

MR PRIGENT

REEL 1

Can you tell me where you were born?

Jersey. In St Helier.

And which year was that?

1924. November 5th.

What did your father do for a living?

He was a waiter at the hotels. Later on in the years, as he got older, he had to turn to be a Docker.

And where were you educated?

At New Street Boys School, St Helier.

How old were you when you left school?

14.

So that was just before the war started?

Yes.

Did you have a job when the war broke out?

Yes. I was learning my trade as a builder.

Now can you tell me in detail what you remember of the arrival of the Germans?

All we knew that we had a message from the Bailiff of the Island that we had to put white flags out because we were like surrendering to the German forces arriving. We weren't armed. Then within hours I remember troops marching through the town and eventually just that the Germans settled here.

Do you remember any German air attack on Jersey?

Ah yes, because I lived by the harbour and the Friday night before they came we had a raid of, I think, High(?) bombers and they bombed the harbour, because I just lived at the top of the harbour, and one of the two hotels that got bombed and all old commercial buildings was set alight because they were builders merchants' stores with a lot of timber. Then that Friday night we were told by the States and the parish of St Helier that we had to move to La Rocque, which is like country, for the weekend and for a week or so. We came back to St Helier and then the troops came then.

Where did you first see the German troops?

I was in Broad Street outside the Post Office because living near the harbour the Post Office is not far from the harbour. I was just walking around, probably doing an errand or something, I noticed there were two soldiers outside the Post Office. That was the first glimpse I had of them.

What did they look like?

To me soldiers but I didn't know they were going to turn out like they did, y'know.

Did they look like smart soldiers, were they quite scruffy?

I say they were clean in their uniform.

Were people stunned when the Germans came?

Well, I think we knew they were coming because they advanced through France, and of course being so close to France one could hear the firing of guns and raids. And we used to listen to the news every day when the island was declared an open town and people went to England that could get away knew that it wouldn't be long before they arrived here, 'cause they eventually came.

Did people feel very depressed about the Germans coming?

Oh yes, most of us. We were sorry that we couldn't get away. There was such a shortage of shipping that everybody couldn't get on the boats to go away so many people were stranded here. So unfortunately we were one of the many who got stranded.

Did you make any attempt yourself to get on a boat?

Yes, well as I say, my father was a Docker then and I can always remember going down to the harbour and there was two or three coal boats taking people to England, 'cos he didn't want to leave without my mother and 'cos he sent me back home and 'cos the next day it was too late.

Did any of your friends get away to England?

People I went to school with. Quite a few got away. Quite a few returned after the Occupation and quite a few joined the forces.

Which building firm were you working for?

Just a small building firm, a Mr Dart it was called. Just a small building firm in St Helier. There was only about six of us on the building firm.

Did the coming of the Germans affect your building work?

Ah yes, everything was rationed, you couldn't get cement. A lot of things you couldn't get. Actually the building was stopped it was only repair work one could do. No building houses, just repairs that one could do and they were rationed to two bags of cement per week. Eventually we were getting a few slates and things from France to do repair works to the buildings that were damaged by a storm in the winter. We had a storm in 1941/42, a cyclone, like we had a storm last winter. We had to go around like begging for slates to repair roofs from the German forces.

Did they give you any?

There was some places where you could go just for the local builders but it was rationed and you weren't allowed to just go in and take as much as you wanted, you just had to go there and get what you were given. Sometimes it didn't actually do the job but you had to patch up things as best you could.

Was there any possibility of producing building materials for yourself?

Well on the island the only thing one can do on the island, even today, was only make concrete blocks which needed cement. We had the granite and the sand but it was the cement you needed. All the cement was imported from France, like it is imported today from England, so the German forces allowed the local builders a ration of two bags of cement a week and you had to mangle with that. But there was a way of getting a few extra bags of cement because the Irish people that were here they used to drive the German lorries and they used to take the cement to the gun emplacements, but passing the builders yard and drop of five or six bags sell them at black market. But that went on for a while but then the Germans found out and eventually the Irish lads didn't get away with it all the time because they used to send a guard with them. But for a while that we happening.

Were any of them punished for doing that?

I think so, but of course one didn't know exactly when unless you were a friend of an Irish chap or were related to one. But if one was caught or punished one didn't know you know. No, no. But that kind of thing went on, yes.

How much would people pay for a bag of cement?

Well, I can remember when I was learning my trade my boss used to say be careful don't waste any, 'cos it was two shillings in old money which is ten pence today for a hundred weight, but then they were paying three or four pounds a bag for it.

So were building workers laid off then?

No, well... Building workers were laid off but you must remember that a lot of the population evacuated and a lot of builders went away so those that were left here were able to find work. But if you were out of work in the building trade they was a labour department that you registered and they gave you work like sawing up trees and making logs for the winter, and they made this new North Marine Road on the north of the Island. The labour department had to find work for the locals, so you weren't given your trade but they gave you some type of work that would keep you employed. But as I said, I can just about remember now, the thing is, the building firms always seemed to keep their staff on they didn't make no redundants or anything. Because a lot of these houses were left, people had left these houses, been evacuated. The advocates and solicitors were in charge of all these empty houses so they used to give you little repairs to do for their clients while their clients were away. I know my boss used to do a lot of work for Advocate Le Cornu, and Lucas and Le Gallais, and be little repair jobs, mend garden walls, repair the roofs and you would probably find while you were there you would have to paint the house to keep them in order while the people were away. But there were no big building jobs going on at all, no, the only big jobs were the gun emplacements.

