

**CONVERSATION WITH JOHN ELLIOTT  
MILTON KEYNES 7 SEPTEMBER 2011**



JE – A lot of things have stayed fresh in my memory and some things are blurred. You can't remember a lot of names of people, particularly on the courses that I was on. You used to do so many courses. As you might know the Wireless Operator course was one of the longest courses. So you did lots of courses and you met lots of people. I can't remember many of the names of the people that were on it. So that's one thing about it. It's a question of the memory.

SB – Let's start with the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1944 – Revigny – when you bailed out. So can you just talk through that op, as far as you remember it? When did you first realise that there was going to be a problem getting back?

JE – It started off as any normal op would start. The briefing was fairly straightforward, it was going to be quite a longish one, into the East border of France. It was a railway marshalling yards I think; it was a big area where all the German troops in the area were congregated. It was essential to break that up as much as we could. It didn't seem to be a particularly difficult one except we met a lot of flak just across the way and it became obvious that we were running into cloud and therefore would be difficult to find our target. In fact, what happened was we spotted a break in the cloud as we came across the target area. The bomb aimer, Guss, he spotted a gap in the cloud, made for it, selected his aiming point and we actually bombed through that point at that time. Just after that, we got a radio call from base to abort the mission. So we turned around to head back home when we found ourselves in heavy flak, which gave us damage to one engine. It caused a slight fuel leak so we had to feather that engine. We came back on three engines. It wasn't too much of a problem except that we came across the Channel which at the time was in the early hours of the morning and it was reasonably clear. As we approached the English coast, we could see it was thick fog. We made for Killingholme, got round the circuit and were informed to be diverted over the radio. We were diverted to an airfield, which I think was called Hethel. We got there, still couldn't see a thing. A really dense blanket of

cloud, thick fog. Jim said “This is ridiculous, we are obviously getting a bit short of fuel by now.” We had been losing fuel and Kenneth had been organising the fuel supply to the aircraft. So we decided to make for Woodbridge. We knew that was a long runway and we might stand more of a chance of getting down there. So we set course for there. We still couldn’t see a thing. We went down to about 500 feet and on approach we couldn’t see the runway at all. Then Kenneth said to Jack that it was getting thin now and we heard him say that we should bail out and that there was really nothing else we could do about it. We got up to about 3,000 feet, and James gave us the order to bail out. I can remember this, taking my helmet off (to make sure that you didn’t get the cables knotted around your throat, as that often happened. When the parachute opens, the pack goes up over your head and sometimes the base of the pack would catch your chin. If you had cables on, the intercom cables, it could catch your neck). That happened only on a few occasions. The thing to do was to make sure you took your helmet off that was the first thing. This was a fairly organised bail out as we had time to think about it. Which probably isn’t really that much of a good idea really. When you realise that you have been sitting comfortably inside a piece of equipment taking you around the sky for a while then suddenly you have to leave it. The other thing that I recall afterwards was Bob Sebaski our Canadian navigator. He was a very precise chap. Everything was done exactly accordingly to the book. If we had veered of course for even a little bit, he would make sure that we were quickly back on course. We had been told that it was advisable if we had time, to empty our bladder before bailing out. So he used the can and stood it very carefully on the navigator’s table to make sure it didn’t get spilled. We can all recall this to this day. Anyway we went out in an orderly fashion. The bomb aimer went out first, Ken the Flight Engineer next, then Bob Sebaski. I followed Bob, behind me would be the mid upper gunner and the rear gunner. Sometimes when bailing out I understand that rear gunners would rotate the turret through 90 degrees and go out of the back door. But in this case I remember he came up through the main fuselage. I clipped my two parachutes on the dog clips and went down into the nose, saw that the hatch was about an 18inch gap. You could sit on the edge and put your knees out and as the slipstream caught your shins, you would do a forward roll out of the hatch. Which I did, and to this day I still don’t understand how I did it. I am not particularly short. The thing I remember most of all was the sudden silence after all that time flying with the four or should I say three Merlin engines bashing away at your ears all the time. I remember seeing the aircraft go off to the starboard and disappear. After that, it’s completely blank because it was thick fog, there was no sensation whatsoever of falling when I came out of the aircraft. After counting to ten I pulled the ripcord and the first feeling that I had was that it didn’t work. Obviously it takes a few seconds for the pilot chute to open. After that the base of your pack goes over your head. Anyway it did open, I looked up and saw this lovely piece of white silk above my head. Then I just floated down. I was very pleased that it had opened but I still had no sensation of falling and I still couldn’t see the ground.

