

This fitting in real form.

Right. As I said, between Xanten and Rees and we went across the day before on a reconnaissance to find out whether it was heavily defended. And we were taken over by an infantry section. It was mainly for to see where the airborne were going to land the following morning. We had to find out whether there were heavy minefields or heavy concentration of troops. And we came back late evening back over the Rhine again.

What did you find on the--

We found nothing over there. There was a very, very small concentration of troops. And there was no minefields. But on the way back, that was when they started their barrage of the artillery. And we managed to get through that.

We brought back a few prisoners. One was possibly, I can always remember, a very, very young man, approximately about 16 years of age. He was one of the Hitlerjungend, Hitler youth movement. And he had serious injuries to his leg. And we managed to bring him back on a stretcher.

How was he treated?

Treated very well, although he wasn't very keen on coming with us. He had been indoctrinated with the Nazis, Nazi formula. And he spit at me, I remember that, trying to pull him up the bank. And it might have been because we were hurting him. I don't know. But he wasn't very keen on becoming a prisoner at all. And he was only about 16 or 17 years of age.

Could he speak any English?

No. No. I can't remember ever speaking to him. He was just lying there on the stretcher. We were trying to bring him up the bank. It was rather slippery. And I was leaning over him. And he just spit at me.

How did you react to it?

Well, I was going to react until I was stopped. I was stopped by a young infantry officer. He said, I saw what he did, he said, but don't retaliate.

So did you obey him?

Oh, yes. Yes.

How had he been wounded in his leg?

Probably spur shell splinters I should imagine. As far as I can remember it, it taken away his calf.

Did he have field dressing put on it?

Oh, yes, he was treated. He was treated as best we could do. We all carry shell dressings and wound dressings.

What happened on the actual day of the Rhine crossing to you?

On the Rhine crossing, we carry out rafting. And, of course, you can imagine that there was a lot of rafts. That was the big one. That was the big crossing where it was mostly taking the infantry cross on storm boats and then building all these rafts and with them the vehicles and the tanks over.

And, of course, when a bridge is made, you got the bank seats. And as soon as the bank seats are finished, then you bring the rafts into bridge. And the rafts are a part of the bridge, if you know what I mean. Each raft is a section of a

bridge. So they do the bank seats, the home bank and the enemy bank. And when they're all finished, then you bring all the rafts in, drop your anchors. And then it's continual rolling of vehicles.

What is a bank seat?

The bank seat is where the road goes up to the water.

So it's like the base or--

It's a part of the bridge. But it's the main-- it takes longer to do the bank seats than it is to do the rafts and all that sort of thing. The rafts are made, assembled. And they're used all hours before the bank seats are completed.

Which units were going across where you were?

What, the infantry units or divisions? Oh, I don't know. It was a British sector. But I can remember the 79th Armored Division, which is mostly Royal Engineers anyway. They were the ones with all what we call the Funnies. That was the track layers and the bridge layers, the petards, all the AVREs. What they call AVREs, the crocodiles. That was tanks that could swim sort of thing.

That was rather a large division. But, of course, they never went into action as a division because they were always loaned to other divisions. They were all the Funnies.

And were they under fire as they went across?

Yes. Yes. They were under fire, but not very heavy, very, very light. It was lighter than we expected because by that time the airborne had landed. They had landed and joined up-- there was the pincer movement from Zanten. And then Rees came around. And then the airborne landed in the middle. So it was joined up rather quickly. And then it was just a matter of charging through Western Germany.

Which route did you take through Germany then?

Well, I should say that it was northern part. We went past Osnabrück. And we ended up just outside of Celle, which wasn't far from Belsen.

Did you go into Belsen or any other concentration camps?

I had been in Belsen. I was in Belsen. We were giving the people chocolate and our tin food because that was before the Red Cross had arrived. And, of course, as soon as the Red Cross came, they stopped us from doing this because the inmates, they weren't used to this sort of food. And it was causing quite a disturbance amongst them. They were dying because of the food that we gave them, given the children all this chocolate, and it was too far too rich for them.

Were you amongst the first troops who went into Belsen do you think?

No, I don't think I was. We were just outside of a Celle. I don't think we were the first troops because there was other British troops there, in there. But it was before the Red Cross had arrived.

Who is in charge in Belsen when you arrived?

You mean as regards the German commandant? They were still there.

Was it the Germans or the British that were in charge?

The British were in charge then. But the Germans in charge, the commandant, and the guards were still there. They were still there, but they weren't doing anything. They were like prisoners. And also, they started using the guards as working

parties. They were using them as burial parties.

How were they being treated?

What? The--

The Germans.

The German guards, after we got there? Well, I would think that a lot of them didn't leave Belsen. The stories that we got after-- we did leave some of our trucks there. We had some tipper trucks all still. And they used to use those for the burial parties. And the stories that we got-- although I never never saw it myself, but the story we got that a lot of the guards found their way into the pitches that were being dug by the bulldozers.

