

TRANSCRIPT OF TAPED INTERVIEW WITH AUXILIER JACK  
FRENCH. FRIDAY 24 JUNE 1994

THIS INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE ON THE MORNING OF FRIDAY 24  
JUNE 1994 AT MR. FRENCH'S HOME: 'HORNE BEAMS' AT  
KINGSTON, NR. CANTERBURY, KENT.

THIS IS A 'VERBATIM' TRANSCRIPT OF THE SAID INTERVIEW. NO  
EDITING HAS TAKEN PLACE. EVERYTHING BELOW IS AN EXACT  
RECORD OF THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN MYSELF, STEPHEN  
SUTTON - AND MR. JACK FRENCH.

Q) If you don't mind me asking, how old were you when you were recruited  
into the Auxiliary Units in 1940, or was it 1941 ?

A).- No it wasn't, it was '42. You see, what they did originally was, they said:  
"Well, East Kent is going to be over-run - we think we ought to take the line  
of the River Stour as being our boundary." So, the Groups that were formed  
to the Westwards, were formed the year before us .... And then, a Major  
McNicoll came round and .... I expect you know how they selected - do you?

Q) Well, Col. Field said yesterday that they had em... not so much lists but  
they knew of the right kind of people they wanted but he didn't really go into  
it much, how they sort of vetted people?

A) Well, we were very fortunate. I would think that they went to Jim Mount,  
who was our Leader - Sir James Mount now, who fruit-farms at Canterbury,  
well he did. It's his son's and grandson's who do now, he is eighty-five and  
not very well. But em .... We were the sort of people who played rugby  
together; we went shooting together; we sailed together; ferreting ... you  
know anything that was a bit of fun involved and, of course, we had an  
intimate knowledge of the surroundings. And so, he knew perfectly well that  
we were people who would get-on together and he knew enough about us to  
know that we could be licked into some sort of shape - if that's what it really  
was - and em .... McNicoll came to me - we were hay-making at the time - I  
was Sergeant of Home Guard down here in Kingston, guarding the  
waterworks. He said, "Are you satisfied with what you're doing?" And I said,  
"Well, no I'm not really." It was in the dark-days of the war - and he said,  
"Well, I can offer you something which will give you more scope and it's got  
some very good training attached to it, and so on and em... think about it!"  
And he said, "You're to say nothing to anybody about it but, are you  
married?" I said, "Yes, I've been married about six-months" He then said,  
"Well, you've got to talk it over with your wife; you've got to know the  
implications - she's got to know - and both you and we have got to be  
absolutely convinced that she is one-hundred per-cent in favour." - She was.  
And it went on from there!

Q) Were you a Patrol Leader then?

A) No I wasn't. - I was a Sergeant here in the Home Guard ... It's rather  
amusing because with the exception of Jim Mount, we all took our Sergeants'  
stripes down and of course, the uniforms had faded a bit and you could see

the mark our Sergeants stripes had made. People used to say: "Good God, what did you chaps get up to ... can see you've all been knocked-down a peg or two?"

Q) Very good. What was the name of your Patrol, Mr French?

A) "Swede"

Q) And how many men were in it?

A) Seven

Q) Are there any surviving members left beside yourself?

A) Yes, there's just one man, George Pellet and Jim Mount, of course but I'm afraid the others are dead. George, I see because we are both of such advancing years that we meet in the doctors' surgery in Bridge occasionally.

A) We were designed to cover the A2, the Dover-Canterbury Road. Our OB was in Bourne Park, just above the Great House, which was part of Goresley Wood - which, of course, is a huge woodland area which interconnects for miles: The OB was built by the Canadians and er ... it was extremely well concealed by a footpath in the wood and it was dead hazel-stock on the trapdoor, you see, with all the ivy, moss, leaves and so on. And you could have one foot on the footpath and put your foot over and put it on the first-rung of the ladder, you see, so as there was no track which was seen to lead to it. It was twelve-feet deep and had a bolt-hole at the other end out into a chalk-pit and er ... for operational purposes, apart from storing our explosives and ammunition, and so on, it was a dead loss because ... In those days, I mean - you can't really blame them - they were using green' wood ... and we had a JU.88 Nightfighter get shot-down about half-a-mile away and it had only been built less than a year ... and the roof came in! - We spent the rest of the war shovelling chalk out into the chalk-pit!

Q) I was talking to Dick Body, the other day, and Col. Field yesterday, who said that the OBs they had down on Romney Marsh were quite unique because of the water-level and everything .....

A) Yes. Mind you ... it depended on the circumstances and it depended on the Patrol. We were a very mobile group. We looked upon it as being essential that we er .... travelled far and wide; we varied the attack; we felt- if we had to - we would go-to-ground but otherwise, we would be free-standing; we would be mobile. Now, the chaps at Ash ... the Thanet people and the coastal area ... they had their OB where the Radar Station is, down near Ash do you know it? - It's Woodnesborough really ... and it's all sand so they spent the war... they'd got 'latts; and they'd got showers; and they'd got bunk-space; and they'd got lounges, and so on .....

We said they'd got a bar down there! - I wouldn't be surprised if they had! ... I mean, to them, it was their pride and joy - to us, it was a hole in the ground and not much more than that. And of

course, with the damage to it ... we could have lived in it but it would have been extremely uncomfortable!

Q) So you just kept your stores and that then?

A) Yes. Well, of course, we had a lot of stores. We were extremely well provided for and I imagine that you've already been advised that in the Home Guard it was a question of begging from the London-Scottish, who were in Broome Park. Asking if they could spare a little ammo - they were very very kind to us (in the Home Guard) but with this ....

