

Peter Masters interview by Joshua Gray. Tape 2, April 23, 1996. Let's begin again with explaining how you dealt with your Judaism when wearing the Church of England on your dog tag.

Well, it was sort of put on hold, I would say, for the duration. The point is we were supposed to be security-minded when we arrived in North Wales, in Aboard Merioneth North Wales. The first thing we heard, I didn't know I was going to be in the commandos. I arrived, saw a bunch of Green Berets, they all wore commando soldier sort of flashes, and we were called in one at a time, and were interviewed by the skipper.

Interviewed by the skipper, Brian Hilton Jones, who turned out to be the same man who had first interviewed me in disguise, as it were, when I had seen a notice on the bulletin board saying, anyone volunteering for special and hazardous duty, come to the office and apply. He was now wearing a Green Beret and was a captain in the commandos. The first thing he told us was about the name change that was necessary, because he didn't want the Germans to know that we had an elite assault unit, parachute commandos, who spoke not only fluent German, but were to be trained in all matters pertaining to the German army, their documents, their organization, their methodology, their weapons, you name it.

And we had lectures on that as on many other subjects. I still have my rather colorful notebooks. Having been an art student, I'd do to all the rank, insignia, and so on so that I would recognize them. And we learned a lot of good stuff. We also learned German army jargon, which proved to be not quite as successful, because as we subsequently discovered, just like in the Allied armies, people, even down to small units, have languages of their own when it comes to dialect-- quite apart from the fact that different services have different language.

The Air Force has different words than the Navy. And the Marines have different-- you could do a dictionary on that language. Well, they had done a dictionary on German army language, but it probably was taken from one unit or something. Certainly at times, I tried it on prisoners, and they didn't know what the hell I was talking about. So I'd use some other phrase until we understood each other, which usually was not too difficult.

And I learned some new words that they were using that hadn't been in the book in having conversations as it were. Interrogations can be quite friendly conversations. Sometimes it's politic to ask questions as if you were playing a game. And if you are taken prisoner, it's usually a very dangerous business. If you surrender, the people on your side may shoot you if they see you doing it-- walking out with, say, your hands up, some die hard Nazi might just put a bullet through you.

And then the question is, can you get into the enemy without somebody shooting you? Because people tend to be loose on the trigger. And one is so programmed that if one saw the field gray uniform, one was on edge and tightened the finger on the trigger a bit. So they've just had a narrow escape, now they're being immediately interviewed in their own language by someone who speaks it fluently and idiomatically.

Often, we would be asked, how come you speak such good German? My standard reply was, I'm asking the questions, and you're giving the answers. But as I say, sometimes you give them a cigarette, and warm them up, and sometimes you would be harsh. We would not ever do anything that you could interpret as being an abuse of the situation. Although I have to emphasize, the Geneva Convention for the treatment of prisoners amounts to very little when one side has the guns and the other side does not.

I would be a bit rough at times. I'm supposed to search them, right? So in order to search, I have to get into the inside pockets. I can ask him to unbutton the pockets, but he has his hands up on his head, so I'm unbuttoning the pockets. Well, I might do that drastically by grabbing hold of both sides of the uniform and pulling it open-- the buttons would pop off, which has a certain dramatic effect which sometimes, without physically harming the person, is a degree of intimidation.

And other times, a friendly cigarette, a cup of tea-- you learned which is likely to be effective. After all, what you're doing is sometimes vitally important. If you capture people who may be upon you in force in minutes, or in an hour, or who have planted some kind of thing that's going to blow up in your face, you want to make darn sure that you

understand what they've been up to. Now, in Aberdare, we were called in, name change, strict instructions to destroy anything with our previous name on it, no correspondence with people with foreign names.

The local post office, after all, is somebody who is conversationally acquainted with almost anybody in the village. It presented certain problems. You'd be surprised where your name appears on things you own. You have written it into a book, you burn the book. You don't throw it in the trash. In Europe, we frequently-- not only in Europe-- you had your monogram in your handkerchief-- get rid of it. Burn it.