Which British units were in charge in Belsen?

I don't know. I just don't know. On television sort of thing, you do get the occasional person who says that they were there. There was a general who was one of the very first in there. But to what units they were, probably special air service. I don't know.

How long were you at Belsen yourself?

We weren't in Belsen. We weren't in Belsen as such. It was just a matter of we got all these people there. And we were invited there. We were I suppose just a few hours. But we did leave some trucks, two tipper trucks.

But there were some inmates where you were?

Oh, yes, there were a lot of inmates. Yeah.

Outside the camp?

Outside and inside because the gates weren't shut then. They were open. It was rather harrowing to see the inmates inside.

Did you go to any other concentration camps?

No. No. That was-- at the very, very end, we didn't do anything after that-- we just-- until the war finished. And then the unit was disbanded.

Did you not go right through up to where the Russians were then?

No. We didn't. No. We saw Russians where we were building a bridge at Celle, which is not far from Belsen. And we were strengthening the bridge. And we used to see the Russians. They used to come over in their trucks. What they were doing, we just don't know.

These were displaced persons?

No. No. They were Russian officers that were coming over, probably have a look around. Some of them had girls in their cars, German girls, that they had picked up. But we had nothing to do with the Russian troops at all.

Did you have much contact with the German civilians?

No. We weren't allowed to speak to the German civilians. They had this fraternization ban going on. And it was the day I left-- I volunteered for the Far East to do the same job as what we had been doing, beach landings and that sort of thing. And the day I left Germany, formed up a new unit, that was the day they lift the ban.

Were people obeying the ban?

On the whole, yes, on the whole. We did speak to the children sort of thing. We weren't supposed to but. The children used to come around. And we used to speak to the children. We given them sweets. We would give them sweets and chocolate, which they hadn't had for a long time. But we never spoke to the adults.

Did they attempt to speak to you?

Some did. As a matter of fact, one woman did who was a British woman. She came from Newcastle. And she had married a German between the wars. And she had married this gentleman and settled down in Germany and brought up a family in this village where we were, a place called Ebstorf. And she was English-speaking, but she used to speak to us. But, of course, officially, she wasn't allowed to.

So you went off to the Far East--

No. I came back. I came back. And we got kitted out for the Far East. And then we sent on-- we had all our inoculations-- sent on leave, embarkation leave. And then they dropped the bomb. And then everything was canceled then.

Now, we've just found out from your record of service that from June '46 to November 1947, you were in Palestine.

No. No. We went through Italy. And I joined the Sixth Armored Division in Italy with the Eighth Field Squadron. And we formed up and received new tanks and changed our number to the First Armored Division, which was the Charging Rhino. And that was a new division that was formed with brand new tanks.

And then we went from northern Italy to Egypt. And then we did our training in Egypt, and tank training and all the rest of it. And then we started to move up to Palestine. And then we were stopped.

Someone said that owing to the Geneva Convention, we weren't allowed to take armor, heavy armor north of Gaza. So they disbanded the division there and then after completely re-equipping it with brand new vehicles and tanks and the rest of it. It was disbanded.

But the sappers, we were divisional engineers. We carried on up into Palestine. And we used to do various tasks. But that wasn't for very long. There was all sorts of little jobs that they had to do-- repairing roads and putting a few bridges up and that sort of thing.

But as regards the troubles, we saw very little of the troubles. That was more to do with the infantry more than anything. They used to carry out most of the patrols. And the sappers, we used to do our day's work and go back to camp. And that was it.

Did you have any contact at all with the people?

With the--

Jews and Arabs.

Yes. Yes. We used to have Jews and Arabs working for us, sort of thing. But it was one of these things that you didn't know who your enemy was, whether it was Jewish or Arab, you didn't know that.

Were you ever attacked?

No.

In Palestine.

No.

The only time, we did a little run on the railway track, which we had to patrol. We had to patrol the railway line, which we came across a couple of Israelis that were mining the railway line. And they were taken prisoner. They were wounded, of course. They were wounded when they were taken prisoner. We managed to wound them.

Did you open fire?

Yes, we did. Yes.

With rifles?

With rifles. We were on a bogie. We used to travel up and down the line on a little bogie. And we came around this bend. And they were laying this mine underneath the truck.

Where was that?

That was just south of Gaza. Then we handed them over to the Palestine police. We were in radio control with headquarters.

So these were Jews, not Arabs.

Jewish.

How did you know they were Jews?

They were part of the Haganah group, I think they were.

Any other incidents that happen to you in Palestine?

Not really, no, no. We were building camp various for units that were coming in.

From 1955 to 1958, you were in Cyprus during the EOKA crisis.

Yes.

Can you tell me about which unit you were with then?

Then I was with the 37th Army Engineer Regiment.

And this is still the Royal Engineers?