Did the houses get into a bad state of repair?

Well, the people that left them, quite a number of them got into bad states. People that left their places in their advocates, solicitors and lawyer's hand were well kept.

So you were never unemployed during the occupation?

No, I was employed all the time till November 1943 when I was called up to work for the Germans. They used to call up the young people on the Island to go and work for them, and 'cos being only eighteen I was probably in that age group, and 'cos being a builder I was called up to go and work, rather than a gun emplacement but they were putting these twenty-four thousand fuel tanks, they removed them from the harbour to St Peters Valley and they were going to bury them under the ground and cover them with concrete and they were to refuel the aircraft at the airport. Well, because it happened to be a cold November day when I got out there and everybody, well I say not everyone, but three or four of the chaps were standing around a blazer warming their hands in a shed and a couple of Irish chaps were playing cards and this German soldier said to me, "You come. You have to paint the tanks". Well, I knew I could paint them but there was already three painters in the shed, so I said, "I am no painter", and he said "You go and paint the tanks", "No" I said "No, I am no painter and there's one, two, three painters in the shed. Why should I paint them when they are sitting round the fire?" So an officer came in with red stripes, so I said "I couldn't care less, I'm no painter. I've been called up, I'm a builder, plasterer, concrete work, not painting". So we had a few words and I gave him back the paintbrush and the bucket of red oxide paint and I decide to walk home. Nine o'clock that evening I was arrested as an undesirable, trouble maker. So I was taken down the harbour then when I got down the harbour I met three or four other Jersey lads, and this Walter Gallichan that I went to school with, and we went to Guernsey. Stayed overnight in Guernsey, then next night we were on another boat and we went up to Alderney. Well, a year or so before I was sent to Alderney they called up young chaps to go over to Alderney for six months to work but they had a German ration and they got a double pay working in Alderney then if they had been working here, so I thought I was classed as one of those. So when we arrived at the docks these chaps went one way and a guard was waiting to hand at the bottom of the harbour and he said to me "You come with me". So I was sent alone up to an OT farm, which was TODT organisation. So I thought there is nobody in here I knew they were all Russians, Poles, French. Working on the farm for a week or so and all of a sudden a German soldier came and he said, "You come with me", so he took me down the S???, that was the German Officer's canteen, it was an old convent, and the soldier said that I had to scrub the floors. So I had to scrub the floors. He stayed there around the building, I had to scrub the floors, and I could hear English voices, I opened the window looked downstairs in the yard and there's this chap Walter Gallichan who I came over on the boat with plus these four or five Guernsey lads. So I asked them what they were doing down there. They were peeling potatoes. They asked me what I was doing, well I said I had been up on the OT farm for a week or two and now they have sent me down here to scrub the floors. So next day I was sent down again to do something else and eventually I was sent down there about a week or two then we found out that in the German Officer's office there was a radio. We used to know when he went out because everyone used to stand at attention at the door and salute him. There were six nurses there that used to be there outside to see him off. So we eventually got into his office and we use to listen to the English news. And of course one day after maybe a week to ten days of not being caught we were caught by Sister Maria. So when the R??? Furher came back...

Who was Sister Maria?

On of the six sisters in the S?????. There were six sisters and she was the head sister, Sister Maria. She reported us to the R??? Furher when he came back, she reported us to him. One of the soldiers called us all outside on the little lawn. He said we had to be punished, either be sent to Germany or work for the OT farm on the Island of Alderney. Well, the lads that were

sent over from Jersey and Guernsey to work on the Island for six months had heard about this OT farm and it was a bad place to be but I had already spent a week or so on it, so I knew what it was like. So the other four Guernsey lads refused, so Walter and I decided to join them, and the R??? Furher got a bit annoyed. Then within ten minutes we had two SS Guards from LagerAlderney, and an Alaskan dog and they marched us down three miles to this LagerAlderney camp which we spent the rest of our time in Alderney there until three weeks after D-Day.

What were conditions like in LagerAlderney?

Morning was role call six o'clock. You queued up for your hot ladle full of coffee. Gave your number, my number was 111116. You had your ladle full of hot coffee, you went back for the role call, and your Fur????, that was a chap like a foreman, he'd take the orders from the German officer, then he say "You twenty, you get hoe", you go into the tool shed and get a hoe and march to the fields which were sometimes three and a half miles away and you hoe sugar-beet, potatoes, cabbages – like farm work. Then twelve o'clock used to be two or three prisoners would come with like a water tank on the back of a horse and cart and you all lined up and you all had a ladle full of hot water, cabbage leaf and one slice of bread. Twelve thirty the whistle would go and you'd go back to your work. Six o'clock you lined up and you marched back from where ever you were, three miles or three and a half miles back to the camp. Then you queued up again and had another ladle full of hot water, cabbage leaf and a slice of bread. Then seven o'clock or half past seven it was role call again. As the days got longer, after the evening role call they would ask for volunteers to work, and we notice that those that were volunteering some night didn't leave the camp to go to work, those that didn't volunteer were the ones to go. So they used to play a game with you, you think tonight I'd volunteer and you found out you went, next night you thought I won't volunteer but you went again! They were playing games with you. When the invasion started everybody had to go out from eight o'clock at night to eleven o'clock at night digging slip trenches around Braye Bay, there was like a common in between the camp to the Harbour. But before then, the invasion, they only used to send out a few people in the evening to do some extra work in the stone quarry or wherever they wanted you to go. 'Cos that was everyday except once a fortnight you work in the morning and the Sunday afternoon you had to hoe around the barbed wire and around the camp commander's garden – that was your Sunday afternoon off – or you had to scrub your wooden hut floors, but in the morning you were out in the stone quarry cutting stones or you may be detailed to go down the harbour. You used to send a lot of like what we call 'pit props', long pieces of wood that they used in the pits, and they used to load horse and carts to take them up to the town. Then a couple of days later three or four of you would be up there with a cross-cut sawing them up into pieces of wood about eighteen inches long. Another day at role call we call to go to the bake house if they had a shipment of flour. You would have to unload sacks of flour from the ships onto the horse and carts and they'd come up to the bake house and we had to unload them from the horse and carts into the bake house. There was several jobs, you never knew what you were going to do.

