas chambers, as you mentioned earlier, or the Italian camps where the facilities weren't so good. Where would you have preferred to have been?
[RJ] Oh, the German camp, definitely.
[DL] At E715?
[RJ] Oh, yes, at E715?
[DL] Even though…
[RJ] Stalag VIIIB was another place where the facilities were first class, no problem.
[DL] So even though the facilities were there how did the British POWs feel knowing that the crematoria and the gas chambers were there and that there was all that suffering?
[RJ] Well there was always that fear, you didn't want to believe it but there was always that fear in the back of your mind that it could happen to you, I suppose.
[DL] And, how, in terms of the Jews and that suffering being so close to you and the facilities which you had at your camp which were arguably better than they were at Italy and obviously certainly a lot better than anything that the Jewish victims were suffering – what sort of feeling did that leave in your camp?
[RJ] Hard to describe really. I mean, it never used to bother us all that much but there was always that fear that we used to talk about sometimes, "Aye, I suppose

we'd be next." That type of thing. You made a joke of it. You know. You never took it serious.

[DL] And apart from the plays, the card games and the football, were there any other recreational activities that was going on?

[RJ] Yes. There were all sorts going on. They used to have people who play in chess club, they'd have whist drives always something going on in the recreation hut as we'd call it.

[DL] And when did you take part in these activities?

[RJ] After we'd come back and had our food at night time.

[DL] In the evening?

[RJ] You were never idle. There was always something to do in the evenings. Always.

[DL] And was this because you were pre-occupying yourselves to take yourselves away from the horror of what you were witnessing during the day?

[RJ] Naturally, yep.

[DL] So, this was almost unique in terms of your experience as a POW (Ron: yes, yes) in Italy (Ron: yes) where you didn't seem to do,

[00:50:00]

[DL] is there a difference in the recreational time in Italy compared to your time at E715.

[RJ] In Italy, it was shocking.

[DL] I think what I'm trying to drive at is that were you deliberately trying to create different games, different activities, …

[RJ] Occupy your mind, more than anything.

[DL] Why did you think you had to do that?

[RJ] Because if you didn't then you would be lying on your bed dreaming about home – we used to talk and if we were chatting then it was always about what food you'd have when you get home, what restaurants you'd go to when you got home all those kinds of things so it was better that you had something to do

[DL] And did people chat about what was happening to the Jews?

[RJ] Yes, we were absolutely appalled. We just couldn't believe it.

[DL] So what did people talk about when you did talk about it?

[RJ] How disgusting it was. Terrible. Sometime you just couldn't believe it. It just didn't make sense.

[DL] How common was the knowledge of mass murder and the gas chambers?

[RJ] Everyone knew about it because we used to talk about it and another thing we used to see because the Jews in Monowitz who used to work in the works were on the other side of the football field when their life in the factory was over, we used to see a lorry go up the road with them all standing up in there and we used to say, "Oh there's another load going up to the gas chamber."

[DL] And how often would you see that?

[RJ] Once a week. I forget know.

[DL] And how many people would you say in that lorry?

[RJ] Oh, I don't know. 40? Maybe 50? Something like that?

[DL] And were these all men?

[RJ] All men. It was men that worked in the works.

[DL] Did you see any women in the works?

[RJ] No, no.

[DL] So it was just men?

[RJ] We never saw any women working in the works. The only women we saw working in the works was Ukraines and Poles. People like that. There was no Jewish women. I never saw a Jewish woman in the works.

[DL] How were the Jewish women, sorry, the Ukranian women treated in the works compared to the Jews?

[RJ] Well, we used to try to get in touch with them naturally (laughs). I have heard of one fellow, I don't know who it was, made a big friend of one of the Ukrainian women and actually went and visited her after the war and they got married. I don't know how true that is but I did here about it that they had got married.

[DL] How far away from the crematoria would you say you were?

[RJ] I would say about two and a half kilometers, two to three kilometers.

[DL] And, upon occasion you could see the smoke?

[RJ] We could see the smoke. Another thing we could do. I remember being up on top of one of those kramers one day and you could look down into the works in the crematorium area.

[DL] Could you see transports arrive?

[RJ] I thought I saw a train but I'm not sure.