A) Yes ... Fantastic, it was very very good. And the training, of course, we had the Lovat Scouts for fieldcraft who were unbelievable, they were deer-stalkers, you see, in private-life. They were unbelievable ... unbelievable! To demonstrate their ability .... they had, admittedly it was a rough meadow down at The Garth in Bilting, you know? Which was our training area, apart from Coleshill, ..... and er ... this Sunday morning, it was as bright as this, and we all sat at the bottom - admittedly we were probably better than a quarter of a mile away - but they said: "Sergeant Mackenzie and Corporal McDonald, are in that wood over there and they're going to come across the spare-ground, and when they get to this wood over here, they're going to stand-up and if you see anything that moves, before they get there - say, 'I see them!' ." There were twenty of us, you know? .... We never saw a thing! There was tall grass - admittedly - perhaps about two-feet high, but em ... they were marvellous, completely fooled us. And they could do it on much more bare ground than that - they were brilliant! And then, of course, we had the 'RE's': Corporal Nouch was the expert on explosives and er ... oh! we had a whole tribe of them.

Q) That's amazing. So, the equipment that you had ... was snipers-rifles and the like was it ?

A) We had ... one rifle - as I remember it was a .300 - We had a Bren-Gun; we all had Commando knives; we all had Smith & Wesson .38's and er ... then of course, whenever we went out on an exercise, we all wore a unit-charge around our waist. A unit-charge was sufficient to take the sprocket off a Panzer. The only thing it didn't have in it was a 'det - of course, you did have detonators on you and of course, the theory was that if you were in an impossible situation you'd stick the 'det in and let it go! And em ... well, they weren't very kind to people like us ... who technically although we wore uniforms and we had HQ authorization and so on ... If we were lucky, we'd be shot-out-of-hand, if we weren't ... they'd er ... work-out what they could from us. That was why ... It's rather amusing because I've got some papers here that I want to show you, as you're going round. They're suggesting a 're-union' this November and er ... a chap came along to see me the other day ... what's his name now ... Wilcox, Peter Wilcox. He comes from Wales but apparently there's quite a lot of interest in Sussex and further west, in this thing and asked, would I do something about it here. But, of course, I knew three Groups - I didn't know any more! And, of the three ... I've been through the list of the others; I think there's one who's still alive but I think he's very

aged and very infirm .... and Pellet and myself! Well, George Pellet said to me, you know, "There's not much point in having a re-union, if there's just you and me!" And em .... I personally think that that is right ... but em I'll give you some of his bump and if you do run into anybody else who's interested, if you'll pass them on for me?

Q) Ok Fine. I'll do that. Yes I'm really surprised and pleased with the response I've had so far, so perhaps others will be in this ... ?

A) Yes. Well, good ... good. Well, I think everybody looks back on it with a ... it's rather extraordinary really .... we look back on it with a degree of pleasure. We were with people that we liked; we were doing something which we thought was in the interest of the country; we felt that we were doing more than we had been for the war effort; and ... to us, and I mean - Jim Mount was a perfectionist - but the lot of us said to ourselves, "Well, operationally, if we can last a week we're doing jolly-well ... but, By God! They've got to catch us first!" And er ... with the explosives training; with the fieldcraft; with the actual operation of a group like that moving about without being detected. But, of course, when the invasion was not so imminent we trained a lot of people for D-Day, which I expect you know about?

Q) No ... that's a question I was going to ask you actually. I asked Col. Field the same question but he wasn't really aware of what went on because it was after his time, of course.

A) Well, of course. we were doing it - just before D-Day - on a weekly basis: attacking camps and the Big-Gun, we did down here ....

Q) Was that the Railway Gun?

A) Yeah ... And Country Houses in which, of course, they were all billeted. And er ... the sentries were warned that they could expect intruders in the night; they were told - they were all carrying ball - that they should challenge three times and then shoot! And we knew the form as well as they did. We had little bits of plasticine - you see - and we used to stick it on the back-axles of lorries; the sprockets of any tanks we could find; Bren Carriers, or whatever - and em .... then in the morning; one of us would go round and explain to them where all our bits of plasticine were stuck! Of course, without exception - I think - ,the sentries, poor devils, were on a charge. So ... they weren't too friendly but, em .... And once you're trained you know and you take advantage of circumstances; it's unbelievable what you can do. It isn't a question of, sort of blundering-in and hoping there were no sentries about. - You know where they are; you know when they're going to change; you know what the pattern is, whether they vary it and so on ..... It's an all night job .... but if your neck hangs on it; you make quite sure you've got it right in the first place!

A) Major MacNicoll was the man who came round and em .... who actually enrolled us. But em .. of course, Delamere was the man down at Coleshill ... Lord Delamere. But ... I'm trying to think of the names of the others ... I think

we had four or five officers that had various responsibilities ... but, of course it's a bit back!

Q) Do you know if any of them are still about at all?

A) I would probably think.... You should be able to find it out from... You saw Field didn't know? But Field would have known about this (Coleshill) if he didn't know about the other.

Q) Ok Fine ... Dick Body was telling me that all the bridges, or most of them, down on the Marsh were either blown-up or charges were laid on them in preparation. But, what were your objectives around here? You said the A2 was in your domain but was there anything else?

A) Hawkinge Aerodrome. That was the other one .... and that was a doddle! I mean, compared to the .... well, of course, it's a huge area and, of course, they didn't really keep many aircraft down there at night. Most of them just re-fuelled there and went back to Biggin Hill or elsewhere. But down there they were at dispersal because, of course, they frequently got bombed so they were as widely spaced as possible anybody could have got in and have nicked the aircraft, almost! But er it was really rather nice to say, tell Hawkinge Aerodrome that we'd been there last night and tell them how many aircraft we'd doctore'.

Q) I know this was probably before your time with the Auxiliary Units. But apparently in September, 1940 the 'Cromwell-Code' (imminent invasion) was wrongly - or incorrectly - issued. But do you recall that at all?