How did you break the stones?

With a sledgehammer. Then they used to have the drills to drill them they used to blast and when they came out as big as a chair and they used to crack them so that we could lift them, then we used to put them into a little truck like what goes in the coal mines and it used to run along Braye Bay to the stone crusher which is at the top of the harbour, and they used to crush these stones to make the gun emplacements. 'Cos while I was there I only worked on one gun emplacement on top of the harbour, the rest of the time was farm work or scrubbing the floors of in the S????.

Which particular gun emplacement did you work on?

Its right actually on the top of the harbour. There's no name to it, well, I've never known no name to it. But every year we go over we always see it there because its still stands out there like a sore thumb. It's the *First and Last* restaurant when your sitting in there having your meal your looking at this gun emplacement, its right at the top of the harbour.

Which was the best job to get?

Well, if one could get into the S????? scrubbing the floors because you were always around the kitchen and you were always able to put your hands in a tin of jam and have a fingerful of jam. And sometimes you would get around the larders where there was always pieces of bacon hanging about and when nobody was looking, but mind you, when you'd been and helped yourself to this raw bacon and a bit of cheese in the night time you suffered, the pains in the stomach, you thought you were going to die because you weren't used to all that rich food.

Which was the worst job?

Cracking the stone, ah yes, cracking stones.

Because it.....?

Yes, heavy work. Hoeing in the fields like the sugar beet and planting cabbages wasn't so bad. The thing is, y'know, there was no weight in it but when you sling a sledgehammer for twelve hours a day, yes.

What were the Germans like as supervisors?

Well, the SS chaps they made sure that you did your work, and they always seemed to be frightened because on one or two occasions we had like in the S????? the cooks in the S????? used to beg to give us a slice of bread or something to eat 'cos they were always scared that if they were caught, the thing was, they were all going to be sent to the Russian Front. So they knew there was always someone watching them and they were scared to do anything wrong because they were shipped to the Russian Front, and they knew once they went to the Russian Front they weren't going to survive for very long.

Now you were at this LagerAlderney, now were there any other Lager on the Island?

No there was S????

Where was that?

That's the one up near the airport.

Was it called L???????

S?????? I think it was called.

Where you ever there?

No, no. Actually one knew these camps were there but we never actually saw them, might just see the entrance, the barbed wire and the gates, but we used to see some of the prisoners. They had a habit of people who were working near the airport they used to send them down working near our camp three and a half miles away, and we would have to march three and a

half miles to work by the airport – I couldn't understand that. So we used to pass, prisoners used to pass each other, but if you shouted anything they couldn't understand it because they were Russians. Only being seven of us talking in English you had a job to make the others understand because you didn't speak Russian or Polish or something, it was hard. You see it was all right in the camps because you got to learn a few words of each language amongst your own prisoners but passing other prisoners from the other camp you didn't know who you were talking to.

So there was only seven English speakers in your L???????

Yes.

And how many of them were Guernsey men?

There was four Guernsey lads, an Irish lad, Walter and I.

How were you accommodated? Where did you sleep?

In these wooden huts. We slept bunks of three, three in a bunk, bottom, middle and top.

How uncomfortable was it?

It was just a bit of straw and bare wood.

Did you sleep properly?

Well, the thing is one was so exhausted you know... At five o'clock when we used to have this ladle full of hot water, well within five minutes you were asleep because you were working over twelve hours a day, no nourishment and 'cause we were there during the summer of 1944.

How hungry did you get?

Oh, very hungry, very hungry, yes, I'm afraid, very hungry.

Would you say that you were starved?

Ah yes, well actually there were some of the chaps died of starvation. The thing was, that they reckoned that once you lasted nine months on the Island you weren't fit to be in the camps any more, because you were so starved and you couldn't do a day's work they used to ship you back to the main camp in Germany which had gas chambers, but there was no gas chambers where we were. But they used... I went in the later part, '43/44....

REEL 2

... well they were sent to Germany to the gas chambers because they weren't fit to work and if you weren't fit to work you weren't wanted by the occupying forces. You had to be fit enough to do a days work to be fed.

So in this state of hunger that you were in, what was your state of health, did you fall sick?

Well, I was lucky, I was only eighteen and had more stamina than some of the prisoners in the camp 'cos some of them were over forty and they were the ones who used to fall sick because

then – there was a sick bay, but we weren't allowed to go in the sick bay to visit any of the other prisoners. And there's times at role call that you notice one or two of the prisoners missing. There was burials every several days of the week but I was never detailed to bury anybody, but they used to bury them on Lounge Common. So there was people dying in the camps of starvation.

So did you get any sickness then?

No, no. Well actually none of us English-speaking people, I can't remember anybody – we'd been starved – but none of us went down actually sick.