Letters-- burn the envelopes or any reference to other language if there were letters in German from home or something-- destroy them. We were then sent to private billets because commanders don't have staff where they have facilities with backup administrative staff. They have one administrative officer and one clerk who's a fully trained commando. So there is no cookhouse, there are no cooks, there's nothing.

So everybody is self-sufficient. That's a big point of the training. So we were sent to private billets of citizens who did this as part of their contribution to the war effort, and perhaps got a slight amount of money to help them buy the rations, and certainly ration cards for us. And so I appeared at Dr. Wright's house, which was the last house in the village, where Dr. Wright, and his wife, and two children lived. And he knew I would be sent.

And I immediately closeted myself in order to destroy my identity, remind us of the other identity. And then I had the present task of stitching on my commander flashes and my combined ops-- combined operations, the anchor, the RAF eagle, and the Tommy gun in scarlet on a blue background on both sleeves. And I had to sign my name, because there was a registration thing in wartime. And so I decided to sign as unaffectedly as possible, just like handwriting, because otherwise, how was I going to do it again and again the same style? You see? And I'm still signing it the same way today.

Then we were told that we had to make up a story why we had an accent, because most of us had more or less broad accents. The members of the troop were mostly Jewish refugees, a few political refugees. And they were from Austria, Germany, Hungary-- and the few odd ones from other places. Austria, Germany, and Hungary because they had no government in exile, therefore no armies of their own serving with the Allies.

So we were technically enemy aliens, which is why we had been interned previously-- most of us, not all of us. So you had to make up a story why you had an accent. My story was that my father was a businessman who worked all over Europe, and Africa, and Asia. And my mother, and he, and I were in Austria when I was a baby. And my father was then transferred to a place in a tropical climate where it was considered a bad idea to take a very small baby, so I was put in the care of a nanny, a governess who was Austrian.

And my mother went with him, thinking she would be back soon. And it got postponed, and postponed, and he got transferred again. And so in the meantime, I started to talk in, naturally, and the nanny taught me to speak the Austrian version of German. And when my parents came back, they thought it was rather cute and that, obviously, I was going to learn my own language easily anyway. But then he was sent somewhere else again, and the status quo continued.

And before they knew it, it became my de facto first language. And I had to learn English as a second language. And by this time, it was too late not to have an accent, because it is at a certain age. Now, this was purely for British consumption, this story. And if I were taken prisoner and that was one of the other reasons and, perhaps, one of the two main reasons of the name change and the identity concealment, then I would try and talk as little as possible to people who would take the next.

One of our people, George Lane, was captured on a French beach two weeks before D-Day doing reconnaissance. And they were, of course, fascinated to have a commando officer in their hands. So he was taken to Field Marshal Volmer. And George was Hungarian-- George Lane was Juri Laney. And he thought his Hungarian accent might show, so he faked a Welsh accent, which we had sometimes toyed with when we were in Wales because the language was rather nice and sort of a sing-song dialect.

And so we'd talk like that. And he figured that unless the intelligence officer on the German side and on the Gestapo

side where he was subsequently referred was very sharp, he would not detect a Hungarian accent under a Welsh accent and the English. And of course, he didn't admit that he spoke German-- he understood everything they were saying to each other. Volmer asked him interesting questions. He said, do you really think there is going to be a landing-- which, of course, we knew full well there was going to be. And he said, that's what I read in The Times.

And then he said, how is my friend Montgomery? And he said, he's very well, but I haven't recently had any personal contact. And Volmer began by saying, so, you are one of those gangsters. And Lane said, I beg the Field Marshal's pardon, we are elite soldiers, not gangsters. And Volmer smiled and said, you were taken prisoner in rather compromising circumstances, and it may lead one to believe you were about to commit sabotage, and you know what we do with saboteurs.

And Lane replied, if the Field Marshal thought I was a saboteur, I doubt he would have invited me to tea. And Volmer said, ah, you think this is an invitation, do you? And Lane said, well isn't it, sir? And they got on very well, it seems. And I dare say that Volmer saw to it that nothing happened to him. There was a Hitler [NON-ENGLISH] order to shoot commandos when taken prisoner. This was not always carried out, but it was certainly carried out in some instances.