A) Well, I was a Sergeant down here (Home Guard, Kingston). It almost ended my glorious career that night! Well, we had a Major Spickenell. who was our Sergeant - who looked after quite a big area - and he knew the code-word for Invasion Imminent and he came on at two-o'clock one morning and gave me the code-word and I got him to repeat it ... and so I knocked my people up. They all went down to the water-works and put a pre-arranged-plan into operation and, of course, - I had a car ... We'd got a ration of petrol for it but, I mean, that was the only one. So I picked the people up from round-about and then I went out to the out-lying spots and I'd been - oh - three or four miles down one way ... and was coming in to drop them and then go on the other way, but the chap I was to bring in was down the pit, I expect - there was quite a few of them Colliers - and I didn't have anybody to drop. So I came past the waterworks and I thought "I'll just go in and have a look to see how they're getting on." They challenged me - I mean, I was probably the other side of the bridge when they did this - (*Kingston Waterworks is the other side of a largish railway bridge and has to be approached through a short tunnel. about 30~40 yards long - under the bridge*) [my italics] - they were a bit jittery and er ... they'd got their bullets-up-the-spout and if I hadn't have stopped, they'd have fired! - They told me they would! ... And, of course, with masked headlights and so on, they couldn't tell who it was but by the Grace of God I thought I'll just go in and have a look. "Ohh!", they said "It's you .. oh thank goodness!" ..... Yes

we knew all about it but er ... by ten o'clock, the following morning - we were stood-down - and nobody ever gave us a coherent reason why ... but we all had the feeling that that was the one where they got caught up in that er, you know, blazing-sea - You know, they lit whatever it was .. and scorched a few of em!

Q) Yes ... my father remembers seeing a few German bodies washed up on the shore - between Dover and Folkestone - all burned-up (*The Germans had been 'experimenting' during 1940 with 'fire-proof' landing barges - passing landing barges (and troops) though an area of sea that had been set alight. This was presumably because they had witnessed - from the other side of the Channel - the British experiments of setting the sea alight to counter any possible invasion attempt. This was one of Churchill's 'brainchild's'. Unfortunately, though - it would seem - that in 'fire-proofing' their landing barges, the Germans omitted to 'fire-proof' their troops in them! - An account of this can be found in R. Wheatley's 'Operation Sea-Lion'*) - [my insertion/italics]

Well, they were stopping in the pub, you see, down in Bridge and in there they were saying, "Guess what we're doing? - Digging a bloody great hole" our cover was blown before we ever got into it!

A) I don't know where they were from ... I never met them - but we were warned that everybody knew about our 'Rabbit-Hole' !

Q) So ... you only knew, you say, three Patrols .. [That's right] Yes. and secrecy was the watchword, I suppose, was it?

A) Er ... Well, to the point that er.: We'd been invited out for drinks [a recent recollection] and an oldish lady - about my age - came up to me and said "You're Jack French, aren't you?" - I said, "Yes, I am". She said, "You don't know me?" - And I said, "No, I don't - I'm sorry" - and then she said, "I was your Radio-operator during the war!" - I didn't know who she was: where she came from; anything about her - but er .... she knew all about me! Er ... Which does show, really, how tight security was. I mean, none of us wanted to know ... I mean, if we did inadvertently hear anything which was, you know? We wouldn't say anything to the others about it because it did seem to us that secrecy was absolutely vital!

Q) Yes, I was speaking to Col. Field, yesterday, and I was saying that, in this day and age you'd think that that kind of thing couldn't be kept quiet, you know what I mean, and you'd think there's always someone that you've got to be wary of. But Col. Field was saying that it was just absolutely normal for everybody and anybody ....

A) Oh yes ... It was .... It was .... Oh Yes, and er ... people don't understand that. I did a bit for Peter Williams [Meridian Television]- you know, he'd be a help to you in this - and er ... He was talking about this and he said, "Surely, you must have had an awful lot of secrets, you know that er ... you wanted to keep quiet about" - "Well", I said, "We didn't have many, but what we did we said nothing about to anybody and we assumed that .. particularly in East

Kent where everybody had evacuated, who could evacuate ... we imagined that everybody around us had all sorts of secrets that they didn't want us to know about .... and if the conversation started turning in anything like that sort of direction - we'd start talking about the weather!" Because he knew, and I knew - you know - that "I'm not going to give anything away and I rather hope you're not!"

A) Well, not just with the Lovat Scouts, of course, I think that really you could say that er ... operational-exercises were the essential part. They were incorporated in assault-courses and er ... the Lovat Scouts played one part of it, but it was unarmed-combat; it was doing mock exercises - one Patrol would go out to a particular spot and another Patrol would attempt to out-flank them and surprise them in some way or another. But, of course, the assault courses were very very good because very often at night you would crawl through three-rolls of Dannert-wire all wired-together, you see? You would then run a quarter of a mile and you would be given a .22 and you'd have to shoot a match-box off a stake at twenty-five paces until you could go on, you see? And when you'd done that, you'd throw a hand-grenade and you had to get it within so many feet of the mark - and then on you went. And then you'd ... er - when you were thoroughly exhausted - you'd make-up, whatever it was, you see? It was specified that it had to be a Time-Pencil and you had to have so much '8G', and it needed a detonator, or whatever. This all had to be done within a certain amount of time, you see? And so, when you got to the far end you got marked on the performance you'd all put up. You went home complaining bitterly, you see, that while one or other of the Groups may have been better than you - you had a feeling that they'd cheated! - It's just like playing football today really, isn't it?

Q) Yes, exactly but very rigorous training though? - So, how often did you go to The Garth then?