[DL] In terms of, just going back to the football matches briefly. You were the goal keeper in the Welsh team. What was the actual atmosphere like during those games?

[RJ] Great. You used to forget everything and just play football.

[DL] In terms of the actual duration, and I know we touched upon this earlier, how long do you think the games lasted for?

[RJ] Oh, about, I can't remember, you used to get tired quick. I should think about half an hour each way.

[DL] And the reason for you getting so tired so quickly?

[RJ] Malnutrition, wasn't it.

[DL] You wore a Welsh playing badge and obviously the kit came from the Red Cross but where did your Welsh playing badge actually come from?

[RJ] I had a fellow, draw. If our socks wore out they'd give us squares of cloth around 12 inches square

[DL] This is the Germans?

[00:55:00]

[RJ] I took a piece off one day and I can't remember his name, Aiden John I think it was from Pontypridd and he drew the Prince of Wales feathers on there and I embroided it with some of the old socks that we threw away. I made eleven of them whether the other fellows brought them home or not I don't know.

[DL] And you still have that today?

[RJ] I still have it, yeah.

[DL] There were photographs that were actually taken of the team – of the Welsh team. How were those photographs done? The photographs, who took the photographs?

[RJ] The Poles used to come into our camp, repairing and all sorts of things so we used to give them a packet of cigarettes, all sorts of things, a bar of chocolate. And they used to take photographs.

[DL] Did it ever surprise you that the Nazis and their plans for mass murder were obviously authorized in secrecy and yet you were so aware of what was going on around you and certainly allowing Poles into the camp to take photographs of yourself and from what you were saying about ordinary members of the German Army being your guards. Does that surprise you in terms of the lack of security around you, the openness with which murder was happening?

[RJ] If the Poles came into the camp to do anything then a guard always came with him. He was never away from him so he couldn't talk. But if he brought a camera in, I think it was done once and then it just caught on.

[DL] But does the openness of the nature of the abuses that were happening around you, does that surprise you when you look at how secretive the Nazis were?

[RJ] Yeah, but the guards weren't like that. They used to help you more than hinder you.

[DL] These were the German Army?

[RJ] The German guards were alright – no problem. We never had any problem with the German guards.

[DL] But it would only be the SS if you were to have a problem?

[RJ] Oh, the SS, that's a different kettle of fish.

[DL] And did you ever have problems with the SS?

[RJ] No, I didn't but I know several who did.

[RJ] In what way?

[DL] Well, they used to search and if they found anything then they just accepted it, took it - which annoyed some fellows of course.

[DL] So, were there any punishments given by the SS to the British?

[RJ] No, I know a couple of chaps who got caught with stuff, like I did with my eggs, and they stuck them in a civilian prison for a couple of days. I'll tell you one thing that happened. Don't forget the perimeter of the works enclosed the village

so evidently one of the boys found like a bit of a small duck, or whatever it was, so he killed it as it was around Christmas time and he brought it back in. He tied the legs around his waist and he had the neck down where his old boy was and the guard found it, touched it, he thought he was looking for women. Anyway, he found it and he took him into the guard room and he come back laughing as even the Verlthere was laughing about it and let me keep it so he brought it home.

[DL] Just going back to the way in which the Jews were actually treated, did you ever discuss their conditions once you played your football, had cards, or during rehearsals in the play, did you discuss at that point how you felt they were being mistreated. What sort of discussions did you ever have on the subject?

[RJ] I don't remember. I just don't remember.

[DL] How many men were there at E715 Auschwitz?

[01:00:00]

[RJ] I always understood that there were 280 of us who went out to Auschwitz. But of course when they bombed the factory one day, a bomb dropped in our camp and killed about 30 or 40 of our men.

[DL] The bombing raid at E715 Auschwitz, when did that happen?

[RJ] One Sunday morning.

[DL] Do you remember the year? The date?

[RJ] It must have been during forty four. I can't remember dates. It must have been around forty four.

[DL] And what actually happened?

[RJ] Well, we used to hear the sirens going off. Oh, one day, it happened when we were down in the works and a few of us jumped into a trench.

[DL] And the actual bombing raid?

