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File: **LR002485-001 - EDWARD WARD**

Duration: **0:29:58**

Typist: **673**

START AUDIO

Male 1: Peter Low, 82/156, reel 1.

00:00:28

Interviewer: What were the circumstances in which you got put into the bag?

Respondent: Well, I wish to say nothing against the South Africans, but their information at that time seemed to me to be very inaccurate. They said the whole time, “Oh not to worry,” because I said, “I think I’m going to get the hell out of here, and I’m going to go back and join [Seventh Armour 00:00:48]” “Oh no, no, don’t do that, it’s only a question that the New Zealand tanks are driving the Germans in our direction but they’ll be along. Everything will be quite okay.”

So, fortunately, we took that with a certain grain of salt and we dug fairly deep slit trenches and in the course of the afternoon, first of all we were very badly shelled and we were very glad of our slit trenches. Then the shelling gave way to machine gunning and I swear if you were to put your hand up you would have had a couple of bullets through. I mean it really was unpleasant.

Then finally there was a great rumbling noise from the ground and I took a peak up out of my trench and so did [Lamprook 00:01:32], the South African [guard] and Lamprook said, “Oh

thank God," he said, "Thank God, the tanks are coming at last." And I took a look and I said. "Lumpy," I said, "Just take another look, they got big black crosses on them."

Sure enough they had and they went straight at us. Ronald, in fact was, I mean I don't know, but he was in the leading- I didn't see him until the following morning but I might have seen him then for all I knew. Anyhow a tank came absolutely straight for my trench and I got up and waved him out of the way and to my utter surprise- I mean really 2 or 3 times in my life I've been certain I was going to be dead in a matter of seconds and this is one of them. But not at all, he behaved very respectably and moved right out of the way, shouting, "Hands up," as he went up and by God, my hands went very high up.

Another tank went straight over Anderson's slit trench and it's a terrible thought to think, I'm a shamed in a way, but I thought to myself, "Poor old Andy, he's had it, but I'm okay." But poor old Andy hadn't had it at all. He came up dripping with sand from his trench and the tracks of the tank had just gone parallel straight over where he was lying and he was perfectly alright. Nothing the matter with him at all.

00:02:48

Interviewer: So you were by that stage in the bag, what was your reaction to being captured? I mean did you want to get the hell out of it, to run for it if you could at any moment when the opportunity presented itself?

Respondent: Well, there was absolutely no question of that in the beginning. No, I think my immediate reaction was that this is impossible. This is the sort of thing one reads about happening to other

people but it doesn't happen to me. That's how I felt and then we were marched back.

One thing which annoyed me very much, although it shouldn't have, Anderson had a pair of field glasses on the German officer came up to him and he said, "Hand over your hand field glasses," so Anderson did.

So then a little soldier came to me and he said- I had a Leica camera hung over my thing, he said, "Gibse me." I said, "No." He said, [Non-English speech 00:03:42], "That belongs to me." He just stuck his little tommy gun and he said, "Just hand it over, will you." So I thought, "You bastard, you win." So I handed over my beloved Leica, and that annoyed me very much at the time.

Anyhow then we were all finally moved up into a whole gathering on the side of a rise in the ground and it was bitterly cold. I remember we all had to take turns, sort of, sticking close to each other in a line and when you've been in the front of the line long enough then you went back to the back. The best time was when you're right in the middle or you were getting the heat from both ends. While all this was happening, it was a terrific noise and a terrific round and some British tanks came roaring by and they stopped actually right in front of us.

The Germans were very quick on that, they lobbed a pencil fastener to this back tank and went whoop up in flames and the crew just got out in time, jumped on to the next one and they went on and they had no ammunition at all. If they'd had one shell they could have saved us but that was that.

00:04:48

Interviewer: What were your own personal feelings that you had been actually captured, after all you were, so to speak, non-combatant?

Respondent: Well, when I had time to think about a bit, I thought, “This is awful but I am a non-combatant. We’ve captured quite a lot of their war correspondents and inevitably I shall be exchanged. In the meantime I suppose looking on the best of things, this is a wonderful experience and what a story I’ll have when I get back. Of course it will take time but in a matter of a month or two.”

00:05:26

Interviewer: But of course, it wasn’t anything like that, was it? At that moment you were a prisoner of the Germans, but you shortly were to become POW with the Italians.

