

After Hiroshima
Interview transcript

Interviewee: Raymond Kemp (RK), born 1925.

Interviewee: Ilias Pantazis (IP) and Ruth Dewa (R)

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IP: So tell me first, please, what is your name?

RK: Raymond Kemp.

IP: And, um, what were you doing in England before the war started?

RK: Oh, I was, I was at school. I went to school here in Bermondsey. I went to what was a central school in those days. You had really three tiers of school. You had a secondary, a central school, and a grammar school. If you weren't good enough to get to a grammar school, you went to a central school. And if you weren't good enough to get to a central school, you went to an elementary school and left school at, what, 14. I left school at 14 because I'd been evacuated. And our school, really, schooling stopped at that point. Well we still had a... we shared a school and had half days, half a morning or afternoon. Anyway, that's sort of more or less. Then I moved back to London, 1940, '40, '41, and went to work in "Siemens", the electrical, German company actually at Woolwich, where I was doing the 12 hour nightshift. You put some hours in them days [laughs]. Worked for a 12 hour nightshift fourty(?) [1:30]. Four to nine nights and four to nine days. When I joined the Navy, um, I got put into the, into the Navy and went out to Skegness, stayed on a Butlin's holiday camp which was fun [laughs]. It was freezing actually, it was in the winter, mid-winter, just about Christmas time. And our homes were little chalets [laughs]. Almost no heating. It was, it wasn't any heating in them. So Skegness in the winter was not a very pleasant place to be [laughs]. But anyway, from there on we were transferred into the Fleet Air Arm. Served on various - did a course in air mechanics and... Is this what you want, you know, this sort of history?

IP: Yeah.

RK: From there I served on a number of aerodromes, getting practical experience on the planes. From there I went to America where we've formed up a squadron and went on to, went on to a carrier, I was on the Vengeance and on the Venerable. I spent V-E Day in Malta, and went on from Malta to Ceylon where I was put ashore. I, I was ill, actually, [3:00] and I was put ashore in Ceylon. And then I was moved from Ceylon up into India, a place called Coimbatore, just outside Madras. And then from there up to, um, Bombay. And back home from Bombay to Scotland. Again in mid-winter. And Scotland was a cold place in mid-winter [laughs]. But anyway, that was sort of the end of my naval career.

IP: So when did you go to India? I mean, what year was it?

RK: Oh, been 1944, just after V-E Day. No, '46, ain't it? At times I... yep, yep.

IP: And you came back to Scotland...?

RK: Yes, from India. On transit with the Star of India.

IP: What year, in, in...?

RK: Oh, that would have been 1946.

IP: '46?

RK: '6, yeah.

IP: *And you spent, so you spent two years in India?*

RK: Yes. No, a year. A year.

IP: *A year?*

RK: Yeah, yeah.

IP: *Um, can you describe me how was there, just a, you know, um, normal day?*

RK: Um, yes, we were, so we were servicing aircraft that was being used to fly over, fly over in Burma and all that area, we were in what was called 'South Asia Command' called SEAC. So that was Southeast Asia Command [4:30]. I mean, I always feel a bit guilty because I got the Burma Star, and, and never went ashore in Burma so I feel a bit guilty about that 'cause they had a terrible time in Burma, they were, were what we called the Forgotten Army at that time. Yes, it was... funny days, actually. But anyway, I came home and got demobbed. And there was, one thing, there was time to work in those days. And I, um, I was determined I wouldn't go back into a factory again. I never wanted to work in a factory again... So I became a groundsman, of all things, a sports grounds. Um, I got married in 1950. Um, I think one of the interesting things about when we got married: we were still rationed in 1950. And a lot people don't seem to realise that, way after the war, we were still rationed. Food and clothes. And in fact, for our wedding, I don't know how, how mother and father-in-law did it but my mother, they had to save their food rationing for, I think we had about 40 people at our wedding. They had to save enough of their food rations to feed them all. Um, I was lucky – suits [6:00], if you had a, wanted to buy a suit, they were still rationed and they were very expensive, actually. And we didn't earn much. I mean, my first wage when I came out the Navy was a two pound ten a week, which would be equivalent two fifty now. Which I mean, even though money went a long way in those days [laughs], it was still... As usual, our parents kept us alive, actually. Parents do this sort of thing don't they. Um, in fact the suit I got, you got suits in the youth department. Um, for no rations, no coupons or, and they were a very reasonable price in the youth departments. And I was very small, I was, I fitted a youth suit, so my wedding garment was... [laughs].