[RJ] Now, if I remember rightly, we were injured when we were in that trench and we had blood coming from our mouths and our bottoms and I was taken into hospital for three or four days, civvy hospital. Who was with me I can't remember. When you talk about these things memories come back don't they? I can't remember any more than that?

[DL] And the bombing raid of forty four?

[RJ] During forty four, yes.

[DL] What happened and where were you?

[RJ] It's only once I remember when I was put in hospital. But basically it was always on a Sunday morning when there was no one working there and then they used to get us in on Monday to get everything right again.

[DL] You talked about, earlier, before we started the interview about the carpet bombing – could you talk us through that again?

[RJ] When the sirens went off we used to watch the planes – they weren't very high they used to come in from four quarters and we used to say, Hello, Number one shovel ready and they used to come down all at once. They called it carpet bombing, I think. But the sky was full of these little bombs.

[DL] And on the Sunday when the air raid shelter was hit – what actually happened?

[RJ] Well they used to drop into the works and on one occasion, I think there was a bombing raid about three or four times whilst I was there. They used to get us to work the following morning to rectify all the problems which had happened.

[DL] You were in a depression, a small grove?

[RJ] Yes, yes, when the bomb dropped on our camp. The Germans allowed us to dig a trench and put some tin sheets over the top and then the earth would be put over it. Now I'm a bit claustrophobic, luckily, and I didn't go in there. I wasn't the only one mind, there was quite a few of us who didn't go into the shelter. We just lay on the ground outside and, of course, a bomb went right into the entrance of the shelter, chaos, chaos. I think there was about thirty or forty killed there and they were buried in the cemetery up in the village but when I went back there to look they'd been taken from there and put into a proper cemetery for British soldiers.

[DL] What was the feeling amongst British soldiers afterwards?

[RJ] Oh, terrible. Terrible. Hard to describe. We were all upset, of course we were.

[DL] What about the experiences the Jews would tell you about? Did the Jews talk about their experiences with you?

[RJ] No. No. You wouldn't get near enough to a Jew to talk about. At least I didn't. I have heard that others did but I didn't get near enough.

[DL] Why was that?

[RJ] There wasn't any Jews working in my area.

[DL] So your working party at IG Farben?

[RJ] Was in a little section. There were Jews out in the front like where we saw them digging trenches and all they were but….

[01:05:00]

[RJ] …we were in an area with machinery you know.

[DL] Were any of the British POWs subjected to cruel, harsh or degrading treatment?

[RJ] Apparently so, apparently so, I don't know. I have heard of meeting somebody after the war and all this business but I don't know about that.

[DL] And in terms of conditions for people like yourself who worked at IG Farben, what were conditions like for yourself there? Also, there was the story of the Rolex watch and you swapping of cigarettes for the Rolex watch.

[RJ] How I come to have the Rolex watch, the Poles used to come bartering with us, of course, they wanted cigarettes. One day a Pole came with a little box and he opened it up and there was a Rolex oyster watch in there. He wanted some cigarettes. So, the following day, I took down, I think, something like a couple of hundred cigarettes, a parcel for the Rolex oyster watch.

[DL] And what happened to the watch?

[RJ] Well, you know we left Auschwitz in January 1945 and we were on that march and I had it on my wrist, of course, but you have your hands on your haversack and a German officer spotted this Rolex Oyster watch and he kept on pestering me and I thought he would take it but in fairness he didn't but he did say to me, one day, he says "you may as well give this to me as your going to die one day anyway. You're not going to complete this march." That kind of thing but I don't think they knew where we were going or what was happening. Anyway, after a couple of days he came with a sack of bread. I don't know where he got it from, Well, I couldn't get the watch off quick enough, could I? There was a gang

of us there and we had a good feast for a few days. It was plain bread but it was food.

[DL] And do you know where the watch came from, the Pole who gave it to you?

[RJ] I haven't a clue.

[DL] There were various stories after the war from men who had been at E715 Auschwitz who claimed to have swapped places with *(interruption from camera operator and clap for sync at 01:07:41)…* so the stories that came out after the war from individuals at E715 Auschwitz who claimed to have swapped places with….