It's still the Royal Engineers. And of that regiment, we were in the 34th Field Squadron.

Where were you based we were based at Limassol. And the camp was called Polemidia, which incidentally was built by Lord Kitchener when he was a captain. That was many, many years ago.

When you arrived, what kind of briefing had you had about the dangers there?

The sort of briefing that we had was that we did not know who the enemy was for the simple reason that it could have been your next door neighbor. It could have been a friend that you used to go with. In actual fact, one of them was my next door neighbor. He was the son of our landlord.

And this is when we were in a private hiring when we first got out there. He worked for Barclays Bank. And he was an EOKA leader. And we used to sit on the veranda in the evenings, laughing and joking and having a drink, little bits and nibbles and things like that.

And at this particular time, my wife was in hospital. She had a baby that was premature caused by the Suez episode. And I was looking after the other children. And one particular morning, there was a screech of brakes. And when I went and opened the door, a couple of chaps rushed past me sort of thing. And I stopped them in their tracks when I opened my mouth and they realized that they were in the wrong house. And when they asked me who--

I asked them who they were looking for. And they mentioned the name. And I said it is my landlord's son next door. And he worked for Barclays Bank, rather high position. And he was an EOKA leader. So he was taken into custody and held without trial, which they used to do then. But--

So these were two Greek Cypriots.

Greek Cypriots. They were all Greek Cypriots, yes. At night, what happened at night was that the town itself was split up into sectors and subsectors. And at 6 o'clock, the British troops who were on patrol during the day used to go back to camp. And all the husbands that lived in the town, they used to carry out the patrols from 6:00 to 11:00 at night.

For some apparent reason, I don't know why, but nothing ever happened after 11 o'clock at night. So they were rather good. They used to go to bed early I should imagine. But nothing ever happened after 11 o'clock.

But we used to do a 2-hour shift in pairs. And we were escorted with a Turkish policeman who spoke English. And they used to do any interpreting that needed to be done.

But we used to go around because we were all armed, of course. And my partner was a pilot in the RAF, who lived just on the other corner from where we lived. And we even carried out patrols, even when the Suez invasion was on, this pilot was over Egypt two or three times in a day. And at night, he would come out on patrol with me looking after the families.

But you didn't know who the any of the EOKA was. One particular night, I was an orderly officer in camp. And there was a terrific bang. And I left what I was doing and went down to the guard room. And I said, do you know where that bang come from? And they said, I think it was just down the road.

So I got a couple of the guard to go down there. And as they were leaving the guard room, the driver of the vehicle was coming up the road, staggering up the road. He was bringing the regimental cricket team back. And there was a nail bomb up in one of the carob trees.

And it went off electrically. And it killed seven of the regimental cricket team and wounded the remainder. And that was the largest incident we had.

There was another occasion where we were called out. And they thought that they had cornered General Grivas, who was in charge of the EOKA. And he was in a cave, so they said. He was in a cave. But they didn't know which cave it was. All the caves had had brushwood in front of it.

So we decided to burn him out. And we were pouring petrol down the side of this hill and then setting light to it to burn the brushwood away. And we had a throwback, possibly caused by the vapor of the petrol. And we lost a corporal and a sapper then with severe burns, and they died.

We had a staff sergeant who had a bomb under his car, or by the side of it, as his car was passing-- his car was parked-- he was going to come into work. And he got killed. But--

What order did these incidents occur? Which occurred first and second--

The first one was-- in actual fact, the way I've told you was the wrong way around. It was the staff sergeant first, then the corporal and sapper, and then the cricket team, the regimental cricket team. And it was quite-- I've never known it before, but we had a church in the camp. And that church was full of troops all night long praying when the cricket team-- when we started bringing the dead and wounded back to camp. The remainder of the regiment got to hear about it, of course, because it was their friends and probably in the same room as they were.

And the church was opened. And that church was packed all night long, just praying in that church, which I've never come across that before. I've seen individuals do it, of course, but not in groups like that.

Was there any way in which that incident with the nail bomb could have been prevented do you think?

Not really. But what happened after that is that the troops went to the stores, and they got their mechanical saws out. And they cut all the trees down, which was rather a sacrilege in Cyprus because trees are planted to stop erosion of soil. And to me, it was rather shocking because there was more hoo-ha about that than what it was losing the men by cutting those trees down.

But once they were down, we knew that was it. They couldn't put any more up there. It was just a matter of putting a bomb in a tree and then going back a couple hundred yards with a battery and touching the two wires, and that was it. It used to go off as the vehicle traveled underneath it.

So you were shocked at the hoo-ha about the trees?

The trees, yes, they didn't like that at all because that was a sacrilege really by cutting them down because all they thought about was soil erosion.

Was Limassol a particularly bad area?

On the whole, I think it was probably worse than Nicosia, maybe because there was more troops in the area there. Nicosia was mostly the headquarters of--