Earlier on, we had talked about my wife coming out and my children [INAUDIBLE] all her family, several generations being murdered in Auschwitz. And I want to make a point here-- that is that I feel one of the values of what we did in the commandos, and what other people did, was the fact that we did not go like lambs to the slaughter. We were the opposite of that.

And I recently talked with some people who told me about their insecurity as refugees, that even now they felt secure only when with other refugees. I found that astonishing. And I thought about it and pointed out to them that this was, without question, a complex of insecurity, which I think one should try to overcome in this sense. When I was a boy, zoology notion was perhaps a little primitive, but we were always told that a camel stores water in its hump, and then can live long periods in the desert on that water that is stored.

I believe that if one has accomplished something, that is the water in one's hump that can sustain one in times of threat and insecurity. Now, I feel that having been able to fight the Nazis has sustained me throughout my life. And I tried to communicate this positive attitude, and also to dispel some of the myths about the competence of the Nazis and how infallible they were militarily, which, of course, they were not. They were unbelievably incompetent at times and unbelievably stupid at other times.

There were certain things that they did that certainly were self-inflicted things that caused them to lose the war. They were, just to throw out one at random, what I called gadget happy. They loved gadgets. So they built complicated machineries that they could in no way afford, precision instruments, weapons, that were excellent. But if they fell into enemy hands, then they were certainly no use to them.

And what they really needed at this stage was what the Allies did-- namely to manufacture very cheap weapons that could be adopted if some of them were damaged, you threw them away. It didn't make any difference-- is \$5 worth of weapons or something. But if you start producing precision things that you can't afford, you're going to go bankrupt.

The attitude also, and perhaps that goes with when you begin to lose, but then you mustn't forget the Allies lost at first. And I don't think we ever sank as low as they did when they were losing. They threatened their own people. There was what I've always thought was an amusing incident where they dropped pamphlets on our lines by artillery shells that exploded, and pamphlets would scatter.

And these pamphlets fell short and never reached us. And I was out on patrol and saw them, and I told a British major in the commandos about it, and he said, let's go out and get them. So we went out into no man's land for the express purpose of collecting the Nazi propaganda pamphlets which had fallen short. And then while we were crawling out there-- at some risk on our knees picking them up-- he said, I want seven complete sets I can give one to each one of our commando troops, and we keep one set ourselves-- one for you and one for me, OK?

And we did that. And I started to laugh on the way back. And he said, what's funny? I said, well, we just captured a

German document that said, anyone below the rank of major who is found with an enemy propaganda pamphlet will be shot immediately. And here we were doing their work, because we thought the pamphlets were funny, which they were. They were incompetent. Apart from being misspelled, they confused British cockney dialects with American slang, so that it became a hodgepodge that would seem funny to both recipients in either army.

Now, in my wife's case, she worked for, subsequently in England, for the Czech government in exile. And she then was on loan to the first conference of the International Monetary Fund, and they offered her a job in Washington. She came for what she thought was an experimental year and then worked for the monetary fund here for 36 years. And she became an administrative officer with minimal schooling in the village in the Tatra Mountains where she came from, and which she left when she was 12 years old.

Now, I think that's the water in her hump that sustains her-- her accomplishment. And she is incredibly fast, and quick-witted, and competent in making arrangements, because she did it for 60 or 100 people in her department. It makes a difference. And I think it doesn't have to be dramatic.

When I was in art school, I once did a design. And I don't know if I told that story, my teacher didn't like the design. I was doing my graduate year in New York. But I guess a famous person had sent the project, and I had solved it. And he subsequently said it was a perfect solution. So whenever I doubted whether I was any good at my profession as a designer, I reminded myself that this great and admired men had said my solution was perfect. And that would really help.

It was an Austrian pathologist professor who said that nobody can be any good at their job if they haven't at some time doubted they were any good at it at all. I believe that.

When you're interrogating the Germans, did you ever ask about the concentration camps or what they were doing to the Jews and the political prisoners? Or were you just interested strictly in their army movements?