Do you remember any diseases within the camp?

There was only lice.

Did everybody have that?

One or two of the huts had lice.

Did you get them?

No.

Did you have any washing facilities?

There was a 'douche' they called it, a shower place. But before the invasion they were able to supply us with water which we used to go and wash up once a day, but once the invasion started they couldn't deliver any water to the camp, because they used to deliver water in lorries with water tanks on the back. 'Cos when the invasion started everything stopped coming to the Island from France so everything got scarce and they weren't able to use the lorries to bring the water to the camp. 'Cos we were only three or four weeks after the invasion in the camp when they decided to ship us away from the Island.

What were the other main nationalities?

Well there was Russian, French, Spanish. There was two French-Chinese. There was a Belgium. One time the camp, there was a thousand in the camp, but when the invasion started we were reduced to seven hundred. Every so often they used to take the weakest two or three hundred away because we were off branched to one in Germany. There were Russians of course.

Did you make friends with any of the foreigners?

Well, when we were out on a working party we used to try and talk to each other, but you had a guard over you all the time but they didn't allow you to stop and talk because all they thought about was you doing your work. In the hut, overnight, yes. I was with several French and three or four Spanish people, and I think there was a couple of Poles in our hut. But those were the ones you really got friendly with. 'Cos then when we were brought from the Island of Alderney back to Guernsey and Jersey we were all separated we lost contact with each other till we go over to this reunion.

Did you learn any of the names of the people you were with?

Well, Christian names, because some of these Russian names and Polish names one couldn't. We never heard Russian or Pole before.

Did they ever tell you anything about their previous experiences?

Ah, yes. One or two people told me that they don't know why they were in the camp. They were just working in factories in Germany, or places in France for the Germans, then something had gone wrong in these factories and they used to come along and pick hostages out from each department. And you were innocent but you were bundled into these concentration camps. The Irish lad, Jim O'Sullivan, that was there, he was working in Germany because the Irish people were neutral, and he was working in a factory and something went wrong and he found himself in this concentration camp in Alderney. Then a couple of Frenchmen told me that they had radios and had been receiving messages from Paris, 'cos they got caught or somebody split on them and they were sent to this camp in Alderney.

So was LagerAlderney like the concentration camps we hear about in Germany?

Yes, but without the gas chambers. That's the only thing, without the gas chambers. Each camp had its 'tunnel of death' that when the invasion started, there was a tunnel, there was a road running out to a fort and they sealed the back end of it and the front end was open and there was a machine gun post at the entrance. After the invasion they found one of these concentration camps near Paris, near Cherbourg, then the Americans didn't bother to take any of the guards they just shot'em so 'cos our SS guards changed their uniforms into navy uniforms, army uniforms and like an air force uniform and this tunnel was there that if there had been any landings by the Americans and the British we had two minutes to get into this tunnel and they were going to shoot us, that's why its been named the tunnel of death by all the prisoners, because the Germans didn't want any of us to have been alive if there had been any landings on the Island. The other camps S???? had there own graveyard but I don't know what it was because I never saw it, but we've heard about it. They wanted to get rid of us all before any landing parties could question us about the Germans on the Island.

How did you get this information that the Germans were going to do away with the inmates?

Well, if there had been a landing we were told at role call there would be an alarm and we would have to get into this tunnel, and if you weren't into this tunnel by two minutes you were shot on sight. With a machine gun post outside the tunnel pointing into the tunnel there was no other way that it was ever really built for anything else, was it? Even today, my friends I met this weekend, when you talk about the 'tunnel of death' one of them wouldn't go near it even forty-five years after it because everybody in the camp knew that you put your foot in there that was it. See, they wouldn't have said if you didn't get into the tunnel within two minutes you'd be shot on sight. Why would they want to say that?

Were you ever punished whilst you were at LagerAlderney?

Ah yes. Marching to work too slow, you were like dragging your feet. Most of us did drag our feet because we were all exhausted and starved. They used to come along with a whip and whip you and to make you march faster. If you were working too slow in the stone quarry they used to come to you and shout at you and whip you. On one occasion after the invasion they used to come into the hut every hour and you had to stand attention alongside your bunk because they were always frightened that you were going to try and escape because we were only eight miles away from France. One night, I got out of my bunk too slow, I just lifted my arms up to yawn and stretch and he must have thought I was going to hit the guard then he hit me in the face with the butt of his rifle and took my teeth out. That's one occasion. Then working in the fields you always used to get the odd butt of the rifle in your ribs to make

you move quicker if you were weeding carrots, you shouldn't be just kneeling down there and lazing about if you could and if they spotted you they'd just walk along and give you a nudge to make you.... but mostly when you were marching back from work and to work in the morning they used to keep you moving because they thought that the quicker you got to work the more work you could do. Other prisoners used to get hit, if they were the same.

So when you got the rifle butts in your face you got broken teeth?

Yes.

Did you get them seen to?

No, no. I came back with half teeth. It was after the war I went to London for a while I had them out and had false teeth done. I had to have them replaced every so often, every three or four years replaced, and I had them replaced last year. We had no medical, no, nothing like that. Some of the prisoners if they had been caught doing something wrong during the day, at role call they were brought out in front of us and they were whipped and kicked around the square where we were stood. Then when they collapsed the guards used to carry them to like what we called just like a wooden shed, tool shed, and you never saw those chaps at role call again.

What do you think happened to them?

Well, there's only one thing you can think. Just disappeared.

Did you witness any executions?