A) Well, ... Coleshill I went down two - I think - three times. They got me down once on the wrong day! And er .... I rather enjoyed it because er ... they put-me-up overnight in the Mess and, in fact, I don't think I came back until the evening ... I walked round looking at things and remember saying to them "Well, this is wonderful shooting country, you know, don't you get out shooting as a rule?" - "Well", they said: "No ... er ... we would if we were offered it but no, I don't think we're offered it - but yes there are some good shoots here" And, it was only three or four minutes afterwards that I said: "Well, wouldn't your cook just like one-for-the-pot?" And then I found a runner in a shave and I pulled it out, and screwed it by the neck!!

Q) When you first went down there .... did you 'know' where to go to or did you have to report somewhere else?

A) Well, we reported to the RTO at Swindon and they provided a vehicle to take us out there, to Coleshill. It took us back the following day, or the day after that. And er ... oh, It was concentrated - It was the sort of thing which was er ... You hadn't got time for really at The Garth. That was all go, go, go. This (Coleshill) was all sort of; school-room stuff. Extremely nice people

and, of course, we all wanted to know as much as we could about what they could tell us - about improving really, our standards. And, of course, they were invaluable. They were extremely good people!

A) They gave us all the help they could. Such a pity that they burnt the house down. Well, It wasn't them really - it was the decorators afterwards wasn't it ?  
- It was a beautiful Mansion

A) Yes - when we were there it was the 'Pleydel-Bouvieries' who lived there, probably they are an arm of the Radnor's - I don't know.

Q) What about local police and things like that - Were they ever suspicious of you, or did you have to account for your movements to them - because, presumably, in the woods - there were things like explosions going off, and the like?

A) We didn't let off explosions at night in the woods, that's for sure. When we did do an exercise on a Sunday morning, if we were here - I mean, we were all farmers, you know and had the need to blow-up a tree or something like that occasionally - then we used to. advise the local ARP - so that they at least would know, and I mean, they would then tell anybody they wanted to, or needed to - I suppose. But, I mean, it was all very controlled - you know? - But we didn't have to say exactly what we were doing, only that there will be some explosions - and they never asked any questions.

Q) So your wife knew of your involvement you say

A) Oh yes, indeed! She totally agreed with it. And of course, we did have a plan - She would have evacuated with the children the moment the 'balloon' went up, and luckily she'd got relatives all over Kent - She'd stay with one or other of them .... and er ... would probably have moved about. She was the sort of woman who would have fought her own particular war .... If the Germans had come anywhere near her~ I don't think there was much doubt about it that er ... any aggression I might have, was more than matched by her!

Q) So. This training - you said - actually continued throughout the war and you actually tested Units, prior to D-Day?

A) Er .... Some of our people went over - I understand - although none of my Patrol - went over on D-Day (Q> They did?) . Yes ... er ... well, there was a feeling that there was a place for them in giving advice on how we'd think that if the Germans themselves had organised a terrorist campaign... how *they* would operate but also, of course, to protect the 'Maquis' because they would want to er... well, somebody on the-spot would say we're pretty certain we don't know them of course but if it was you, we'd be doing this that or the other. So you see, it wasn't a question of us shooting our own people I think that was what they went for. But it says here (Mr French indicates David Lampe's "Last Ditch") that we shut-down on 30th November



'44. So, you see, that was well after D Day at any rate but not frightfully long after.

Q) Yes, I see. Did you have to do any intelligence gathering at all?

A) Umm Not specifically but obviously, we would be expected to advise er through the 'radio-link' ... er ... what units there were; the size of them; were they in transit; .... whatever. Oh yes!

Q) So... you did have a radio-link then?

A) Well, a woman had it. Jim (James Mount) would contact her. But also, we had a chap who 'theoretically' was an officer who went by the name of Castier - R.P. Castier ... , and he was really the 'link' above Jim. He'd got a very good record actually, he'd .... He was a young schoolboy when the First World War started and he did just manage to scrape-in, and he became commissioned in the Corps of Signals and er .... He went to the Western Front; was wounded and went back afterwards and saw the war out. And er, he used to boast that when he first went out there as a newly commissioned; very green officer ... They'd said "Ah Good, what's your name? - Nice to know you. Has anybody told you what your life-expectancy is?" - And, of course, the signallers were always exposed - they were down in the forward trenches, laying telephone wires, and what have you. - They said: "It's three days!" (Q) My goodness!) - yes ..... It's not 'comforting' is it?

A) Erm No. We weren't but yes ... we did. Because we felt that anybody who was

Q) So ... these people who you did keep an eye on. If the Balloon had gone up, presumably they would have been eliminated - would they?

A) Yes! Fortunately .... Castier had spent his life 'Silver-mining' in Brazil where everybody wore a 'Six-Shooter'. And, er ... there were some bad men about. Because, of course, if you're silver mining - you're a pretty good target .... and he said - and, I mean, he was a friend of mine - even before the war - There's so and so and so and so. If the balloon does go up and we're invaded, *they won't live for twenty four hours! We'll shoot them!* " And er ... we rather relied upon Rex, you know, to keep-the-slate-clean of people who might shop us, because that was the fear.

Q) Yes. I see. I know enemy-aliens were interned but, presumably, - I mean we were friendly with Russia. So, presumably, there were people who might have had Communist sympathies, for example? I mean, some people say that if an invasion had come and an independent Resistance Movement had sprung up; it could have ended up being led by Communists who might see invasion as an opportunity for 'Revolution' which might be success full given the hatred of the Nazis - and, if successful, might have led to a 'Soviet' Britain by default almost?

A) Oh yes exactly! There was no question about that - there was a threat. It's very hard, of course, to predict what the situation would have been but the historic experience of the invaded-countries; they were all the same: Dutch, Belgian, French .... er ... The Germans had done their homework well and they had really a skeleton-network of people who were going to be their Gauliers; their Fuhrer's , or whatever, and er ... they had their ramifications - and, we reckoned, that exactly the same thing was the case here. But I daresay that if Rex Castier had done what he intended to do, half the people would have been guilty and half may well have been innocent! But there you are!