No, it was strictly military and on the spot. How much we knew when, I already mentioned is hard to determine-- I don't know for sure. Later when we got into Germany, there was a great temptation to play God, and punish, and reward, and whatever. Not easy, because I would talk to some slave laborers who were French, or Polish, or whatever, and I would say, how did they treat you here on this farm?

And almost inevitably, they would say, well, mine was not too bad. And they wanted me to work, so they fed me very well. But the one down the road was a really bad Nazi. So I'd go there and get the same thing. I'm not sure whether it was that they thought perhaps we might lose the next day, and the Germans might come back so they didn't want to compromise their situation too much. Although, progressively, this was getting less likely as we were rolling along.

Mind you, the rolling along was not without cost. There were always some fanatic Nazis who were making a hold at the next line, making a stand-- and from their point of view, doing the patriotic thing, from our point of view doing stupid, self-destructive things that we resented, because we had the casualties when it was clearly over. We lost our leader, the one who replaced the skipper when the skipper was wounded on a patrol on which I participated. He was wounded very badly and taken prisoner.

And subsequently, one of our own, a German, Clint Garza, James Griffiths took over, and he was responsible for insisting I get a commission-- rather late in the war, because that wasn't easy for foreign people. And Montgomery apparently objected to commissions in the field unless they were demanded by dire necessity, because he said it leads to fraternization with the enlisted men. And we thought that was not a bad idea.

And evidently, the old, stodgy soldiers, including Montgomery, didn't approve of that. So they wanted people to go to cadet school. And I had to go to cadet school, which I had found was no problem. If they asked any questions how to do something, I tried to remember how we did them. And it seemed to be right most of the time, because I was in a good unit. So I went to cadet school at the urging of James Griffiths, and he was killed at the very end of the war.

He had already sent me back. And he went on a patrol on the river with one other guy from the troop-- I don't know who

it was, never found it. I had done a number of patrols with James, and I'm sure he would have taken me had I been there. So on return from that patrol, somebody warned that there were snipers about. And James allegedly said, what, me worry about this? Don't you know I'm bulletproof? And then he was killed.

And they put up a cross. So his cover story obviously held for the time being anyway, because they wouldn't have put up a cross for a Jewish boy from Germany.

Following the war, did you ever want to go back to a life that had not made you flee from Vienna?

You mean go back to Vietnam?

Right, and establish your life there again?

No. No, no, no, no. I have to say that in Austria where every high school student learns Latin and Latin Proverbs are bandied about freely, the Latin proverb, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] is quite popular-- where I'm well, there is my fatherland. In other words, I've always felt I could live anywhere. And technically, I could live in Austria, but it is too much of a strain to think in terms of all the older people-- whether they were in any way materially murdering my friends and relatives-- and my grandfather, among others.

I have been there, and I have found a somewhat refreshing new generation of more democratically-inclined young people. And the present Austrian government is a liberal government, and certainly bent on making amends as best they can. But there's also a very anti-Semitic neo-Nazi party that doesn't go by that name. And in fact, when it came up in parliament whether to pay all Jewish refugees a minor token reparation, the neo-Nazi leader-- my phrase, not his-- voted for the compensation, to improve his image, presumably.

And the only people, amusingly, who voted against it was the Green Party, which is the most liberal party. And they voted against it because they felt it was not enough-- the compensation should be more. So they voted against it.

Were you looking for any compensation?

Yes. Well, first of all, in the beginning, the Austrian governments were not as bent on improving their standing as the more recent ones. And in the very beginning, they didn't want to call it reparation or anything like that. So they called it a pension for anybody who had been working. Well, I had been in the middle of high school, so clearly, I hadn't been working, so I was hardly entitled to a pension per se.

So they called it a pension for interrupted studies, because who knows what academic heights I might have reached had I been allowed to continue and complete my studies? So I got a pension, as most Australians do. Certainly of a certain age, the youngest ones who were infants-- I don't get it, I don't think. And then this recent thing about the compensation by the national fund, as it is called by parliamentary action, has nothing to do with the pension or with the interrupted studies.