SB – Was it still dark at this point?

JE – It was about 6.15 in the morning, at dawn you see. Then I realised that as I couldn’t see the ground; where the hell was I going to land? We could have been anywhere. We knew that we were over land because before we bailed out, Jim had pointed the aircraft out to sea and put the autopilot on. He went out himself, and as

soon as he went out the aircraft ran out of fuel and later landed in a field just outside of Needham Market. Jim was knocked out, when the parachute opened it knocked him out and he doesn't remember anything about the bailing out at all. He didn't come to until after he had reached the ground. You were supposed to help break your fall by bending your knees a bit, but as I couldn't see the ground I didn't do this and I landed quite hard and jarred my back a bit. Also I twisted my knee a little bit. But overall there was nothing to worry about. I suddenly realised that I was on the ground and was in the middle of a very bleak wheat field. I gathered the bits of the 'chute together in my arms and looked round to see that there was a farmhouse in the corner. So I walked across to the farmhouse. The first thing that I remembered to do was to make sure that my Mae West was open so when the farmer opened the door he would be able to see that I was RAF and not Luftwaffe. Anyway I knocked on the door and it was opened by the farmer, I explained to him what had happened and asked him where the nearest air force station was. He said it was RAF Wattisham. He had a number for it and 'phoned through to the guardroom and then we arranged for me to be picked up. While I was on the 'phone the farmer came out with a tumbler filled with whisky.

SB – Welcome back to England

JE – In a matter of about twenty minutes or so, a jeep came to pick me up and it had already picked up Bob on the way. I suppose the seven of us all landed in a fairly close area because we were all picked up quite quickly, then taken to the RAF base at Wattisham, which was in fact American Air Force. I can remember going to the control tower and reporting there. The Major with his feet up on the desk and a cigar in his mouth, heard us tell him what had happened. He asked us how long we were airborne and we answered eight or nine hours. Anyway so we were all picked up and taken to the sick bay there for a medical check and they really did look after us very well. Then if I can remember, that night or maybe two days later, the fog still hadn't lifted so they couldn't send for anybody to come and pick us up. In the end we had to leave by train to Ipswich to Kings Cross, then we had to walk across from Kings Cross to Euston to get the train to go back up to Lincoln. I can remember walking across London, seven of us, full flying kit, carrying our parachutes, looking very scruffy and being stopped by an MP for not being properly dressed. Anyway they had reserved a compartment for us on the train because we had all of our gear. And it so happens that Euston is very close to where I used to live. I used to live in Kenton Middlesex. The train wasn't due to go out until much later in the afternoon or early evening. So I took the opportunity to hop on a tube train and head home. I had a hot bath. My mother was absolutely staggered when she saw me walking up the front path with my flying boots and my Mae West. After that I got back for the train and we headed off back for base. I can remember one thing about the WAAFs that were looking after Jim and I, they hadn't been told that we were safe. So when we arrived back at the base, they were very overcome and pleased to see our return. The first thing that we did was to head over to the parachute section and offer our thanks to the people who had packed our parachutes. That was it really.

SB – Apart from Jim knocking himself out, were there any other injuries?