Well, It's like this you see - this is what actually happened - We've got a very good farming family down between Rouen and Dieppe, who years ago' taught my young to talk French, and I taught theirs to talk English. And, ... Claude hardly ever talks about the war - but we were in the Boulangerie one day, getting the bread for lunch, and er ... he said "There was a bad morning, in here" - He did give me the year - and, of course, that was where they were launching the VI's from - you know? - And he said: "We French had a bread ration which was meagre but there was this chap just in front of me who'd got his five or six loaves, or whatever and a German came in - a German soldier came in and said 'I'll have those' - The chap said: 'no you don't, that's my ration' - Out came the German's gun and shot him dead!" - This suddenly came to Claude's mind as we were in the bakers that time.

Q) Really?... So. What were your actual instructions if invasion did come. What were you expected to do? You said earlier that you might go-to-ground.

A) Yes .... Go-to-ground for two-days then have a recce and see what's what but keep out of the hair of the Home Guard and any other military defence units that were about so that you didn't cloud-the-water. You'd see what you had to do - you know - when you came up to have a look.

Q) I see. But ... assuming that happened, was there a line of communication from you back to Corps Headquarters?

A) Yes...Castier would have been au-fait with the situation with each of the Patrols. And he would then telephone onward - now I think he had a code, I don't think it would have been ope' conversation ... but he would provide them with essential information that they needed. And whatever it was we needed would be provided through him ... in whatever form it was that we wanted. We never felt that we would have been isolated because the invasion forces would have gone-on - We felt perfectly capable of moving about anywhere... surrounded by Germans!

Q) So, If necessary, do you think you could have slipped back into your farming life and still operate?

A) Yes. Well, it wouldn't be a group who'd go. It would be one or another, or whatever, depending on where they really had to go. And the one with the

best knowledge... and the best contacts really because, of course, we all of us had contacts all over East Kent of people we could rely on

Q) In Gordon Stevens' book, he says that Britain was split into occupied and unoccupied zones. He may well have got this idea from R. Wheatley's book "Operation Sealion". I think in this book, the sources say that the Germans gave themselves, I think it was, four to five days to get to the line of the Stour and then they would talk, possibly, of occupying up as far as Birmingham and then stopping! - This seems an incredible thing to have considered?

A) Ah yes, but of course it would have stretched what was then - their very meagre resources. So that seems perfectly feasible!

Q) Yes, I suppose so. - Col. Field was saying that during the war there were actual photographs in the newspapers of the German concentration of barges in the Channel ports?

Q) It seems hard to believe - again I suppose that was a part of the strategy of keeping everybody - the speculation - aware of the danger and what was its likely outcome and so to keep them 'on-the-ball'?

A) Well... when you think, that at the outbreak of war, we were intolerably ill-prepared. We'd put our Expeditionary Force into France and virtually none of it came back. I mean they drove their trucks down to Dunkirk, or wherever, then drained the oil out and left the engine running full bore so that they'd seize the engine up and make them useless to the advancing Germans and therefore, it stayed. And when you think that in the Home Guard, they had no weapons for us but they said: "Use your sporting guns; open the twelve-bore cartridges and fill them up with wax and let it set with the shot and so it would come out solid, you see, and it would kill!" It might also kill you though, because it might blow your barrel up! That was sort of the hazard one ran. We never actually let-one-off. But we'd been very lucky because my father said - The 'London-Scottish' were into Broome Park, I think probably before war was declared - but at that time anyway and, of course, the shooting-season was coming up and er ... he said: "Go and see them and say, look if you want some pheasant shooting, you'll be very very welcome to come and shoot our birds" - And er ... they were a nice lot, you know? - I mean, I've never seen so many 'Purdey's' in my life... beautiful guns! And, of course, they smiled very favourably upon us and our efforts and er... I was very lucky, I had a chap by the name of RSM Glover: Regimental Sergeant Major Glover, of the 'Blues'. And er... he'd retired to Kingston - he'd served some of his military career in Canterbury - and an RSM knew the Army upside down and backwards and he could write magnificent military letters - I couldn't begin to, I'd just say "Could you let us have a gun or two?" - But RSM Glover wouldn't say it like that - it would take two pages and was very well done and like that we got far far more than we were ever supposed to have done! So between him and my father's offer our Home Guard Unit did quite well compared to many who had to make-do with Pikes and Pitchforks, and the like!

Q) According to Col. Field - yesterday - Peter Fleming. Did you ever meet him at all ? A very very colourful character?

A) Yes indeed. A 'wildman'!

Q) Yes, from what I gathered yesterday - He (Col. Field) was showing me a few things that Fleming had left. He'd left a book for the Officer's Mess at The Garth.... He'd written a book, a satirical one, about Hitler actually. You know Rudolph Hess had parachuted into this country quite early-on in the war? Well, this book took as its scenario Hitler parachuting into this country ... but he'd written in the fly-leaf- "To The Officers Mess. What a mess. No Officers!" - But Col. Field was saying that he was completely wild but the contacts Fleming had went right to the very top - from what I could gather?

A) Oh Yes. Peter Fleming was a very good man. He used to impress us enormously because if he was searching for his cigarette-lighter and er... turned his pocket out - one would find out that he'd got live 'dets' in there, you know?

Q) Incredible! What about information coming the other way; down to you?

A) We had virtually none. The training provided us with the situations that we would meet in-the-round - But I'm absolutely certain that they would have been very loath to say: "We're going to do this next-week and that the week after; you must be prepared for it" - and so on. Because if we fell into their hands (The Germans) they'd hear about it - so; if you don't know, you can't tell 'em! That was the theory we had.