That goes to anybody who was forced to flee for religious reasons or racial reasons-- gypsies, what have you-- political reasons, homosexuals, Seventh Day Adventists, whatever. Jehovah's Witnesses, I don't think the Seventh Day Adventists were persecuted, but the Jehovah's Witnesses were certainly murdered like the Jews. So that amount goes to people who apply for it, and they urge everyone to apply.

But it goes by age and medical condition. So I know of people who are over 90 who have got theirs. I'm obviously too young at this stage, although I wrote them about my cardiac and prostate cancer situation and hoped that that may expedite it. So there is that so-called compensation.

I've also tried to get the Austrian government to recognize those who died fighting the Nazis-- the Austrians who died fighting the Nazis, including, mainly, the Jews, and more particularly, the ones in my troop. There were 15 Austrians, five were killed, all except I, I think, were wounded, some very badly. So they were invalids. The Austrian embassy told me that they would prefer to do something for the living ones.

I said, well, that wasn't my purpose. And they said, how many are living in this country? And there are three. So they wanted suggestions. And I said, it's really hard for us to do because we wanted the dead ones to be honored. Well, they said, see what you can come up with. I talked to the other two-- one in upper New York and one in New York City. And we said, let's have some fun with this.

And we said, we still prefer you do something for the dead ones. But if you want to do something for us, sail us down the Danube in a cruise ship and put us up at the Hotel Zaha for a week with our children and grandchildren and a gala performance at the opera will be fine. I met the man with whom I talked subsequently, and he said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] And that's where the [matter rests?].

Getting back to what you knew when-- idea about your grandfather-- you mentioned in the previous interview that at first you thought the Nazis had killed your grandfather, but then you found out for sure. When did you find out and how did you find out?

That he was killed?

Yeah.

My mother and her siblings tried to find out from the Red Cross and were subsequently told. There were still Red Cross letters from concentration camp. I have them-- obviously, for the sense that they don't say anything that compromises or communicates anything of substance. The tragic thing with my grandfather was that he was out. He was in Antwerp, and then he came to London to visit, and he didn't want to stay because he didn't speak English. And in Antwerp, he was a well-known figure as a jeweler, and gold, and silversmith.

And when the Nazis came into Belgium, he tried to walk to France, and they were machine gunned by planes on the road. And he was injured. Apparently somebody saw him with a bandage and told us. So he went back to Antwerp and simply waited-- some friends said we can arrange that could be hidden on the farm. And he said, will I be able to take a daily walk? And will I be able to have a bath?

And he was told he could have neither. He said, then I'm staying here. And he packed his rucksack, and they got him almost immediately and sent him to Auschwitz. And they killed him immediately. Now, he had hidden some of his jewelry or whatever, gold dust, in the doorjamb. He had an excavation made. And my mother went to Antwerp, and looked for it in the apartment, and found the place.

And it was empty, because, presumably, they found it, or the person who made it, they remembered where he made it, and we don't know who that was. The World Jewish Congress, incidentally, is talking about the list that two Austrian historians made about whose property had been taken away-- which Jews, and also those who were given token compensation-- forced to sell a business for 10 marks or something.

And they have a complete list with numbers. And if one calls up this number in New York of this person at the World Jewish Congress, she looks it up while you wait. And if it's not a common name, as in my grandfather's case-- the name is Arnold Metzger-- Abraham Metzger-- and that is a very unusual name for an Austrian Jew. She found it immediately. And you have to know when he was born approximately, and I could figure that out pretty accurately.

But I have no idea what they took from him. He was a very reserved man who always said, we mustn't be ostentatious-- never owned a car, never lived in his own house-- lived in an apartment, but owned some houses somewhere. I have no idea what they took away.

Was he your only relative who was killed by the Nazis?

The only immediate relative who was killed by the Nazis. There were any number of his--

My grandfather had a large family whom I would not see. We would rarely see them. I don't think any of them survived.

That's not quite true. I know one or two who got out into this country. But most of them were people with whom I was not in constant touch. I would see them at holidays in the synagogue, or maybe they would come by my grandfather's when I happened to be there.