JE – No. None at all. I am not sure how much I can remember, from what Jim said to me, he was taken to the site of the aircraft, where it crashed to make sure that nothing

had been left lying around. In fact there was nothing there left lying around and the police took him there and later brought him back. It wasn't until later, 1978 or in the early 80's when the archaeology people were investigating the aircraft in a field and they identified the tail plane of our aircraft. That is the one that is now in a museum at Horsham St.Faith.

SB – I see from looking at the ORB the squadron lost three aircraft that night. I don't know if you know, but was that all for the same thing, having trouble to land?

JE – I think there were losses over the target area. It had been quite a difficult operation and I know it wasn't a successful one. There were only a very few aircraft that had found the target. I know we did. But I am not sure where our losses that night were.

SB – Can we talk about the time that you said when you were looking up at the astrodome and the Halifax was above you? Can you just talk through that?

JE – That was one of the first daylight raids that we did. If you recall just after D-Day, although the RAF had mainly been concerned about bombing at night, after D-Day there were quite a lot of flying bombs and also we did a lot of support work for the Army when they were advancing up through Normandy. This particular trip was just outside of Paris, I am not too sure about what the time was, we were just outside of Paris and were at our normal bombing height of about 20,000 feet. Normally there would be a staggered height of waves for the bombing aircraft, some went in at 18, some 20, some 22. It was a clear and sunny day I was just standing up in the astrodome and was listening out on the receiver and looking out to see what I could see. We were actually on our bombing run, we had our orders “left, left, steady” and so on, I looked up and saw a Halifax which couldn't have been no more than 500 feet above us. His pilot was obviously receiving the same orders as we did for the bombing. Their bomb doors were open and I suddenly saw bombs cascading down. They seemed to be very close to us and I realised then that this sort of thing must have been happening all the time at night but we had never seen it. Of course there were many casualties from planes being hit by bombs from above. That was one of those experiences that I think I felt absolute terror, just seeing that lot come down.

SB – Were there other times that stick in your mind, that you thought “this was pretty dodgy?”

JE – Well, there was one occasion. I think the mid upper gunner gave Jim some very quick instructions “Christ's sake Jim, move!” At night this was, and another aircraft was passing directly over us. He was very close to us and we had to do a sudden dive to port to get out of the way. I didn't see that, because most of the time at night I was in my cabin and I didn't bother to look up. I was listening out on the radio and at the same time I was watching my radar screen, the Monica screen. That is what I was doing most of the time.

SB – Let's go off ops for a bit and let's talk about the “Phantom” trip; the fighter affiliation, how did that come about?

JE – Occasionally, when there were no ops on or for some reason the Squadron was stood down, we used to do what was called fighter affiliation with either Spitfires or Hurricanes to get them used to the idea of attacking aircraft, in liaison with Fighter Command. It just so happened at the time that a Ju 88 landed, fully equipped. I don't know what had happened, whether he was lost. But this was one of the latest models with full radar equipment on it. They decided at the time that it would be very useful to use this for fighter affiliation work because it would give them some idea what the Ju 88 was capable of and also what we could do with any anti-fighter attacks we could use. So I had my Monica radar switched on and that was to detect aircraft approaching from the rear, and so it allowed me to tell the gunners when there was an enemy aircraft approaching or if there was aircraft in the slip stream. You would be able to see a bleep on the screen to say that they were in the same place or a cluster of bleeps. If a smaller bleep came in, you could see that would be a night fighter attack and would be able to tell the gunners where the attack was coming from. Well, the outcome of that was I realised, or the Eastern Radar people realised, that as soon as I switched my radar Monica on, that Ju 88 was able to home onto the signal. After that, Monica was scrapped, what was used was Fishpond; that was towards the end of our tour.

SB – We might have to dive into the log book because 31<sup>st</sup> August 1944, according to the ORB you did a daylight raid to Amenville?? and I think in your book you say that was the same day that you did the fighter affiliation.