Q) yes .... So, if invasion did come and you were captured. Were you told to hold-out or were you told... I read somewhere that some Patrol Leaders were given suicide-pills?

A) Oh! We had a Unit-Charge around our middle's - That was quite sufficient and was what we would have used and er .... I would imagine it was totally painless. A bit surprising, but still!

Q) Were you given any information concerning German weaponry, vehicles, tactics and the like?

A) We were very well provided with information on the way to deal with Panzers; to identify the various types; their weak-spots and anything else that might be vital battle information. And er ... we knew how to deal with a fuel-dump - the various fuses, you know, Cordex or the silver-line or whatever and er ... this was, of course, where the 'RE's' came in: Corporal Nouch and his chaps. They were inventing things all the time that we could make ourselves! I mean, we were shown how to use an old two-inch mortar/scaffold tube as a mortar: put a small charge in the bottom which would fizz it off; put another charge with a slight delay so that as it's coming

in to land, that charge goes off you see? HEATH ROBINSON... you haven't got a weapon you try and make one.

Q) Very ingenious! How long was it .... you say you were recruited in 1942, but was the threat of invasion still felt as imminent ? Or was it still felt that it could come?

A) It wasn't quite as desperate as it had been immediately after Dunkirk when you'd go to bed at night and think: "Will it be tonight?" But... I suppose we didn't feel that we were wasting our time even after the invasion (D-Day). But certainly right up to the invasion; we were extremely busy. We had er.... not only training of ourselves but going out and being the enemy for any unit in the area...

Q) So, in your opinion then. If for nothing else, the viability and the usefulness of the Auxiliary Units was extremely valid even if only for that purpose alone?

A) Oh Yes! Well, I think that we were considered, and I think they were justified in thinking that, that they considered that we were extremely well trained and that this wasn't an amateur effort .... sort of "The Big-Boys do it, so we'll have a go!" Erm ..... We were in deadly earnest and, of course, the use by the Sentries of ball meant that you weren't 'mucking about!

Q) Yes, quite.... Erm .... When you were stood-down in 1944 what was your reaction to that?

A) Regret I couldn't keep my Commando Knife!

Q) Really... you had to hand even that back?

A) Yes. I would loved to have kept that as a memento.

Q) Yes, when I was talking to Dick Body, He said a similar thing. I was really surprised that they wouldn't at least allow you to keep that?

A) Well....We weren't allowed to keep anything. I mean, they checked what we'd had out and, you know, they checked what we gave back. I think I complained I'd worn a pair of boots out! But, you know, they'd still say: "Where are the boots?"

Q) So. Of the three Groups then - that you are/were aware of - how many OBs do you think you had between you?

Q) Do you feel that... I mean, there's snippets in books like this ("Gubbins and SOE") and "The Last Ditch" was way back in the Sixties and then Gordon Stevens' book obviously but that's a novel. Do you think that enough recognition' - or enough recognition - has ever been given to the role of the Auxiliary Units?

A) Think so - I mean we, of course, were '10 c a l' sow we generated the interest but erm ... Peter Williams (Reporter for Meridian Television) got me to do - No, it wasn't him, it was one of the other chaps from the television - to do a piece on the 'Big-Gun' Because it was after all the the 'year' (previous anniversary - not 50th?) of the D-Day landings and er...they did a little bit; asked several people about it - but I'd climbed up on top of the gun because they'd rumbled us, you see - I mean they were roughing everybody up and I thought: "Well, I'll be the last to be roughed-up" So, I went up and up and up and they were coming up to search the gun, so I climbed right up onto the barrel of the thing and I was just beneath the roof, you know thirty-feet-up! - And anyway, they were shining torches up and around and I was lying spread-eagled on the barrel [bloody great barrel!] .... and er, then they all cleared out, you see? And I thought: "Everything's oily and sharp .... I'm thirty-feet up, if I miss my footing - there's going to be some sharp edges I'm going to meet on the way down!" Anyway, I got down - fortunately - without damaging myself! But erm ... they got me to mention this, and so on and er .... one of the chaps in the village - a chap that I'm very friendly with - he said; to one of his friends, with absolute justification: "They did a bit of television about this thing' that Jack French did." The other said: "Yeah" and then this chap continued: "They didn't do anything about me, did they?" - You know, he was in Lancasters' and erm ... on one classic occasion he came into Manston - of course it was an enormous runway and badly damaged aircraft coming back from the continent used to make for it if they were in trouble because if they hadn't got any brakes it didn't matter too much because the runway was so long - anyway, he came in with his Lancaster - shot to pieces - and had to wait for a vehicle to take them back to Scampton, or where ever it was, and he said to them: "I live nearby, do you mind if I go and see my mum?" And they said: "We'll provide you with a vehicle - and a driver - and you may have one hour to meet your Mother !" - He said : "Well they don't say anything about that, do they?" - And I thought: "Well, I'm that high! "(Mr. French indicates an inch with his fore-finger and thumb} .

Q) Just a few more things though .... Where was it? - We were saying about Communist cells and so on. Do you think .... there's also a feeling, right? Gubbins, for example, went on from the Auxiliaries to SOE. Do you think that the Auxiliaries were something of a blueprint for SOE or the Resistance Cells in occupied Europe ?