And I think he was supporting several of them with money, and food, and what have you, because he was well-to-do and they were not. So I doubt any of them survived. I also know that my Hungarian family, my father's family, a great many were killed. Now, the information did not work too competently, because with many of them, as I mentioned before, my paternal grandmother, for instance, I saw once in my life for a brief visit, and I understand she was killed.

I don't know where or when. I know that one of my father's sisters and her husband, who was an attorney who didn't practice-- I think they lived in downtown Vienna a block from St. Stephen's Cathedral, and they had a [NON-ENGLISH]. It's like a hotel-- and we used to go there as children every Thursday and play there, my sister and I. And then when the Nazis came to Austria, they went to Hungary.

And I know they perished there. I know somebody said they perished in an air raid, but I don't know whether that's true. The fact is they perished-- either by war action or by a concentration camp. So I have never researched the full number. Of the relatives with whom I was in touch, my grandfather was the only close relative that I know about, unlike my wife, where the two children were the only survivors.

So why did you decide to finally write a book after about 50 years?

It's not that I decided after about 50 years. I started much earlier, but I was rather busy doing a job and all kinds of other things. And I first started to write by tape-recording while walking the dog. And I got pretty good at that when there was an interruption to pick up where I had left off and so on.

And then I found it difficult to transcribe the tapes. I thought I couldn't do that myself because I don't type very well except two fingers. And I hired various young women who were going to do it for me, and found that they had several common denominators. One was that they were not very good at it, because they didn't understand my accent or the proper nouns-- the place names-- and had no idea how to write them. And that led to many blank spots.

And also, they all were expensive. So I abandoned that and was persuaded to get myself a word processor and do it myself. So then it underwent a whole number of metamorphoses, because people would say, don't do it like this, do it like that. And some of them, I believed. So I kept on at it more or less, and rewrote, and rewrote, and so forth.

And then I encountered professor Ambrose, Stephen Ambrose, who was the head of the Eisenhower Institute at the University of New Orleans. And he has a D-Day museum, and he has written a book on D-Day. And he wanted contributions of people who had been on D-Day, and he called us all together. And we spent a few days in New Orleans, including a German tank commander, and a few eminent American historians, and a whole bunch of the 6th Airborne Division to whom I was attached as the Maroon Berets, where we were the Green Berets-- the ones who landed to guide us on the bridge, which we reached on the bicycles, which was very interesting to me, because I'd never talked to any of them.

We didn't talk much when we were crossing the bridge, except I remember them all shouting, give them hell, when we were going beyond their position deeper in. And I got them all to sign my book on Pegasus Bridge that Professor Ambrose wrote. And one of them wrote, Peter, next time come by glider. It's much more comfortable than by bicycle. So where were we? I'm lost at the moment where we were.

Oh, at the book. Ambrose liked my contribution and ran it in installments throughout his D-Day book and wrote me a letter saying he thought it was the best he's got. And so I asked him for advice about the book, and he gave me good advice. And then I wrote it up. And whether it'll ever see the light of day remains to be seen, but it's out there waiting.

What do you hope to achieve with it?

My main purpose is the counterpoint to rams to the slaughter. And I think that relatively few people know about this.

And I think that it would make Jewish refugees feel good. I think it would make Jews in general feel good. And I think it will enhance our image-- meaning the Jewish image-- wherever it is [?read?].

After all, there were a large number of allied nations, and we were involved in their liberation. Unfortunately, none of us got near the liberation of a concentration camp, except one of my friends, Manfred Gunz from Borkum in Germany, who was commissioned in the Royal Marine Commandos, and who got his parents out of Terezn. Terezn had just been liberated by the Russians when he arrived there two days later. And he got them to Israel, where they lived out their lives. And it was an absolutely shattering experience for them and for him.

He says that when he walked up to the hut in the camp, he reminded himself of Hilton Jones' admonition, don't panic, no matter what. And he said that's kept him perpendicular. It was such an emotional thing for him.

Do you regret not having the opportunity to liberate a concentration camp?