JE – We must have been stood down for that. It is interesting reading the logbook and seeing at the end of each month the flight commander would sign it. According to this 31<sup>st</sup> August.....I have here 1300 take off.....ops ?? bad weather conditions and then the day before on the 30<sup>th</sup> August..... so I must have put them in the wrong way round. So that was the day before that. On the 30<sup>th</sup> August, we were testing radar equipment with that captured Ju 88; that was with "The Phantom of the Rhur".

SB – How long was that sortie for?

JE – 3 hours and 5 minutes

SB – While you have got your logbook, there are quite a few that I don't know what the target was. The 2<sup>nd</sup> July is the first one....

JE – Donleger – what that was I don't remember.

SB – Was that daylight?

JE – Daylight.

SB – Then the 6<sup>th</sup> July....

JE – That was Neufchatel. Again in daylight.

SB – And the next one is on the 8<sup>th</sup> August...

JE – Return to base... that would be aborted. That would be an abort, horrible.

SB – The 10<sup>th</sup> ...

JE – That one afterwards...Paris. The 10<sup>th</sup> August. That would be the one with the Halifax above us. Moderate flak and again in daylight.

SB – Then the next day, the 11<sup>th</sup>....

JE – We did a lot didn't we. In fact in daylight I think sometimes we did two in one day. The 11<sup>th</sup> August that was Douai. Very bad bombing results. Sorry I mean very good bombing results and that was 4 hours and 30 minutes

SB – Was that daylight again?

JE – Daylight again.

SB – And the 15<sup>th</sup>...

JE – That was again, daylight, Le Culot Brussels. Airfield well pranged and that was 3 hours and 24 minutes. And then of course that was the succession of daylights.. the day after that on the 16<sup>th</sup> we went to Stettin. That was a long one, which was 8 hours and 20 minutes.

SB – Sorry, just going back to July. On the 7<sup>th</sup> to Caen, I think. Is that right?

JE – Well it's Fontenay. Actually, diverted to Oakley. That was at night. Wait a minute....

SB – Now in the ORB it says you were damaged by flak on that op.

JE – Yes that's right because the following day we returned to base. We were diverted to Oakley to land because obviously we were having problems. We landed at night actually. 09.25 we took off... yet it's classified here at night. I think I must have put that in the wrong place.

SB – the 20<sup>th</sup> July... according the ORB that was the Kiel Canal

JE – I can't see anything for the 20<sup>th</sup> July.

SB – On the 18<sup>th</sup> July, it was a daylight raid to Sanniville

JE – 23<sup>rd</sup> July,...

SB – Ah! I had trouble reading the ORB in some places...

JE – You see that day on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July, we took off at 11.30 and we did a formation practise for 23 minutes. And then on the same day at 22.50 we took off and went to Kiel. Very heavy flak. Target well pranged.

SB – The only other query I have is your last one on the 26<sup>th</sup> September. Your book says that it was a daylight but I don't know what the target was.

JE – Cap Gris Nez. I tell you what happened there. We went on the 25<sup>th</sup> September but then it was abandoned, so we came back and then the following day we went to the same place. Calais, and that was our last trip.

SB – You had another aborted one on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September

JE – Yes on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September that was on the way to Nice. That was an aborted op

SB – OK, that answers that, because Gee was US apparently? When we come to the aircraft can you just go through the story of where the name “We Dood It” came from? Could you just explain how you came up with that name?

JE – I think it was probably Ken Down. He was a bit of a character was Ken. When we finished all the ops we had all the bombs painted on the side of the aircraft and had our photograph taken and the ground crew actually painted “We Dood It” on. I can’t really remember when or where it started but I do think that it might have been Ken Down. Or even Jim, it might have been Jim.

SB – I have a puzzle to which aeroplane that is. Let me explain. We know it wasn’t the original George because that was the one that you jumped out of, but then you did something like 10 or 12 ops in LM228 another G George. Now in your book, that is the one that you say was painted up as “We Dood It”. But your last four ops were in different aeroplanes PD319, and your last one was in PD 321

JE – The end of August, we were in G George then at the beginning of September we did two trips in PD319 and NG312. No they weren’t ops.