No, no. But I'd seen people being hit, whipped and kicked at role call, then they used to be put in the shed and they were never seen again, then a couple of days time they'd be back. People just used to disappear on occasion. A chap that was four or five, well he's not there today, one never knew what happened to them unless you were detailed to go on these burials, which I never witnessed any of those burials because I was never detailed to go on them.

Were they the people who were the guards all Germans or different nationalities?

For me they were all Germans. But I believe like in the OT, the TODT organisation, I think there were Austrians, people like that y'know. But the SS were all six foot chaps.

Did you know any of the Germans by name?

Well, there was Fitzen, Herman... just like... but, then again, used to just change the guards every so often. You'd just get used to seeing one then you didn't know where they had been sent to, another camp, or sent back to Germany or sent back to France, because they only used to do a short period in Alderney. I think it was more like a rest camp for them.

Were any of the Germans not harsh, or even kind?

Well, when you were working with the ordinary soldiers around the S????, they were older persons than the guards and I think they felt sorry for you but they were scared to do anything, to give you anything, because they knew if they were caught doing anything they had this Russian Front in their minds.

Did you ever get anything from them?

No, nothing. The only thing we used to get was we used to steal it, when they weren't looking, that was the only time we got anything extra. Or on occasion we had to peel potatoes because the S????? was open to the ordinary soldier and we had to peel potatoes, and while we were peeling potatoes we used to burn the skins and put a potato in and we used to be able to get a potato for ourselves like, cook it in the skins, that was the only time we got anything extra. Every so often they detailed twenty of us and it was like Hitler's birthday we go to the S????? and we peel maybe a ton of potatoes then that evening/day they would bring a band over from France then the ordinary soldier was allowed to have sourcrouete, mashed potato and a beer, then he used to be able to bring his French lady friend in for a dance. But it was only when they were celebrating something. It was only about twice or three times they were celebrating something while I was over there and that's the only time we used to like going because we knew that peeling potatoes we had to burn the peelings and, when the guard wasn't looking we use to shove potatoes in the burnt peelings and have a baked potato. Then after that we had to take the potatoes up to big boiling place up in the kitchen, and Walter and I had the job of tipping them into the boiler thing and we had to mash them, and then when nobody was looking we used to put our fingers in and grab a handful, as much as we could, without the guard seeing us, because then we use to get a bit of freedom there because the guards were more interested in chatting the nurses in the S????, because sometimes we were left five or ten minutes with nobody about and that's when we used to go for everything we could find, you know.

Did the German guards treat all the different nationalities the same?

Yes. Even had Germans in the camp, not in our camp, but there was Germans in the camp because on one or two occasions I was working in the bake house sawing these logs up and these Germans were passing and they were talking German to the guard. I asked them once how they came to be in the prison camp. They were taken hostages because they were working in a Mast??? Factory and the Mast????? blew up on this trial run. They just took hostages from the factory, and I think there was two, I remember talking to two of them in the bake house, but they were getting the same treatment as everybody else in the camp.

Did anybody ever try to escape to France?

No, you couldn't because outside the barbed wire was mined, then when you got outside the barbed wire was the sea and 'cause the sea between Alderney and France, the Race, was very dangerous. The currents are too strong. On occasions we'd seen British bombers shot down and when the chaps had fallen in their parachutes into the sea we see them just swept away the currants so strong its... its very bad the currants around the Island.

How often did you see that?

I think it was on two occasions I saw that happening.

Did you get any letters or news from the outside?

No. It was only nine months. Some of these people had been away from home for longer. The only news we got, as I say, when I first landed there, was we use to listen to the English news on the German radio. But we knew things were going on because we were in the front line at D-Day and we were only eight miles away because the gliders and the planes used to pass over our head, and you could see the gliders being released over our head. And they used to glide down to France. We could hear all the bombing going on, so we knew things were happening.

Did you know that it was an invasion?

Well, as I said, once the invasion started, after a week or so no food was coming in to the Islands. We were told at roll call that we had to be punished for the British and Americans landing in France so they were cutting our midday ladle full of hot water and cabbage leaf because there was no food coming into the Island so we had to suffer. Instead of having a bowl of hot water and cabbage leaf at twelve o'clock we could stop at twelve till twelve thirty if you were working in the fields you just sat in the fields and just fell asleep. If you were working in the stone quarry you just sat on a stone, but you didn't get nothing to eat because they told us that the British and the Americans were in France and no food was coming to the Island. So we had to be punished. But they didn't accept the British and the Americans to stay so long, they thought it would only be for a short period you see.

Did the Germans seem to be shaken by D-Day?

Well I think some of them thought that it would never happen and some thought that it would, and the Americans and the British wouldn't be long in France. They didn't expect the Americans and the British to overrun Europe like the Germans did. Then some might of thought, well, they'd be going home. Some of these soldiers had been away from home and were looking forward to getting home. The older ones, I wouldn't say that about the younger ones, but the older ones.

Can you tell me again how you got off the Island?