IP: *Youth?*

RK: It was a youth suit, yes. I mean, this is more or less. Do you want any more of the history of that period? You know, sort of... I think, you're probably interested in Ban the Bomb?

R: *Yeah, and also putting in, putting in context about your personal story.*

RK: Yes, well this is where I, where I, where I... you know, this is where I think your generation finds it hard to understand how our generation felt. I mean now, I was in India at the time of the bombing of Hiroshima and Naga-, Nagasaki, which were terrible events. And I, you know, I wouldn't say they weren't that. They were terrible events and so I'm sorry we ever had that [7:30]. But I think at that time our attitude was... when the war ended in Europe, we were all on alert in India and in SEAC that there would be an all-out invasion of Japan. The mainland. Well, I think the casualty, casualties invading the

mainland in Japan would have been enormous. Because if nothing else, the Japs could fight, they didn't run away, and it would have been a blood bath. I don't know what casualty figure it would have been. So when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, um, we all flung our hats in the air. You know, great, that was terrific. Because that ended the war, even though the Japanese couldn't stand, that's sort of thing. Um, but, I think the one big bone of contention and has always been, at least I'd plead for this: why did they drop off two? Now, looking in hindsight back, why did they? And I think quite frankly if, if you got the atmosphere of that period, the, the things that the Japanese had done, the atrocities, the German atrocities, people really were in a state 'well we'll finish them off, no matter what it costs'. And the second bomb was to make sure they didn't change their minds quite frankly. But whether it was ever justified [9:00], I, I don't know - I don't think it probably was. One, one would have been enough. The devastation was so bad. And of course as usual it was ordinary people that suffered. Because mainly Japanese families are no different to ours, I suppose. They're local to one another, they have their own children, bring them up, sacrificed for them, you know, so... Um, it's very difficult to justify the second one. But I think if you could see it in the context of that period, and how people felt after four, five years of terrible war, they have been bombed and, and you could understand the feeling of it, you know, um, and every day taken off, and the length of that war, to save our own lives, as I say, that is the big debate as far as I am concerned. The two. The first one - I think the problem is once something like that is invented, and once it's been used, you can't put it back. Um, in, in the modern world, the trouble is there is so many different people who got the ability to actually produce it. And you can't just keep it in the hands of main powers who perhaps could control it. I don't see how you control it now it's out the bottle [10:30]. Um, you probably don't like the way I'm putting this.

R: Not at all, I think it's very interesting.

RK: And... It almost seems as though... the only way to stop it being used is to make it so devastating that no country would be mad enough to get itself destroyed by it. But it's a pretty dangerous... we've got the Putins in this world and they look quite capable of doing crazy things, I've got a feeling. And we certainly have with the Islamic situation, what happens if they get one? Don't bear thinking about it, does it really? Anyway, that's sort of... why, I think that's how my view of the bomb is. I was relieved they used it, because I could have been one of those gaining on, in on Japanese mainland and I don't think I fancied that one little bit. So to me, it was a big relief. But I'll say reflecting on it now, it's a long time afterwards. It's a shame it was ever invented, I suppose. I don't know. But it's saved a lot of lives as well as causing a lot. The thing is, it saved a lot of lives on our side, as we saw it then. We were more interested in saving our own lives. We felt the Japanese started it, well started it, well started in with America anyway. And, unlucky, they reaped the whirlwind [12:00].