[RJ] Denis Avey

[DL] Denis Avey and Charlie Coward being two among them. Firstly, what's your views on Charlie Coward's story?

[RJ] Oh, absolutely a lot of lies. Definitely. What he says he done in the works is just plain stupid. In one instance, he says he had a hard cart and he went down into the works with a handcart. He never come out of E175, I never see him in the works and where did he get the handcart from? I never saw any hard cart. And he used to go around the works and get the dead Jews out – what for?

[DL] So Charlie Coward who was the POW liaison officer for the Red Cross, what you're saying is whilst he claimed to get radio parts as well…

[RJ] Whether he got the parts. I don't think so. Someone else got the parts and then he looked after the wireless, he knew where it was.

[DL] Fine. So he was the one

[RJ] As far as I know

[DL] But as far as him being down in the works, you never saw him there… so his story of the handcart…

[RJ] It's all poppycock.

[DL] So, his story about finding…

[RJ] And I've talked to Dougie Bond and he says the same thing. He says it was all lies.

[DL] So Charlie Coward whose affidavit was presented to Nuremberg after the war and in his book where he talks about how he swapped places with someone in the Jewish concentration camp there. In your mind that isn't possible?
[RJ] From my point of view, yes, I couldn't see it happening, no.
[DL] More recently, Denis Avey (*Jones: He said the same thing*) has gone on to write alongside a British journalist…
[01:10:00]
[DL] …a book called *The Man Who Broke into Auschwitz*, what's your view on Denis Avey's story?
[RJ] A lot of his book is authentic but as far as he said that he would change places with this Jew. I just can't believe it. I just can't. If you could see the situation you'd say the same thing.
[DL] What makes you believe that he couldn't do what he claimed to have done?
[RJ] Well. For instance, when we walked into our camp in the evenings, we always walked in with our hands up stretched. If a Jew had done that, he just couldn't. You should have seen the state of them. They used to shamble about. They didn't walk, they just shambled about with their heads bent, shoulders bent, they just couldn't straighten up, they just couldn't have held their hands up. Impossible.
[DL] What changes actually occurred in the camp towards the end of the war?
[RJ] Not a lot really. We noticed that the guards weren't as keen as they used to be. They were more friendly, put it that way.
[DL] When you say they weren't as keen as they used to be?
[RJ] Well, they'd talk to you. They wouldn't have talked to you before. On that march, for instance, alright they controlled you but not in the same sense as guards would normally do. They used to stick us in barns and leave us overnight. I think they would go to the farmhouse for a meal where as we were shut in barns.
[DL] In terms of changes towards attitudes towards the Jews. What changes did you notice in their treatment? Did you notice any different changes?

[RJ] No, no. The only thing that I saw at the end of the war is that they let a lot of the Jews out when they could hear the Russians fighting and when we were marching through the Carpathian mountains we saw Jews dead on the side of the road. Loads of them.

[DL] So, how did the march actually start?

[RJ] About the second week of January 45 and we were hoping that the Russians would release us because we could hear them fighting up the road, several miles away of course, Jerry walked into the camp and told us to pick up what gear we could carry as "we are marching you out." They stuck us on the road and, apparently, it was one of the worst winters they had had for fifty years. The temperature was around 15 to 20 degrees below, they marched us through the Carpathian mountains and down through Czechoslovakia. We were 17 weeks. I wrote it all down on the back of one of Gladys' photographs. We were 17 weeks on the road and we marched something like 9000 miles.

[DL] 900 miles?

[RJ] About 900 miles. We had no food and even the guards themselves didn't have any rations to give us. All we ate, they used to put us in barns at night time, all we ate was what the animals ate or what was in the barns: carrots, Swedes, mangoes. I remember kicking a pig out of the way once and pinching the potatoes he was eating.

[DL] In terms of the route *(interruption by camera operator and additional clap for sync at 01:14:03).* When you started the march, what evidence was there for the Jews taking the same route as you were now taking?

[RJ] We saw them died on the side of the road, they just couldn't take it. I didn't count them but I saw dozens and I mean dozens of dead bodies on the side of the road in the snow.

[DL] In terms of yourselves, how bad were conditions on that route?