It was the 27th June about three weeks after D-Day they decide that there were three thousand prisoners left on the Island and we'd have to be reported to Germany to the main camp of the camps that were in Alderney. They were going to send us to Cherbourg but they found out that the Americans had Cherbourg surrounded, so we came to Guernsey and from Guernsey we came to Jersey then they put us in Fort Regent in the dungeons, then a couple of days later they shipped two or three may be four hundred at a time from Jersey to St Malo. Then on one occasion one of the boats with the prisoners in were sunk outside St Malo. As the time went on the ships were scarce so eventually there was no ships left to go from Jersey to St Malo. So Walter and I was released but we had to report at room number seventeen at Victoria College to an office every morning at ten o'clock. So they would say no boat today, and then no boat the next morning. Eventually in our local paper they asked for forty auxiliary policemen so I applied but I said that I was going to be shipped to Germany, so they still took my name and address. When I went up to this German office, room seventeen, I said I am not coming anymore because I have a job, I am working for the States of Jersey Auxiliary Police. 'No', they say, 'you are going to be sent to Germany'. I said 'no boats to go to Germany'. He said 'you come every morning here'. Well after having the interview for the States Police I went up again and said I start for the police, well I don't know what date it is, Monday, or whatever day I was due to start. He said you go Pilot View, Commercial Buildings, St Helier work for the marina. So when I came out I said to Walter 'I'm not going down there because I've got a job and they can't send us anywhere because the prison in St Helier was full up and people were queuing up to go into prison, no boats between here and St Malo' so Walter and I parted, I said 'you can go tomorrow I'm not'. And I didn't go down to this place at Pilot View, Commercial Buildings to the marina, I started on the States Police force as an auxiliary.

What was that like?

Just out after curfew, actually that was when the Red Cross parcels came in December 1944 was to go into the stores at night and be there because the Germans were trying to break in and steal the Red Cross parcels and just looking after the parcels that nobody...

You said you went to Jersey via Guernsey, did you get a chance to see what conditions were like on Guernsey as compared to Jersey?

No, we were only there a day or so.

What else do you remember about your work as an auxiliary policeman?

It was a different kind... ten o'clock at night till seven o'clock in the morning. You would go on shift work from two o'clock in the afternoon till ten in the evening. Like two shifts work. Night work was just patrol the streets and making sure there was nobody out after curfew and just making sure nobody was breaking in to other people's property.

Did anybody break the curfew?

Ah locals, but we never used to worry about but the Germans would you see. If you were caught out after curfew I believe there was a place in David's Place they used to take you there, and you either had a note to say you would be going into prison in three months time report at Gloucester Street, it would say the date, whatever date they gave you. A lot of these people were caught out by the German soldiers, but we would never report any of the local people. But if a German soldier caught them out after curfew they would take them to this place in David Place, and a lot of people were still queuing up to go into this prison after the war. Prison so full.

Where about in David's Place was it?

It was at the top, somewhere around 46 or 44, opposite St Marks Church. When the Liberation came we were still in auxiliary police force, well, we had more to do then because we had the best job at Liberation Day keeping the crowds in order, not in order, but keeping them back like, with the forces landing and that which was impossible.

REEL 3

We had jobs looking after the ammunition and various German places where the Germans were, we were looking after, making sure that people didn't vandalise the places and take souvenirs. Some of the British forces collected all the material of German forces.

Did people attempt to vandalise?

Ah yes. Souvenir hunting. A lot of things like small arms and rifles were dangerous to the public, if people got hold of them.

At Liberation did anybody attempt to try and take revenge against the Germans?

Well, not what I know of. There might have been an odd place in the country, but in the town you never hear of anything and being in the police force we'd have known.

Did you see anybody victimised because they collaborated with the Germans?

Well there was... Probably once a week we had stay on station duty and there was one or two people that were here during the Occupation who had to come in and stay in the cells for protection from the locals because they were collaborators.

What exactly had they done?

Well.. probably they'd been found out for reporting people with wirelesses, some blackmarketeering. There was one woman that used to go round with a German Officer in his horse and trap and if you were walking in the road in the way the German officer used to just whip you out the way and she used to laugh at you. There was several people.

Where did she live?

She lived in Union Street... was one of them. There was another young girl she got engaged to a German officer and she was well known and there was...

Where did she live?

I think she lived not far from here, Mont A'Labbe, on a farm. I think she was the girl Romeril, I think.

The girl what?

The girl Romeril.

That was her name?

Yes. There was quite a few, there was a butcher as well. Cornish, I think his name was. And there Mrs Baudain another well known one, but there was several young girls that were marked, used to go out with the German soldiers. But they didn't have to come into the cells for police protection, but they were well marked after the war because they used to go around with the German soldiers or sailors and they used to get chocolate and nylon stockings because in those days they were the only ones getting chocolate and nylon stockings people found out who they were. And you used to see them walking around the streets with them.

What do you mean when you say they were marked?

Well, the people used to call them 'jerrybags'. It became a name for them.

You mean that they became notorious?

Yes. But they only went to get what they could off the soldiers or sailors like chocolate and cigarettes, stockings.

Can you describe what the atmosphere was like on the Jersey at Liberation?

Oh, everybody was so excited. It went on for about a week. Everybody was joyful, excited, it's a job to describe you know because it was a thing that one will never forget. Especially when the British forces landed in the harbour. They walked up the harbour towards the Pomme d'Or, soldiers, they just couldn't march, they were lifted off their feet and carried. Though, as I said, we were in the auxiliary police but to hold the public back was impossible.

So the joy was really because the Germans had gone?

Well they hadn't gone but they were surrendered. We had food for the first time because landing craft just came up the beaches and opened the doors and lorries and lorries of food just left in the park and you would just to walk by and you were given a parcel of food which, chocolate we hadn't had for five years, people that smoked. Powdered milk we hadn't had, you know things like that.

So parcels were just handed out to anybody who came?