There is an Austrian who is a refugee who went back to live in Germany. And he's lecturing people, and he is saying that the only ones who got any satisfaction were the ones who were liberated concentration camps. I don't agree with that. I got plenty of satisfaction doing what we were doing. The fact that we didn't encounter any on our prescribed route is coincidental.

Perhaps just to draw this to a conclusion, if you could comment to a quote that is from Stephen Ambrose's book D-Day- the Nazis, who lived by hate, had built up a lot of hatred in Europe in the past five years. From Piaget, Masters, Nomburg, Patheger, and other young refugees, the Nazis were about to get some of their own back.

Right. I hope so. I endorse it. And I think that it changed our lives, there's no question. And I hope that we contributed something meaningful. I know we contributed something meaningful. Sometimes the prisoner bit worked incredibly well. And I'm telling about those incidents in the book of where we really functioned the way we were supposed to function.

But it went beyond that, because we were so keen as commando soldiers, and we were so well trained by Hilton Jones that we soon acquired reputations of competence, so that patrols which had nothing in particular to do with our particular skills of knowing about the German army-- except, perhaps, being familiar with the methodology or something-- nary a command or patrol would go out where the person in charge would not want to have one or two of us along.

The brigadier stopped it and said we are too valuable. And we were only to go out with his express permission. So what ensued was a typical commando solution. We bootlegged ourselves out. That is, if somebody said, oh, I wish you could come on that patrol with me, we'd say, who would ever find out? And we'd go. We were so self-motivated that we became reconnaissance specialists on top of what we were specialized in.

And I remember being on a patrol where the function was simply to watch the Germans-- you could see them from a certain point and see what they were doing-- to report anything unusual, an early warning system in case they were about to attack. And I was on patrol with a Frenchman who was not in my troop-- three French commando who spoke not a word of English, so my high school French was strained. But we communicated.

And we said one day, why don't we try and go and snatch a prisoner? This was by no means what we were supposed to do. And we actually didn't bring it off, but we came awfully close. And on our own motivation, we went way beyond where we were supposed to go, simply to see whether we couldn't do it. Well, you can appreciate a Frenchman who has lost his country, and I, who have lost arguably what was my country-- our motivation exceeded that of many people who were, even though our commandos were volunteers, who would do pretty much what they were told to do.

Again, it's perhaps a commander characteristic to do the extra bit. But for us, it went unquestioningly that you did what you could, not what you had to. The Frenchman and I found a booby trap that was laid for people coming along the path. And he saw it-- he had very sharp eyes. And then I started to lift it. He was very much against that, because he thought it might be booby trapped within the booby trap. That is, if you lift it, it'd blow up, you see? And there was



enough explosives to blow up 12 people, you know? Here we were two.

I told him to lie down face down a reasonably safe distance away, and I was going to examine carefully whether it could be lifted, and then I'd lift it. And I put it back. I thought it would be interesting to see what they were doing in the way of such contraptions, which was an improvised contraption. And I found our demolitions officer a little anxious, and he said, take it out of here quickly.

And I said, I've been carrying it for the last hour. So it's not going to blow up unless we set it off-- didn't want it in his quarters. But all this, again, is really trivial to demonstrate how eager we were to do our bit. And all the pent-up frustration of having been an abused minority exposed to anti-Semitic action, and arbitrary arrest, and arbitrary abuse, and then a frequently penniless refugee where the refugee committee handed out a card, which I have an intent to publish in my book, that says, be considerate of your British hosts.

Do not damage their furniture. Do not speak German in the street, particularly in the evening. I'm not quite sure what that means, but you can see which way it's blowing. And then being interned as an enemy alien, when we were the victims, and understanding why they wanted to intern us, so we were their friends. We helped them with [INAUDIBLE]. The superannuated British soldiers who were guarding us were on the watchtower and fell asleep, we would throw papers up to wake them up so that they wouldn't get in trouble with the Sergeant, and so on, you see?

And so we cooperated. And then being in the Pioneer Corps, which was, to us, the bottom of the barrel, and finally, like a caterpillar to butterfly, becoming elite soldiers, and well-trained, and confident transformed us. And I think people ought to know about that.