Respondent: Well, of course, we were captured on Italian territory and the Germans handed us over to the Italians. I will say one thing, I remember meeting a whole lot of Italian correspondents and a couple of whom I’d known in Finland and they were very, very nice indeed. They didn’t ask any embarrassing or annoying questions or trying to pick on- one of them who I knew said, “Look here, we know how you are, we know what it is with you. It’s just one thing we would like to know and that’s all these Cunninghams you’ve got.” There was General Cunningham, which was Cunning Ham. There was the air vice marshal Coning Hame, and then there was an admiral Cunningham, and all we want to know is how they spell their names. I thought, “That’s not really exactly giving away a very great state secret so I told them.”

00:06:21

Interviewer: The Germans treated you well, did they, food and otherwise?

Respondent: The Africa core behaved absolutely impeccably well. I mean I remember in the beginning, when we were all out in the desert, just after this tank business, when the British tanks as, I told you, arrived, they said now, “You’re our prisoners here. You’ll be well treated. If you make any attempt to escape, you will be shot.” And that was that.

As there wasn’t very much to escape to in the very centre of the desert there, there wasn’t very much point in even trying. But they behaved really very correctly.

00:06:59

Interviewer: Had you settled into a routine by then? Did you think it was pretty well inevitable you had to put up with it?

Respondent: Of course, at that time I was thinking constantly trying to get out of it, escaping and first of all we went to Taranto or to be more accurate in one’s pronunciation, ‘Taranto’. But the most extraordinary thing happened there because we were absolutely, we were really very, very hungry. If it hadn’t been for some extremely courageous Greeks at Crete who came out on boats and gave us oranges and things, we had no food at all.

We arrived in Taranto and we were marched al through the docks and we ended up at quite a large passenger ship called ‘The Victoria’, and we were marched up the gangway, past the galley where there was the most wonderful smell of cooking. I

thought what kind of torture is this which the Italians are putting on. It's not at all. Went into the first-class dining saloon, "Sit down, senor," and we sat down and there was a lot of bread and stuff on the table. We ate that right away in case nothing else- we had a terrific dinner.

Fortunately, I was sitting at the same table as a man called Harry Carber and the [Itizars 00:08:18], in fact his family, they were cotton planters in Egypt and he had travelled on The Vitoria and all the stewards knew him. So we got a special good conduct. Then we were marched out into the cold again and taken to this little place called Tuturano.

In Tuturano we had a wonderful plan for escape, one other man and myself. We only abandoned it because we really thought at that time we had no food, we had no clothes, we had no organisation. We had no great organisation to escape. It was no use just walking out in battle dress and expecting to get away with it, particularly not without any food.

We had not abandoned any idea. We stayed for a while.

00:09:03

Interviewer: What sort of plan did you have for escaping?

Respondent: At that time we had no fixed plan, just to walk out through the gates and hope to God. I mean it would not possibly have worked because escaping is a thing which you really have to- it has to be well planned and well worked out in every kind of detail.

Interviewer: So from there you were moved to Sulmona which was to become your base for quite a long time, the major Italian prisoner of war camp as far as you were concerned.

Respondent: When I got to Sulmona I would also consider myself without thinking about it much, as a sort of officer. The Italians thought otherwise. They said, “Oh no,” a lot of the correspondents were sergeants and corporates and everything else, which of course is perfectly true. Of course the German and the Italians had a quite different idea of having foreign correspondents. The Germans, for example, a man who worked on let us say the [___ 00:10:06] got into the tank, of course, and stuck him into a tank and did the most wonderful repertoire if he came back. The mortality among war correspondents was of course just about the same as the mortality among ordinary serving soldiers. There were plenty more where they came from.

We, on the other hand, didn’t. You had to beg your way into a tank if you wanted to and I was going to once but I never effected. Then they just demoted us, that’s all. We then were told we were no longer, we went down to the troops compound which frankly I far preferred after the initial shock of thinking, “Oh my God, this is terrible.”

00:10:49

Interviewer: Why did you ___ so much for it, what particularly about it?