[RJ] Terrible, absolutely appalling. Don't forget there were thousands on the road getting away from the Russians but the guards took us around country lanes – that's how we come into the barns.

[DL] Were there abuses?

[01:15:00]

[DL] Did prisoners of war die on this march?

[RJ] Yes. We tried to couple of them. I tried to help a couple of them. There was one fellow from Jersey, I remember he lost part of his nose from frostbite. I tried to pick him up. I just couldn't. I was in a state myself. I just left him there. I just presume he died, I just don't know. As far as I know when we got to Regensburg in Austria, there was about 150 of us so there was close to 80 or 90 that had died on the side of the road.

[DL] How did you fair during the course of this march?

[RJ] Shattered, knackered. I shambled. I was in a terrible state and I think what kept me alive was my Rolex Oyster watch.

[DL] Because you swapped it for food?

[RJ] I swapped it for food. But don't forget that I was an extremely fit young man when I joined the army. I was thirteen stone two and as fit as a fiddle. I belonged to the Oxford boys, I was weight lifting. I was extremely fit.

[DL] When you finished the walk, what weight were you?

[RJ] When I finished the march, I ended up in Regensburg. I didn't know it was Regensburg. They put us in a barn and the following morning they didn't open up and someone said, "Hey, the guards are gone." So we got out. We heard rumours that the Americans were close, mind. To give you an idea what happened, some of the boys found a cellar in the barn and he found some joints of pork and all which the farmer had hung up and naturally it disappeared didn't it? And then the guards said that they were going to line us up and shoot us all as the farmer had created a fuss over the missing meat but the next morning and the guards were gone.

[DL] So, what month was this?

[RJ] This was April forty five. The end of April.

[DL] And how were you actually freed?

[RJ] We got out of the barn and loads of us and don't forget that we were covered in lice, I lost my boots and we walked down into the town and found the town was Regensburg and we found a hotel called the *Gruener Kranz* and we

realized that the Americans had been billeted there. The Americans in those days were issued with what was called Compo parcels so, of course we found a lot of them with food in, some had cigarettes in, some had gum in. We made pigs of ourselves and then the Yanks came out and I don't know how many of us but I know the Yanks came and took us up to a place called a delousing centre and they took us in there and they deloused us and then they took a crowd of us to what I would call a rest centre. It was just, I can't remember really, but I would describe it as a rest centre and there, they took all of our clothes and burnt them. I came home, dressed as a Yankee soldier, they kitted us out as a raw recruit. I still have the two blankets upstairs and I have the knife and fork in the draw. I came home dressed as a Yankee soldier. I was in this rest centre for close on a fortnight. By this time I was getting better, of course, but by this time I was only just over seven stone when the Yanks picked me up. Then they put us on the Red Cross train and took us to Le Harve and there there was a fleet of Dakotas. I landed at Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. They had long tables there with telegrams all written out and we just filled our name and address and what was on the telegram was "Arrived in England. See you soon."

[01:20:00]

[RJ] Then we had a medical and a shower and the following morning we got on trains.

[DL] And…

[RJ] When we got home, I think it was the first week of May. The first week in May…

[DL] When you arrived back home.

[RJ] When I arrived back home.

[DL] When you returned back to South Wales, what was people's attitudes towards you?

[RJ] Well, of course, I got invited to all sorts. I used to be called down and I never told anybody about Auschwitz though. I told my family but I never told anyone else. They just thought I was a German prisoner of war for three and a half years and that was it.

[DL] Why didn't you tell anyone?

[RJ] It just didn't dawn on me to tell anyone about Auschwitz. It was just a wartime experience best forgotten and since then, you ask Bishop and all, and I bet you they'll tell you the same thing: they never told anybody.

[DL] Why was that?

[RJ] I just don't know. To me, it was just a wartime experience and that was it.

[DL] What was your state of health like when you got back?

[RJ] By the time I got home I was still under eight stone. I remember Gladys, my wife, put me in the bath on the first night and she started crying. I said "Love, don't cry. I'm here in one piece. I left men out there who will never come home." That sobered her up a bit but she was upset, of course, the state I was in. Another thing was that I was covered in boils for 18 months to two years. For eighteen months I had them everywhere and when I say everywhere, I mean everywhere, and then one day, a local doctor, Dr Desmond Hull said, "Come over to the surgery, Ron." I knew him from school, of course. He gave me a little tiny bottle of tablets. There was no label on it, just a little bottle of little tiny tablets and he astonished me. He said, "Take 14 on the first day then 12 then 10 until you've taken the whole bottle and I took them and I've never had a boil since. Not even a pimple.