SB – Then your 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> ops were in PD 319 and PD 321. So the question is which aeroplane was painted up? And had the 30 ops on it?

JE – Unfortunately my log book doesn’t give me the aircraft

SB – Well I can tell you that because I looked it up in the ORB

JE – You see Jim would have that in his logbook

SB – I have got it. It is in the ORB. The ORB is very specific about it. So you had BQ-G George LM228 which was the aircraft that you used from your 13<sup>th</sup> until your 27<sup>th</sup> so that was for the bulk of your ops. And then your 28<sup>th</sup> was still in BQ-G but that was PD319, the 29<sup>th</sup> was the PD319 and the 30<sup>th</sup> was PD 321. Now ORBs are not infallible I have to say. So I rather suspect that the ORB is wrong. And you probably finished in the LM228. Because you have 30 ops listed up there in “We Dood It” and I can’t imagine that somebody had painted 30 bomb symbols on an aircraft just for a photograph. So I think that the ORB is wrong; I think we can justifiably say that.

JE – We did quite a lot of daylight ops actually. We did quite a lot of flying bomb sites, because that was the time that they decided because the flying-bomb sites were in the Pas de Calais, close to the north of France, it was a fairly short trip. It took three hours, or something like that. We used to go in at about 8,000 feet when we’d

identified the target in daylight, because they were just field with ramps on them, very difficult to identify. They used to allocate one squadron to each flying-bomb site. Because they said it was so simple, we had to do three of those to count as one op.

SB – Oh really.

JE – Yes, they suddenly realised they were losing so many aircraft on these ops, low level ones, with all the light flak, that they went back to counting one for one. We were at 8,000 feet; we used to go in at 10-20,000 feet normally, but in order to identify these ramps you had to go in low anyway.

SB – Of course, yes. What was the longest trip that you did?

JE – I think probably it was Stettin, let me have a quick look. 8 hours and 20 minutes. And there was another one to Russelheim, Opel Works, and that was 8 hours, there are the two long ones there. 9 hours and 30 minutes that would be the Revigny one.

SB – Because you were trying to find somewhere to land....

JE – Yes, trying to find somewhere to land, that one was 9 hours 30. 7 hours to Saintes. The date of the 16<sup>th</sup> of June is strange because it wasn't that long. 4 hours 39. That would have been the second trip. Jim would have done one before us, as so would have the second pilot. The captains were always taking other trips just for the experience. And he always did one more than the rest of the crew. We started on the 14<sup>th</sup> June. So Jim would have done one with Peter Nicholas, the Flight Commander, the day before. I wouldn't have more on that information.

SB – Just going back to look at the squadron losses, the 16<sup>th</sup> June there were three aircraft lost from your squadron, I just wondered how aware were you of losses, of other aircraft and crews not being there?

JE – I think the first indication of how hazardous it was going to be, not long after the Nuremburg trip and that was when they lost 96 or 98 something like that. It was horrendous. Everybody realised then that it was a really dodgy situation. We knew of course aircraft on the Squadron and people who didn't come back. There was one occasion when a Canadian – Clarke – he brought his crew back in a heavily damaged aircraft. He bailed his crew out and attempted to land but failed. He avoided a village I think and he crashed in a field. You see that must have been happening all the time but I really don't recall to this day what went on day by day by day. I remember the aircraft though and perhaps in the morning doing air tests. Going to the flights to pick up equipment to take out there, going to the briefings of course and when you went to the briefing the first indication that you had where the target was, was when they pulled the curtain across the map and you would see where the red tape was. As soon as that happened there would be a gasp in the room. Or a "thank god" that it was only a short one. Again day to day things, I don't recall.