Respondent: Well, I think, I don’t know, there was a far more [comradery 00:10:54], sort of, feeling among the troops I found than amongst the officers really on the whole. They all shared out everything, whereas the officers, they got a personal parcel, my God, they hung on to, but down there any of us got

personal parcels, we just shared out among everyone. There was somebody who do could do everything, there were tailors who could make clothes, there were blacksmiths who could do this. There was every trade you can think of which made things very easy.

00:11:22

Interviewer: What was a typical day like for you in Sulmona?

Respondent: Well, I'll talk about it when I was in the troops camp rather than the officers. The officers is a much easier life. You even had soldier servants there and, of course, everyone got up fairly early in the morning, we got out and we stood up. They had what they called [Uppal 00:11:49] which is a kind of mustard. All the huts had the same number of members because the Italians weren't very good counters. I was in what was known in naval terms as the 'The Gash Hut' which was- it varied. I mean all the others had, I think it was 80 men and this one had anything from 55, 65 up to nearly 80. In other words if a dozen prisoners suddenly turned up, they stuck them into the Gash Hut or else they put one each into all the other ones to make up to the right amount.

So we had that Uppal. Then we had breakfast. I was made a member of the Sergeants Mess there and they lived very well. Again, I was talking about all the different tradesmen, of course, naturally there were great many cooks and the cook was- the sergeants appointed a cook and he started off with great enthusiasm. He had a great incentive to work there because the main issue from the Italians was a very low grade macaroni which was largely made of sawdust I think. What they did was, the Italians having presumed to gone to some trouble to turn flour into macaroni in the first place, the

prisoners of war then went to even more trouble by soaking it to get it back to a sort of dough which is its original constituency.

With that plus the odd raisins and things which you used to get in Red Cross parcels when they turned up and berries and nuts and one thing or another, they made cakes and what was known as Duff and so on, puddings. That was the privilege as a cook. He made a lot of money during his time with the sergeants, he did very well. Inevitably after, say, 2 or 3 months he got a bit lazy and so then he was just immediately without any further due fired and a new one was only too anxious to start in again.

So we always had a very good cook, so we lived very well as a sergeant. Much better there then we ever did with the officers afterwards.

00:14:06

Interviewer: To which of course you ultimately got back but at the same time you were a naughty boy once or twice. Were you ever put into the cooler?

Respondent: Oh yes, I was. It was very comical because there was a Yugoslav camp near us and we were allowed to go down there once and I talked to one of these- we had no idea of the political situation in Yugoslavia at that time. They were daggers drawn, you had the Mihajlovic conservatives and the Tito communists and of course they wouldn't speak to each other. Anyhow my friend was a Mihajlovic boy. So we were talking, I got talking and we began writing letters to each other and sticking them through holes in the walls so that they could be picked up the other side.

One day the old [___ 00:15:01], the head [caravaner] man came and opened the door, his entourage came into the Sergeant's Mess, and among other things I also had a map which I had no business to have from their point of view. But what was worse, he found this letter from the Yugoslav and so I was arrested and sent down to the Calaboose which was small cell about 5 feet wide by about 9 feet long I suppose with a grating up over the door.

So there I was and mind you, I lived very well down there because they were allowed to send food down from the Sergeant's Mess and I was a prisoner within a prison, they fed me very well. The person I always remember, I suddenly heard tap, tap, tapping on the wall. So I said, "Who's there?" And this is the Yugoslav officer who I had been communicating with by letter.

He said, "Just have a look at the grating over your door and see if it's loose." I found it was completely- can you pull it down? I had a go, yes, I found I could pull it down quite easily. Have a ride over. So having been put into solitary confinement for having communicated with another member of the enemy, from the Italian's point of view, he came over every night. I climbed in over the top and we sat there and talked until about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. There was no hurry because you could sleep any old time.

They even exercise us together. We were allowed out for about three quarters of an hour exercising. We walked up and down. The whole thing made no sense at all. I found out afterwards again in the corridor outside, it was heavily barred with great vertical bars but the vertical bars were fitted into a rather light wooden frame and the light wooden frame was just tacked on from the outside. So if we seize the bars with two hands just went, you could have just pulled them straight out.

Now Christmas 1942, I suppose it was, I reckon we all had a much better Christmas than anybody in England because we'd saved up a certain amount of this money and that together with trading things like coffee and so on which we got in our Red Cross box. Anyhow we got turkeys. We had so much drink that we ran a running bar day and night between Christmas Eve and New Year's morning.

