

Their hopes rose after D-Day, the Allied landing in France on 6 June 1944, but it was not until the morning of 23 April 1945 that Jim and the other inmates realised that the German guards had disappeared, and they owned the camp. As Jim recalled later, "We were ecstatic!"

Walking to American lines, Jim eventually returned safely to England in May. He finally returned home in December 1945 and was discharged with the rank of Warrant Officer in April 1946. On his return, Jim visited Patrick Edwards' family in Newcastle to tell them what had happened and has stayed in touch with them ever since.

Back in civilian life, Jim returned to his job as a clerk, while he studied accountancy in the evenings. Walking home from Mass one Sunday in 1945, Jim caught up with his childhood friend, Valda. They had written to each other intermittently during the war and married in 1949. Jim qualified as an accountant not long after and they spent 54 happy years together, raising 10 children who, in turn, kept Jim and Valda busy with 38 grandchildren. Sadly, Valda passed away in 2003.

Jim has been an active member of the Preston and Keilor East RSLs since 1946 and since retiring has served as an honorary auditor to the War Widows' Guild and several other community organisations.

Today, the tail of the Halifax that took off from England 60 years ago is used as a decoration in a plant nursery in Belterhausen and the cowlings from the engines serve as a farmer's woodshed. On this visit to Europe, Jim hopes to pay homage to the many Bomber Command personnel who, like Patrick Edwards, made the supreme sacrifice, and to visit the area where his father fought in the Battle of the Somme in World War I.

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