[DL] And, your mental state of health?

[RJ] I was in a shocking state. If a plane went overhead then I was under the bed, straightaway. No problem. Gladys used to coax me out but she wouldn't get me out until that plane had gone.

[DL] In terms of nightmares?

[RJ] I used to get terrible nightmares. For instance, when I went back to work I occasionally worked night and she was in bed, naturally. I used to walk upstairs backwards, I used to look behind me all the time. Nerves, I was a bag of nerves. I used to lose my temper, I was in a terrible state. I should say that it took me all of about five years at least to get back to what I would call a normal man. I've never ever weighed 13 stone again – I've got to twelve but I've never been bigger.

[DL] When you realized the extent of The Holocaust and the numbers involved at Auschwitz.

[RJ] Terrible, terrible, yeah.

[DL] Did you ever realize that it was that bad at Auschwitz?

[RJ] Yeah, well, we learnt then that different people would talk to us. I learnt then that it wasn't only Jews who were put to death there. I think there was about 30,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, there were 29000 gypsies, there were Russians, there were all sorts apart from the Jews.

[DL] But being so close to what was happening, what psychological effect did that have on you after the war when you realized what was happening?

[RJ] Oh, I don't know, I forget now. I never told anybody. I never spoke about it. It wasn't until Schindler's List when it first came on the television. But nobody talked about Auschwitz in those days. It just wasn't discussed, I never talked to anybody about it.

[DL] Why, why not?

[RJ] I don't know. And I've spoken to several. Dougie Bond. He never told anybody. Denis Avey – he never told anybody until recently. I just don't know. It was just one of those things which happened during the war and you just forgot about it

[01:25:00]

[RJ] and then you just started to put it on the television and then, of course, all your memories come back.

[DL] Did you go back to Auschwitz?

[RJ] Yes, in 1999, my nephew said to me one day, "Like to go back to Auschwitz, uncle Ron?" I said, "Yeah, I wouldn't mind, why?" "I'd like to go," he said. So he booked the plane to go and on the Wednesday, he rang me up and said, "Come into the office," he was an estate agent, you know. So I went to the office and put a tie on and when I went there, the local paper, the Argus was there, with a photographer and took my story. That was the first time I'd told anybody about it. Then on the Thursday, I had a telephone call from HTV, they understood I was going back to Auschwitz on Friday and could I have the number of your flight. I

think they were willing to send a photographer with me. Anyway, there was no room on the plane apparently and so when I came back I came home on the Monday. On the Tuesday, I had another phone call from HTV and they said, "Can we come and see you?" So they came here and, of course, I was on the television a couple of days after.

[DL] In terms of your experience at Auschwitz when you went back, what memories did that create?

[RJ] Oh, terrible. I couldn't sleep. I could see them Jews walking about again. Proper nostalgic.

[DL] When you talked about the Jews walking about, obviously this is something which has stayed with you. Why has that been such an overwhelmingly powerful memory for you?

[RJ] Well, when I came home and HTV found out about it, a local Argus came to see me and I had a big write up in the local press and the local headmasters saw it and could I come along and have a chat with the children. I've been down to three or four schools and then groups of people asked me to come and so I called it "The Soldier's Story." Then when they found out about me, the ASA film company, Steven Saunders, phoned me and said could he have an interview. So he did and they came here and, I don't know if you've seen it, they made a film called "*The Long March to Freedom*." It was on the *Yesterday* programme and I still have a DVD of it if you'd like to borrow it.

[DL] You were talking about your memory…

[RJ] And then my memory started to come back but I couldn't remember then and how but the more I talk about it then little things come back to me.

[DL] Were you interviewed after the war at all for your experience at Auschwitz? Did any war crimes investigators interview you?

[RJ] I don't think so. No, it was mostly newspapers, magazines, that kind of thing.