Well, everybody was told to go down there. You see things, when everybody had parcels then rationing started for a year or so until food came back into the Island and everything got plentiful. But even the parcel of food you were so glad, even white bread! The bakers were starting to make white bread which we had had.

Before that you had rye bread?

Yes it was wheat and oats mixed, it was kind of a greyish colour. Half the time it was full of husks when you were eating it, you had husks in your throat. Sometimes you would find match sticks, it was the sweepings of the floors. Some people found glass. Various things were found.

You describe the horrible treatment that you had on Alderney. Did it make you hate the Germans?

Well, today we go on holiday and we come across Germans my age and, you know, the things that they... We were in one place there and the German stood up at the table and told me they occupied the Islands and kept us for five years, well, 'cos I saw red and I had to tell him what I thought about them. But the youngsters, the teenagers today, they didn't know what was going on. So you can't blame them they weren't born, but the middle-aged people like my age, you still get the odd one or two, you get the odd one or two that comes here and I've read stories about, they felt sorry like, but the ordinary soldier was only doing his military service. Because these people that were trained to be SS Guards and OT Guards, well there the ones that I have no pity for today.

What did you say to this chap who said that the Germans had kept the Islands?

Well, I said I'm Jersey from in the Channel Islands, and he said well we occupied that during the war and we kept the Islands for five years. I said you starved the people for five years. When you first landed in the Island you robbed everything from the houses and shipped it to Germany, then you starved the people for five years. Then I said people were sent to camps for not doing what they were told, they were beaten to death, and in Europe they were sent to gas chambers. Well 'cos then it come to blows then 'cos my wife made me leave the table and go outside then and I never went back in again.

So when they first arrived they took things from the houses?

Well, what happened, they had these French barges that came and all the shops were full like they are today, they emptied all the food and sent it back to France, Germany, wherever - I don't know where they sent it. Then they issued rations after. Then cars, they took a lot of local cars and shipped them to France. What they did with them I wouldn't know, and some of the buses. They emptied the Islands out, not only Jersey, Guernsey as well. Everything was bare.

Was it just sheer theft?

Well, I believe the States of Jersey if you had a car gave you so much for it, not the value of it, just a small amount of money just to say that it wasn't taken by force I suppose. We didn't have a car because we lived in St Helier by the harbour those days one didn't need a car. I was too young, I was only eighteen. I had a push-bike that's about... They came around, and a lot of the English people you see that left the Island you see to go to England - evacuated.

Their furniture was left in the houses because they only had an hours notice, so everything was in the houses as they left it. Well, when the German forces came the houses they didn't occupy, the houses that had furniture, shipped the furniture and stuff to France. We always thought that it was going to Germany. Then the States decided that a lot of these houses that were left empty they'd store the stuff in some of the stores in town till the people come back. But the Germans took quite a bit of it first. The Germans had the first choice, what the Germans didn't want the States decided to store it in the warehouses in St Helier.

What did people living on Jersey think about the way in which the States behaved in the occupation, did they think...?

Well, everybody's got their own version.

What was your version?

Well I was only eighteen. You could say that I didn't know what was going on really. I suppose the middle-aged people, well, the again, you see the thing is what could the States do? The States couldn't do nothing, because if the States argued with the Germans they would have landed up like me, somewhere in France or in prison somewhere. Because there was several Jersey chaps that were sent to camps in France, Germany, all over Europe. Just for being out after curfew, having a radio, or doing something wrong. So if the States were to argue with the German forces they would have all ended up somewhere over in Europe I think. You see they had a hard job to do. They had to satisfy the civilians plus the occupying forces. It wasn't a thankful job was it?

You were on Alderney with one other Jerseyman and his name was Walter -can you spell his surname?

G - A - L - L - C - I - N.

Now you are telling me that because of his experiences on Alderney during the Occupation that he suffered a great deal. Can you tell me what happened to him?

As I say most of the prisoners in the camp never got away without being whipped, beaten with the butt of a rifle, but Walter one day I witnessed having a spade, planting cabbages, the spade handle broke on his back, because he was planting the cabbages too far apart compare to the other prisoners. Not only that, on several occasions along with myself, being hit with the butt of a rifle, being whipped. When we returned to Jersey, a few months after we had returned to Jersey I heard that he had been taken bad and he was sent to St Saviour hospital which was an asylum and 'cos for thirty years we knew he was there but nobody could see him unless it was his family which his brothers live in England and his sister lives in Australia. Then I got to know after thirty years that he was still out St Saviours but he was allowed visitors so I went to visit him with my wife. Then for the last six or seven years we made a habit of going to see him once a month, he has been to our house, we've taken him to these memorial services in Alderney. About three months ago I had a phone message from his brother in Bristol saying that Walter had got up in the morning, had a bath and had a heart attack. He went through thirty years in a padded cell, and the last five or six years he was able to come out and go back in the day. To think after thirty years in a padded cell you had to end up like that.

What condition was he in in the mental hospital when you saw him?