I remember on New Year's Eve, the Italian guards were all paralytic and the Australians took their rifles and they paraded up and down the compound for them, let them sleep it off.

00:18:01

Interviewer: Let's now move on to the fact you were transferred from a rather gentle lackadaisical Italians to the rather tougher regime, the Germans, first to Moosburg and then to [Stellar 00:18:13] ___ at Hadamar. How did life change and how was the camp run, was it more efficient and was everything better or worse?

Respondent: Well, first of all, we never expected to be, we always thought when the invasion of Italy came, that'll be the end of the war for us. We always felt sorry for these poor chaps who had been captured at Dunkirk and so on who had been German prisoners all this time. But it didn't work out that way. We were taken up to the north to Bolognia and even there we all thought we'd get away and quite a few did. A lot of us tried to get out and some succeeded in getting out of the train which went very slowly up through the Brennan Pass. We unfortunately had a carriage lined with steel. When I say carriage I mean a cattle truck, so we couldn't get out.

We stayed of course, first of all, in this incredible transit camper in Moosburg near Munich which had a floating

population of, I suppose, between 30,000 and 40,000 people. I worked it out once, it was well over 20 different nationalities but predominantly Russian and Polish. That was when I really did have a good chance of escaping but it just didn't come off in the end.

It was so corrupt, that camp. I mean you wouldn't believe it possible. I mean you could get anything, if you had food, if you had cigarettes or anything, you could get a Luger pistol, you could get- they had tailors there who'd make you any kind of suit or civilian clothes. You could get anything.

I was in the hospital there for a while. I had some very bad skin trouble from lack of vitamins or something and there I got in with some American sergeant pilots. I also got in with a very nice little Russian ex-fighter pilot who had been shot down. They were [___ 00:20:14] and they knocked his teeth out with a butt of a pistol and he made himself a set of false teeth with a margarine tin.

I had been studying Russian for a long time, so he was a godsend for me and so we used to talk and I taught him English and I taught me Russian and we had a 3 or 4 weeks, very good.

When it came to the- and I had the whole thing lined up, because I knew exactly where I was going to go to [___ 00:20:42] place, I said before the war, I knew they'd look after us, people I knew very well. Then it came that they were going to move all the English further north. I didn't pay attention, I just stayed in bed. They said, "Come on, you too." "Oh no, no, I'm ill." "Come on, get out." So I had to crawl on this train and they took us up to the north to- well, we went to various little places on the way. We ended in this place, it had been either a monastery or nunnery. I can't- it's a nunnery now anyhow

called Hadamar which is near Limburg an der Lahn, not very far from Frankfurt.

That's where we ended up.

00:21:35

Interviewer: Was it well run? I mean was it better run that the Italian ones?

Respondent: Yes, I think one could say from an efficiency point of view it was better run but it was much more fun in Italy. The German guards, they were alright, they behaved very well. There was practically no fraternisation with the guards except for one or two, because they were not encouraged to do that and in fact if they were caught talking to us, they were sent to the eastern front which is just about as good as condemning them to death.

I don't think I've ever been quite so busy in my life because personally I had an obsession that here I was against my will in this situation, I must not waste a second of my time. Therefore I studied- I found myself studying about 4 or 5 languages all at once, once but in the end I just concentrated on Russian which I spoke quite well at the end of the war.

Interviewer: It was a psychological situation, really.

Respondent: I think so. I mean you got a lot of people who did nothing but read westerns and detective stories and lay half asleep all day long or people who felt no, that's a last thing to do, one must spend all one's time possible in doing something more useful. I mean there were some people who indeed in Germany worked like mad and passed their chartered accountant's exams and

so on. They were shut up in a room and the senior British officers were supposed to see that nobody got in contact or anyone helped them in any way, but there they were. I mean they were very lucky. They walked out free at the end of the war and there they were, full blown charted accountant which if they had just been soldiers they wouldn't have time to do anything at all.

00:23:11

Interviewer: Edward, you were released on 31st March 1945 to be absolutely accurate, it must have been any correspondent's dream to have a story like that right at your fingertips. How did it happen? Did you capitalise on it and what happened to you immediately afterwards?