A) I think that ... Gubbins had to fight a war to get the soldiery - you know, most of whom thought that fighting wars was all about climbing onto horses, you know, and roaring about. Er .... It ain't like that anymore ... and they fought desperately - You know - to pretend it wasn't happening. War is a filthy, dirty business; there's no question about that and .... whatever you can do; however 'offensive' it is .... to your finer nature - you do it! And you've got to accept that the other-side are doing just the same! - And, er a good spy is probably worth a regiment of soldiers. And as so many of these commentators on wartime activities have said, with regard to - shall we say the 'Dieppe-Fiasco' - "It saved millions of lives later-on!" - And it probably

did, but at the same time you can't help but be desperately sorry for these chaps who er .... got shovelled into that. I mean, being in Dieppe as often as I have been and now that Claude's retired; he lives just down the coast and at the bottom of his garden there's a cliff-top. At the bottom of his garden, he's got enormous ramifications of gun-emplacements and so on .... all trained on the Dieppe beaches. I mean, how anybody survived [and that's only one of many!] how anybody ever survived ... I do not know! - And er., it convinces you that it was so ill-conceived. They must have had 'resistance' people who must have said; "If you're going to invade Europe - for God's sake don't go to Dieppe!" - There must have been easier places to go to?

Q) Yes, indeed. So. Do you think if there hadn't been the Auxiliary Units; you would have joined some kind of 'Resistance Movement' anyway?

A) No. Look at it like this .... I would have done my best to get as well trained and as well equipped within the local Home Guard, as I could get. But, the resources were so limited and the sort of back-up that we had in the 'Auxiliaries' was something which you'd have never have achieved privately. I think that we, most of us, had the idea that: "Well, ours not to reason why, ours but to do or die!" And the authorities will get us to do what they think is the best thing to do .... in the circumstances. - I mean, within the Home Guard, it was desperately difficult to get enough ammo - really - and enough weapons to even provide half of the men with a rifle and enough ammo to get them to do even the most rudimentary training - you know? - I mean, with us, we had everything we wanted. You could have mounted a considerable exercise every time you went to The Garth, if you'd wanted to! But not the Home Guard and er . . . . privately, of course you'd have been even less acceptable than the Home Guard were!- You wouldn't have really have got anywhere!

Q) Yes. It seems a strange kind of thing hearing you say that when one knows of 'Ironside's' Office putting out that leaflet to the British public. You know the one I mean - "STAND FAST" ? asking the British public to do, basically, what the trained Auxiliaries were going to have to do?

A) Yeah ..... Mind you, I think that at that time I would have wanted to do something - however suicidal it might have been!

Q) Yes, I can appreciate that. So - the fact that the Auxiliary Units were run along what were to all intents and purposes: strict military lines was then really a positive advantage - do you think?

A) Oh yes! Very much so. It was just like any fully-fledged military unit and er ... If they made very heavy demands upon you - You didn't say: "Well, I'm hay-making today" - You did it! ..... But then of course, I think that one of the things that comes out of all this is that the national spirit at that time was .... marvellous! - You know, we were all in this together and er ... the number of times that I've actually heard a bomb whistling down or have actually seen the dirt going up from a overtown Ack-Ack shell, or something, and everybody throws themselves on the ground ... But then they

would all stand up and roar with laughter! - For one dreadful moment your heart stops ... and then starts beating again: you're so happy to hear it clicking-away again that .... you're all happy! - Now, I cannot understand how that happens. But then, of course, the enormous history of tales like this .... You see, the one that springs to mind; one of very many, but this one was very amusing:

I used to play rugby on a Saturday afternoon, in Canterbury er ... with Canterbury Rugby Football Club. And, of course, we scratched together a fifteen ... I suppose three or four of us were farmers but there was: the Balloon Bar age and we used to get all sorts of strays who would come in and help us. On this particular occasion, we were playing a "Div. HQ" and the Padre had been playing for them. And er ... you'll not believe this, but we used to change in 'Ostlers quarters' at the back of the "Fleur de Lyss", which was our watering-hole. It was a little lean-to and it had got a bath in it and thirty-bods got in that one bath! And, the water had to be seen to be believed at the end of the exercise because it was so muddy. Anyway., Man of the Cloth .... So we said to the owner of the Hotel: "We've got a Pardre here, can you do something?" - "Yeah, that's all right he can go up to one of the staff bathrooms right up on the top floor". So we got back and were getting changed, in fact I'd finished changing, and we were moving into the tea, and the Reverend was having a lovely long soak in his bath upstairs, when the "FW.190's" came in, and they didn't mind about the balloon-barrage; they shot-in at nought-feet ... and, you know, you heard the crump and then the wump and then the bigger one and then the most God-awful almighty crash! - It brought the glass ceiling down .... I was under the table at the time, but I did see afterwards a shard of glass about a foot long, embedded in the table, just in front of where I had been sitting. But the Reverend heard this coming and he said: "Not up here, by God no!" .... He shot down into Canterbury High Street, on a Saturday afternoon at about quarter-past-five ... and said: "God! I've got no clothes on!" .... And then he rushed-off back upstairs again! You see, when you're asked: "Tell me Daddy, what were air- raids like?" - And you tell a tale like that and they can't believe it but it actually happened and we fell-about laughing!

Q) You've told me of the woman who was involved in the Auxiliaries, whom you found out about later. But were there any other women that you knew of that were involved?

A) No, no ... My wife, that was all ... the other chaps' wives, although we never saw them really - or hardly ever saw them, that is.

Q) You mentioned early-on that some of the chaps were asked to volunteer to go over on D-Day. But did you know of anyone who, sort of, transferred over earlier on in the game, as it were?

A) No, I don't. But the idea was mooted: would any of us like to go on D-Day ... "Could we er ... do something?" But of course, if you ask a farmer in the middle of June; whether they can swan-off' .... but, of course, you see we had no help ... I couldn't even hire one chap around the farm, and I thought: "Well, no I can't" - You know, nobody to get the crops grown or



harvested if I'd swanned-off on that ... so I didn't volunteer. But yes, other people did.

Q) Yes .... Dick Body said a similar thing really. He also said that he'd feel somewhat like a fish-out-of-water .... Inasmuch that he knew his own area but to be parachuted into somewhere that would be totally alien, he didn't feel right about.