SB – I imagine when you were not flying you would stick around with each other as the crew if you went out to the pub or something.



JE – Yes, we used to go out to the pubs and I can remember getting marvellous fish and chips too. Sometimes we used to go out together as crew, bearing in mind that both Jim and myself were both commissioned. Therefore we were living alone and different from the rest of the crew. Jim and I shared accommodation in the Officers' quarters, the rest would have been in Sergeants' quarters. Perhaps we didn't have as much contact with them as we might have done on the ground. But we were very busy. Our ops were always very close together. We operated in the summer months and whereas a crew could take 8 or 9 months to complete it's tour of operations in the winter because a lot of the trips would be scrubbed or cancelled due to bad weather conditions, we got out pretty quickly. And there couldn't have been an awful lot of time to spend outside the camp apart from when we went on leave. We used to get seven days leave every six weeks.

SB – Would you go home then?

JE – I did go home, yes. I suppose it's what you remember. I do remember learning to do a job and learning to do it properly, going out to the flights, getting the kit, making sure that the aircraft was serviceable. A lot of looking after the radar equipment was done by the wireless mechanics. They would make sure that the aircraft was tuned into the right frequency before you even got into the aircraft.

SB – Did you tend to see the same ground crew?

JE – As far as I remember it was the same ground crew.

SB – Do you remember any of their names?

JE – No, not at all. It was their aircraft; we just borrowed it from them.

SB – And woe betide you if you didn't bring it back! Let's go to the end of the tour then, you've done your last op. How did you feel? Was it relieved, pleased?

JE – Relieved, I think. We had this thing where on our last op, the idea was you made sure there was a pail of beer left on the bar for when you came back. So the first crew back would line up all the beer for those who have come back. So we did this on what we thought was our last op but of course that didn't count so we had to do the same again the next day.

SB – You must have been popular!

JE – Again relieved, but I think as far as I can remember we went on leave and came back to the squadron and that was when I think I was feeling depressed. We had been as a crew, the seven of us for about 18 months through the training and the ops, then suddenly six new chaps were waiting. I felt completely disorientated really. I think that was the feeling about it really, that you would lose touch with these chaps. And also that you weren't sure what was ahead. I remember that very clearly, it was like having six brothers as a crew.

SB – How long was it until you saw them again after you split up?

JE – The Spring of 1945 when Jim Lord married and I was his Best Man. I kept in touch with Jim all of the time pretty well. Even after the war, he moved to Leicester and I moved to Bletchley, Milton Keynes area, I was still in touch with him occasionally. Not all the time because we were both busy having a career to build you see and both had families to bring up. The rest of the crew just dispersed completely, the two Canadians obviously went back to Canada, the Australian must have gone back to Australia. We never knew whatever happened to the mid-upper gunner, Pat Scully. At that time Ken Down, we thought had come from Devon or Cornwall and apparently he went back and was teaching but we found out later that he had moved to Dartford in Kent and he was teaching there. So he became a schoolmaster. We didn't meet Ken, well me met Bob in 1978 and then we met Ken a couple of years after that. We met together in London and that was the first time really that we had reunions.

SB – What about Gus Vass?

JE – We never saw him again. Ken and Bob were in touch with him being Canadian but we didn't meet him again. Apparently he had health problems and eventually he died in the late 80's or early 90's I think. We kept in touch with Bob because Bob had come over for the squadron reunions every year. Year after year, so we kept in touch with Bob.

SB – But Jack Schomberg, you knew nothing about?