Respondent: Yes, of course, being liberated was one of the most fantastic things that ever happened. I went through one very anxious time though, because the evening before, we were very worried because the commandant of our camp had been sent for by the German general in charge of that area and saying, "What in the hell have you got all these prisoners of war in my line of retreat. Get them out of there." And he went over to talk to him and he realised by this time that the best thing he could do would be to turn us over neatly and tidily and he then would not be in any trouble himself.

So in the meantime he went off to see the general and I had an idea that the German army, in particular, generals on the whole beat colonels, and so I thought our prospects were not very good and we would probably go on the road and I wasn't frightened of the Germans on the road. I was frightened of the British and American air forces who were ground staffing every road in the country.

So there's a little German guard who I had become quite friendly with. I used to swap coffee for eggs that he used to get locally. There was a farm right out in the middle of a plain about quarter a mile away from the camp. So I said to this little man, I said, "Would you do you think is going to happen with the colonel?" He said, "One doesn't know." I said, "Now, that's the thing." I said, "I personally think I'm going to go and hide up in that little farm out there until the Americans arrive. All I'd like is your assurance that you won't shoot me if you see me going off." He said, "That's the last thing in the world I or any of of my [camaraden 00:25:22] would do."

Nevertheless he said, "I think it's a dangerous thing to do because you never know in the retreat you might get up against some bad SS boys and your future will be very poor." I said, "Well, okay, I'm going back to the camp now, but will you let me know when the news comes in about the colonel." So he said, he would and I was halfway back to my room, my hut and he came running after me. He said, about this escape, he said, "Would you mind if escaped with you?" So I said, "No, of course not. That's fine." He said, "It's a good idea, because if it's bad Germans in the retreat I can say you're my prisoner, you'll be okay and if it's Americans you can do the same for me." So I thought that's an admirable idea.

However, it wasn't necessary because the colonel did win and the next morning the Americans came in. Then I finally got out, I got a lift out and got back to London, spent about 2 nights in London, went straight back again.

00:26:25

Interviewer: You went back to cover the Russian link up, now this presented a problem partially because Shaif didn't want to admit that it was happening too quickly?

Respondent: Well, yes, I think that was part of the reason and also nobody quite knew where the link up was going to happen. Personally, I thought it was going to be with the third American army somewhere near the Czechoslovak border, somewhere up there. However, the BBC thought no, it was going to be the first American army and it turned out they were right.

I joined the first American army and sure enough we linked up with the Russians in the end but just before, it was very interesting, because we had among various other foreign correspondents, we had the Tas and the [Isvicre 00:27:14] correspondents with us. And the Isvicre man was a very nice chap and it got to a point that we were getting the Russian advancing from the east, they were getting very near the Americans and the chattering that we picked up from their tanks and so on. So I said to this Isvicrean man, I said, “Why don’t we go down and you talk to your tanks and say who you are and where we are and it would make a marvellous bit of repertoire.” He entirely agreed, he said, “That’s a wonderful idea. We’ll do that.”

The poor man, he went down there and identified himself and who he was and everything else, all this chatter, chatter, chatter was going on the whole time. They paid absolutely no attention to it at all and they were hearing him perfectly well but you would have thought oh what a wonderful-I mean from their point of view, everybody’s point of view would have been wonderfully exciting to have advancing Russian tanks talking to the Americans who were there in opposite numbers just perhaps 10 miles away for something.

Interviewer: Shame, wasn’t it, one of the big stories that never happened. Edward, in point of fact Hodges with the first army did link up

with his Russian counterparts on the other side, you were there.

Respondent: In fact the first unofficial link up with the Russians was that they brought in some small American patrol, met a small Russian patrol in the forest and they brought the Russians back. And there were a couple of Russians officers and one little soldier and all the other correspondents were talking through interpreters to the officers and I thought this is where I get a little exclusive of my own because I spoke very good Russian at that time. I talked to the little solider who was a filthy looking little man, he'd been wounded a bit and he had a great dirty bloody bandage around his head and he was very- he hadn't shaved for about a month and he was a terrible looking little man but very valuable.

So I asked him, where he'd fought and he'd from everywhere including Stalingrad and everything and so I said, "Well, you've had a lot of contact with the Germans." I said, "Tell me, honestly, what do you think of?" And he said in Russian, "You know what I think, they're an uncultured people," and with that he dismissed Beethoven, Gerta, [___ 00:29:54] right off.

END AUDIO