[DL] That would have happened in the latter part of your life as opposed to after the war?

[RJ] Yes, since "*The Long March to Freedom*" was on the television and people saw that and people wanted to know about it.

[DL] But, in terms of actual war investigators or war crime investigators?

[RJ] No, no.

[DL] Because Reynolds, Corporal Reynolds' shooting was investigated

[RJ] I never heard anything about it at all. Nobody asked me.

[DL] Did you stay in the army?

[RJ] No. When I came home, of course, as I told you, I had a reserve occupation and my father was a blacksmith in the same firm as me and the personnel manager said "I hear Ron is home, I expect he'd like to come out, wouldn't he?" My father said, "I should think so." So while I was home, they gave me ten weeks leave. While I was home on that ten weeks, Birchall, the personnel manager came to see me and said, "Are you ready to come out?" And I said, "Of course I would." He took all my particulars and while I was home

[01:30:00]

[RJ] I had to go to the pensions place in Cardiff and I think, if I wanted, that I would have got a pension but I didn't want a pension because you had to lose time at work if you'd keep your pension. I heard rumours about this but they regarded me from B1 to B4 and then they said when you go back, I had a War Office letter, when you go back you'll go back to the engineers at Pangbourne, near Reading. So, I was there for about three to four weeks and I came home for a weekend's leave we were allowed to go back on the midnight train and we were allowed to go onto the parade ground the following morning. So, I got there and went onto the parade ground and the Sergeant Major said to me: "Corporal Jones, what are you doing here?" I said I had just come off from weekend leave, I thought I was in trouble. "There's a letter in the office for you." I went in there and there were my release papers. My personnel manager had got me out so I was only in the army for ten weeks and four days. I got out.

[DL] What did you go on to do and how long did you stay in that job for?

[RJ] I came home then and my father took me down to see Mr Birchall and he said, "you can start work whenever you like, Ron. I'll give you a light job to start with." So I did a light job for approximately a month and then went back to my old

job so I didn't have any trouble, like a lot of these people who write books who have problems, I didn't have any problems.

[DL] But did you have any nightmares?

[RJ] I had nightmares for years. Ages.

[DL] And what did those nightmares consist of?

[RJ] Things like I was running away, I was climbing a fence. I was slipping back or climbing a path and then, all of a sudden, someone would put a hand on my shoulder and I would start to scream.

[DL] Did you have nightmares about the Jews and the gas chambers?

[RJ] No, no. Not the Jews.

[DL] Looking back now, what key memory determines your time at E715 Auschwitz?

[RJ] I've forgotten it, really. Until people started to talk to me about it about it I just don't bother about it.

[DL] Why do you think you have forgotten about it?

[RJ] Well, I suppose it was just a war time experience that was best forgotten. Loads of people have wartime experiences.

[DL] How did it your experience at E715 affect you during the course of your life?

It has definitely, I am not the man that I was. As a matter of fact, before the war I was a shy, quiet, timid man and, of course, I met Gladys when I was 15 and I had a lovely life, no problems, but since then I used to lose my temper quick. I'd argue now and I wouldn't accept things that I would of before the war. I'm a different man now, definitely different.

[DL] Would you say that that was because of your experience at Auschwitz?

[RJ] At Auschwitz.

[DL] So what caused that change at Auschwitz?

[RJ] Being pushed around, being told what to do. I've never been in my life been told what to do before. I had my own job my own life, I've been my own boss and nobody's told me what to do.

[DL] And, did witnessing abuse at Auschwitz, or being aware of abuse, as I appreciate your workplace was away from the main factory, but hearing of the abuses there, the knowledge of the gas chambers, did that also change you?

[RJ] It must have. It must have. I must have taken notice of it, more than what you realize.

[DL] You mentioned about the memory of how the Jews walked. Why is that an important memory for you?

[RJ] They were dying on their feet from lack of food. They'd walk about like people dying. Shambles. Shambles.

[01:35:00]

[DL] Is there anything else you want to add, is there anything else that you feel we haven't touched upon.

[RJ] No.

NOTE: 01:35:10 – 01:43:10: Separate shots of photographs from E715 Auschwitz together with other items from his time as a POW.

ENDS