Q) Just one more thing really ... Were you ever given ... I mean you did do training exercises throughout the war ... but were you ever told: "Right, the threat of invasion is over now, but this is why we need you"? Or, were you ever told why it wasn't until 1944 that you were stood down?

A) No no. The theory was that you were trained as an anti-invasion exercise. "Until we're absolutely certain that there is not going to be an invasion we want you." So, frankly, the other ... was a supplementary exercise: training the others. As you know, we were anti-invasion protection really.

Q) Yes, I see. I suppose, of course, that as far as the Germans were concerned, the invasion in Normandy was just a feint and they still expected something to come across from the Pas de Calais?

A) Well, yes, but as far as a German invasion was concerned ... We felt that some of them might have landed in Sandwich Bay and some of them would land down on Romney Marsh with a pincer-movement coming round the back, you see, to cut off Dover.

Q) Yes "Sealion" and all. Have you seen this? It's a German map for their "Operation" that's....

Q) No .... They were talking about an 'airborne-landing' somewhere north of Folkestone [Oh yes]. Yes, and moving round and out from there to Dover.

A) But they don't seem to have marked the River Stour at all? [No] That's rather interesting because, of course, it would have needed a lot of getting across - I mean, there aren't many bridges. That's very interesting ...

Q) You can keep that copy, if you want. I've also got something else which may be of interest to you. It's a copy of a report from Ironside's' Office (Duncan Sandys), to Winston Churchill and it shows the setting-up of the Auxiliary Units [can you spare it?] - Yes, of course. This is from some digging-around at the Public Records Office. It's the first bit of concrete evidence that, as far as I'm aware, has actually been found. As yet it hasn't been published anywhere yet and I would appreciate it if you would keep-it-under-your-hat, so to speak, until my research is published. I'm hoping that in my soon to be frequent visits up there - something more will come to light.

A) Yes of course .... Can you spare it? - That's very interesting indeed. Thank you very much. I think this is rather interesting him saying that they intend to provide "Within the framework of the Home Guard Organization". - It never had anything to do with the Home Guard! - And, of course, quite frankly ... would YOU want to have this sort of information handed out to the average man in the Home Guard? - He'd keep it a big secret until he next went to the pub! - I mean, they knew nothing about it and we had absolutely no contact with them whatsoever! - But, I mean, if we had had - we would have been terrified!

Q) Yes, quite. This was just, I think, from what I can gather just as 'GUBBINS' was brought into the organisation. After that, I believe, things were somewhat tightened-up. In fact Col. Field commented on something in here ... about the "gathering of intelligence and information." He was saying that his brief wasn't that at all - It was "Do the job - get in and get out," sort of thing.

A) Yes ... I see it says: "The other function of Auxiliaries is to provide a system of intelligence so that regular forces in the field can be kept informed about what's happening behind the enemy's lines." - Well, we obviously would have had ... some sort of contact with somebody whom we felt might have been able to make use of it .... but, as far as I know, there was no chain that said: "You have to report to so and so".

Q) Yes. I suppose what this may be referring to, at an early stage, is the organisation that came to be known as the "Secret Sweeties". I've got the names and addresses of a couple of ladies who were involved in this aspect of it. It's funny about the secrecy isn't it. I mean, you yourself were saying that it wasn't until well after the war that this lady approached you and told you that she was your 'radio' operator and that you didn't know her at all.

A) Yes, that's right. And a jolly good thing too! - I mean, if they're screwing your balls off and asking: "Who or where was your radio operator?" You might give a shriek or two but you couldn't give the woman's - cause you wouldn't know it. Yes of course, talking of this thing in the Resistance .... There was a chap who had a brilliant war. He was the local newspaper reporter on the local paper. And er ... we knew that he was ... he was half French anyway ... we knew that he was with the Resistance, in France. And er we all used to go down to the Falstaff Hotel in Canterbury. One of our, not of our Patrol but of another Patrol ... ran the place ... And, it was really the only place that did a decent meal on a Saturday evening; where all the forces used to go ... the place was always packed-out - it was a lovely spot; a lovely smell of cooking, and so on. And er .... literally, at the end of the war he (this reporter) cadge a lift with a Tank Landing Craft and came across to Dover; came up to Canterbury and, of course, we'd known him well from the early days. So, we bought him a beer or two .... he was in a very expansive mood. He knew perfectly well they weren't going to get him and he was very very pleased about it. And we got around to this subject, you know: "What about the Jerries" - we said - and he said: "Well, you know, the Jerries would do any barbaric thing you'd like to think of."

"But" - he said - "We had a relatively harmless way of getting information out of Germans ... we stripped them; we put a line of wire round their balls, then hoisted them up from a branch of a tree and lit a slow fire under them!" He said, "Anybody would talk under those circumstances!" - Ha! Ha! The mind boggles, doesn't it? And that's from one of the men who'd actually done it! We weren't going to get taken prisoner. - I mean, there was no question about it, you know, "We shall live to be ripe old men!" - If there had been the invasion; if we had been doing it - er .... they wouldn't have taken any prisoners, as far as we were concerned .... The only thing about the book that "Stevens" wrote that I didn't like was the fact that in it we left behind one of our badly wounded chaps, and booby-trapped him. I don't think we'd have done that. Well, the feeling that we had was that if somebody's in that sort of state if we'd leave 'em behind, they might nurse them back to health and then set-to-work-on-them ! If that was the case, we'd sooner finish them off! - And we certainly had the understanding between us, that if we were in that position, you know, "Do it and do it quick!"

Q) Yes. Dick Body said almost exactly the same thing [Yes] . Well, that's great. Thanks ever so much for your time and help. If I need to get back to you .... would that be alright?