His mind - he could hear voices, we'd be talking like this, and then all of a sudden he start talking to me in German and he'd break down and start crying. Then one would have to try and think of a little joke then he would laugh and it would pass off. But he could always hear

these voices from above. And these last four or five years he kept saying, well, if you could find me a job they'd let me out of here. But then again, I used to say, Walter you haven't worked for thirty-five, forty years Walter, what could you do? 'Well', he said, because I used to work for the Electric Company, says 'I could dig the roads'. But a man who hadn't worked for forty years he couldn't use a pick and shovel, well I said 'you couldn't use a pick and shovel'. 'Well I could go as a night porter at a hotel'. 'Well', I said, 'Walter, that all hotel staff now are Portugal people'. I couldn't imagine him being a night porter at a hotel. No, no. People would get to know that he had been in St Saviours Hospital that long, they wouldn't give him a responsible job like that. Then the thing is that every so often he used to break down. When he has been here he has broken down. We've been having a cup of tea or coffee in a restaurant in St Helier I used to take him in and have... and some of the people used to know him, and he used to break down. So if he had a job in a hotel what could he... no. He had to stay there the last five or six years, and I don't know if they would have allowed him out, not for a job.

You were telling me earlier that when you saw him on a street he used to stand to attention.

Ah yes, not every time but on occasion, be in the middle of King Street, everybody in town would stop, look around, and start laughing. 'Cool down, cool down Walter, that's all over with now'.

So he would stand to attention as though he was with the Germans?

Like if the Germans were giving him orders.

Well, I think you also said that on Alderney he imagined he could see some of....

Well, when we were taking him back to these reunions the people of Alderney gives us a reception at the Island Hall now which was the S????? Which we both worked in. In the hall way, either side of the hall, there was these paintings, and there was German writing underneath. He'd stand at the door and he'd start reading the writing, well the Island Hall must have been painted half a dozen times those walls since the Occupation and there's no photos or writings on the walls at all.

What were these pictures originally?

Well I can only remember one was like a castle and trees all around and the other side was like a river with trees on. Scenes of some description I suppose of Germany, somewhere in Germany I suppose. Probably one of these painters were in the forces in Alderney. He probably spent his time painting them. But I never knew what they were.

So your friend could still see the writing that was written underneath them?

Yes. Was a scene I say, with trees and this like river, and the other side was like a castle with woods all the way around. It could have been some body in the forces and he could have been a painter and spent his leave or his time painting over there because the forces had nothing to do over there, there was nowhere to go. I suppose this chap must have been artistic and he did that there.

Just going back to D-Day....

June 5th, the night of June 5th, the night before D-Day we were working at the S?????, and at eleven o'clock at night the guard detailed us down to this lower park behind the S????? I was at the German bake house and we were detailed to dig a slip trench each. That night all the

aircraft flying overhead and going to France and that we had to stand in this slip trench all night till morning. When daylight came we were rousted out of our trench and we were marched back to our camp and we had to stay at the camp all day because the Germans thought that landing in France that they would have landed on the Islands. We were missed.

Did you know of any Jews who lived in Jersey?

No, I didn't know any all I knew there was a shop in St Helier that was run by a Jew but he evacuated to England and joined the forces. Of course the Germans put a star in the window and the locals were forbidden to go into his shop and eventually it closed down. But I didn't know he was a Jew until we were forbidden to go into the shop. But as I say he was evacuated and joined the forces.

If I can go back to your friends who were with you in the camp in Alderney, can you tell me what was the reason why Walter was sent to Alderney in the first place?

The German forces, they called up young lads in the building trade to go over to Alderney and to work for them for six months. Which they were sent over there, lived in the empty houses and reported to the kitchen and got the German soldier's ration which was a double ration then the locals were getting in Jersey. So they had more money working in Alderney than what they would have had in Jersey. So while Walter was working in Alderney he was one of us seven that got caught listening to the radio. 'Cos he had to be punished like the rest of us, he was sent down to LagerAlderney, which he spent like myself nearly nine months in LagerAlderney Camp.

Had the Guernseymen gone to Alderney for a similar reason?

The Guernsey lads were already working in the S?????. They were sent there for six months and they were getting fed at the S???? and getting the wage every week. But once they were sent down to LagerAlderney everything was stopped, the food rations stopped and the wages stopped.

So you were informed upon by this Sister Maria?

Yes.

Did she stand out as a particularly unpleasant person?

Well she was older than the other five nurses and they were always, to me, to be frightened of her because when she came round the S???? shouting out orders to them they used to run, run here, run there, and they seemed to be frightened of her. Even the two cooks in the kitchen of the Sud????, when she used to come in the kitchen they used to be frightened of her. She seemed to be domineering and had more authority over them being a woman nurse.

Now we have in front of us a book by someone called Soloman H Steckoll, who is an Israeli from South Africa, and his book is called The Alderney Death Camp published in 1982. Does this book as far as you know give an accurate account of what went on Alderney?

Well, like I say, I can only agree to the things I saw while I was there. But there's a lot of things in the book which I can't vouch for because I wasn't there at the time things happened. So I can only vouch for what I saw in our camp, but I can't vouch for anything that went on the Island or in other camps because I wasn't a witness. 'Cos a lot of these things were written in 1942 which I didn't go to Alderney till 1943/44, but one has heard about these things, I can't... I wasn't a witness.

Some people seem to think that the British government should have tried to rescue you from the Alderney camps, do you think that was feasible?

Well, the thing is I said there was no population and most of the prisoners that were there they wouldn't have survived the Liberation after the War because whatever came, the air force would have had to bomb, the navy would have had to bomb the gun emplacements to pieces before any landings could take place. The Island being so small I'm afraid most of us would have been killed by the bombing.

Some people seem to criticise Jersey people for not doing more in the way of resistance to the Germans, do you think its a fair criticism?

No, because the thing is the Island is so small that even today there is no factories to make anything. One couldn't make any arms of any description. There was a lot of little things done to annoy the Occupation forces, letting their tires down, siphon the petrol out of their car/ lorries. What else could one do?