JE – No. What happened with Jack, was when I wrote my book I think there was a meeting of the Aircrew Association Beds and Bucks Branch, where we had a visit from the secretary of the Caterpillar Club, I had mentioned that we hadn't heard anything of the crew and she told us that she could find out through the club if there was any correspondence that had taken place. She came back and said that she had some communication with Jack in Australia in the 1990's. He was asking for his badge to be replaced. There was some correspondence between Jack and the club about that time. So they had an address for him and a telephone number. We found out from the club that Jack had actually died in 1991 so we weren't able to get in touch with him but as soon as I had written my book and we had the address and telephone number, Jack rang up the address which I think was in Queensland, spoke to his widow and I sent a book out to her. As soon as she received it, she rang me and said that it was the first time she knew what her husband had done in the war. Although she had been in the Royal Australian Air Force, they as a family never knew what Jack had done. So my book was a revelation to them. Jack had a twin. His twin brother Charles was killed just before we started our tour of operations. So that might have been the reason why he didn't talk about it.

SB – He was an Air Force man as well, was he?

JE – Yes. He is buried in France. After we had contact with Jack's family, his daughter and her husband visited us.

SB – Well, I think I have exhausted everything that I have wanted to ask you, but is there anything else that we haven't covered that you would like to?

JE – When I volunteered to go into the RAF, my brother was called up in 1939 and became a pilot. I had wanted to follow in his footsteps. I had been in the air cadets in

1941 and did some training with them. I knew quite a bit in Morse code, drilling and training before I even went into the Air Force. Unfortunately, when I went for my medical when I signed up I was turned down because of my bad eyesight in my left eye and I was short sighted. So I had to go in as Ground Staff Wireless Operator which disappointed me very much. It made my mother very pleased of course. By this time my brother was a fully qualified pilot but he was instructing all the time, from when he qualified. He was instructing on AFU from 1940 right through until 1944 on Ansons and Oxfords. When I first joined up I did my training in Blackpool then I went on to do a radio course in Madley. While I was down there in Madley doing the course they had relaxed the eye test and that meant that I was able to join up as aircrew. So myself and a very close friend at the time both remastered as aircrew. At the end of the radio course in Madley we were both posted back to Blackpool. And then we were both posted as ground staff radio operators. Luckily we pestered them and told them that we were remastered aircrew and were taken quickly off the course. Then we waited for basic training for aircrew. I was sent up to Scotland for ground crew radio operator and it was while we were up in Scotland that we were attached to an Army base just north of Edinburgh. After that I was sent back down to Madley and that is when I did my remustering. We did our aircrew training at Madley too, then after that we did AFU. At first I went to Gloucester at a place called Staverton, did a week there. The AFU course was a five or six week course I think I remember. It was a very good course with an excellent instructor. He had been a Sergeant when we first arrived but soon he was promoted to Pilot Officer. He was a very good instructor. On one occasion I had a weekend off and went to Greenham Common where my brother was flying, spent the weekend with him flying in Ansons. I was called to the office one day for the commissioning board, I had no idea at all but apparently I had been selected for commission. I was told that at the end of the operating training course, I would be commissioned. I went to Peplow which is near Wellington and that was 83 OTU. I must have done something like 55 daylight hours training and 6 hours 50 at night. And that is where I met Jim. I asked him if he was looking for a wireless op, and we met up with Bob and the others and that is how we were crewed up.

SB – Did you have Ken there though, because a lot of people joined later didn't they?

JE – We must have had only one gunner, because we were on Wellingtons you see. They were only twin engine aircraft. Whether we had two gunners and they took it in turns to fly, that was probably what happened. That was quite a long session 31<sup>st</sup> December to 30<sup>th</sup> January. 31<sup>st</sup> January was the last trip that we did in the Wellington I think. No February 1<sup>st</sup>, high level bombing. We didn't do any flying from the 1<sup>st</sup> February until the 1<sup>st</sup> May, what were we doing in all that time? Very strange, there must be something missing there.

SB – So the 1<sup>st</sup> May was HCU was it?

JE – Yes. And then on the 27<sup>th</sup> May was the Lancaster Finishing School at Hemswell and we only did a short time there. Fighter affiliation, circuits and landings and overshoots.

SB – Where was the HCU?

JE – Sandtoft – prangtoft!

SB – Halifaxes.

JE – Well they were clapped out Halifaxes. The Merlin Halifaxes. I did cross country. That was when we came down on two engines at night. That was probably the hairiest thing we ever did. How Jim got that down I don't know. He did a tremendous job. He got commended for that.

SB – I take it that you didn't go home in the same aeroplane then! Left it there did you?

JE – They did pick us up from there in daylight. Some of these things that you remember quite clearly. At OTU we were all Sergeants of course and when we finished there, I went on leave as a Sergeant and came back as a Pilot Officer. And that of course was when I was separated from the rest of the crew. I was a little bit concerned about it at the time. Jim was in charge and then he was commissioned when he got back to the squadron.

SB – I have thought of something else that I would like to ask you about a month ago you went up to Coningsby and got back inside a Lanc. What was that like?

JE – Brilliant. Unfortunately I didn't get a picture of myself in the position. That camera that I have we couldn't get the flash to operate. We went there, pouring with rain, it was a horrible day, but we got there nice and early and we were introduced to Emily Barrington, she was waiting for training for a helicopter pilot and she looked after us. There were three other wireless operators besides myself and we were taken to the aircraft and there was an ex Squadron Leader there who looked after us. He took us into the aircraft, and again I climbed up the steps, went past the mid-upper turret, past the rest area, up over the rear spar and sat in the old seat there. He was more interested in what we did and told us that we knew more about the aircraft than he did. A very nice chap he was. I sat in the pilot's seat and then went down into the bomb aimer's position. I got down there all right and then I realised how they must have been lying on their stomachs for the whole bloody trip. You just lie down there on a cushion across the escape hatch where the bombing controls were. So he must have been on his belly the whole day. We spent a lot of time that day talking about our memories. Two things that I think are a wireless operator's nightmare, one is forgetting to reel in the aerial when you are coming into land and secondly when you were doing the loop exercises what you had to do was to tune into a signal, for a direct location. It was very loud and you had to wait for the loudest one otherwise you wouldn't be going on the correct course. That was a great help for the navigator.

SB – There is another thing, another question that has come to me; there is a lot of talk about "scarecrows", which I have heard were thought to be that the Germans had some type of weapon that could fire vast shells into a bomber formation, and they became known as "scarecrows". People say that is nonsense and what they really were bombers exploding when they were hit by flak. Do you remember anything like that?

JE – Not really no. What you have to remember is unlike the rest of the crew, Bob and I had a different viewpoint. Although there were seven of us all in the same aircraft,

each one of us all had a different viewpoint. When Bob, Ken and Jim read my book, they all said the same thing. They realised that I had a different perspective than they did. You have to realise that the pilot, the bomb aimer and the flight engineer were looking out all the time, Bob and I weren't, we were in our cabins doing our work. I must say that trip to Kiel at night, I pulled my window back, switched the light off and pulled the window curtain back, I looked out and I saw the flak coming up and that was when I began to get frightened. I thought to myself, "God look at that lot there". I quickly pulled the curtain back and I didn't look out after that. And of course the rest of the boys saw it all the time. They saw aircraft going down, there is no doubt about it. Though I don't recall them talking too much about it. I suppose none of us did really, we were so focused on getting the job done. I suppose we were lucky really having our tour in the summer where we had a lot of daylight. I remember one – during daylight 8 hours 5, and it was on our 17<sup>th</sup> op. Pauillac; no opposition. The flight details that we were given at the briefing were to go out across the South coast, down to 50 feet, across the bay of Biscay to avoid the radar and then about ten miles outside of the target, climb to 8,000 feet, bomb an oil refinery and quickly make it back home. Used to love flying low level and it was a beautiful clear day, and looking across the bay we saw fishing vessels. Absolutely clear, it was more like a training operation, reached the target, bombed, came back with no opposition whatsoever. That was a doddle that one. Apparently two days later it was done exactly the same and they lost about 30 aircraft. Things like that I can remember.