R: Be-, before the dropping of the bomb, can you tell me a little bit about your perceptions and the perceptions of those, the men around you, of the Japanese and some of the fears that you had associated with an invasion of the mainland?

RK: Well, I think one of the things we thought of the Japanese, we thought they had inert cruelty, quite frankly. I mean, we probably knew more about what was going on in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps than we did about the concentration camps of the Germans. Um, but, we always I think thought of the Japanese being a rather cruel race. And of course they're a warrior race, anyway. I mean, they, they, the Samurai, they're built on a warrior. And strict obedience. And I think we, we really felt that they weren't frightened to die, quite frankly. And which made us, a bit... They had their suicide bombers and... they were just an aggressive race [laughs]. And we classed them as being

a bit uncivilised, so really their civilisation's are older than ours. They're very civilised, in fact. But we didn't think of them as being very civilised. It was a real hate. I mean, the Americans bore the loss actually [13:30], I mean, they sunk their fleet at Pearl Harbour, without any warning. It's all... really... It was always a little, well, the fear of them, in fact. I mean, they all just talked about the Yellow... Before the war, I remember when I was a kid they talk about the Yellow Peril [laughs]. And I think they still do today, actually [laughs]. You know, that's what the Chinese are. It's a circle. Yeah.

IP: Did you have any battle or interaction with the Japanese army?

RK: No, no.

IP: No? While in India, I mean?

RK: No. No, no. No, they were turned back at the borders of India. They got, they got very close, actually. At one stage, into, getting into India, but they never did get in, actually. They were stopped. I think the biggest problem in India at that time was the Indians were trying to drive us all out. And they always say about Gandhi, who was the peaceful. But they all forgot about Nehru, who was trying to blow us all up [laughs]. 'Cause I think in a little ways Nehru did more than Gandhi to bring the Indian... what do you call it? Freedom from the Raj. Um, then, then Gandhi, 'cause we really were frightened of Nehru, he was a really powerful man [15:00], and of course he... in those days, he was classed as a terrorist, which of course he wasn't. He was a patriot. Then Nehru family took over, more or less, and you had Pandit Nehru, and, yeah. They used to blow things up, and we used to go on patrol to try and stop them [laughs]. We didn't succeed very well [laughs].

R: Just going back to what you just said about this fear about the Japanese.

RK: Mhm.

R: Were there certain stories you can remember? Kind of accounts that were fed back, that instilled this fear in you?

RK: Well, um, yes. I mean, you know it mainly was the speech, with, with, they'd already been in a war with China, remember before you had, you had the rape of, um, what was, my memory is not so good, as I've said.

IP: The rape of Nanjing? The city?

RK: Yeah. They butchered the Chinese. And I mean, we already knew that they were a pretty vicious lot, quite frankly. The Chinese, I mean. There was never any mercy shown to the Chinese by the Japanese. Um... So I think we already knew their quality- fighting qualities. And also they were completely... um, what's the word? Getting loss of words, these days. There was no, um... no half-measures with them [16:30]. They were completely, they were completely ruthless. That's the word I was looking for. They were totally ruthless. Um... I mean, in effect they never took prisoners. People knew that. They never took prisoners. They thought to be taken as a prisoner them self was an absolute insult. They would, they would just simply get themselves killed rather than be taken prisoners. It was an insult for a Jap to be taken a prisoner. They weren't really good Japanese if they would. No, I think their whole mentality was different to ours. And as I say yet, they are such civilised people. Which is strange, actually, strange. But, so be it. Yes, and... But I think, the general consensus of that time was just, when the bomb was dropped: "thank God, it's over, we can go home" [laughs].

R: Oh, can you tell me how you felt at, on VE-Day, when you knew that people were celebrating but you'd still have to continue?

RK: Not very happy. Mind you, they did to give us one concession: it was about the time when we were beginning to get English beer in India, tin beer. And I think we got two cans of beer given to us, I think, that night. But um, there wasn't much celebrating [laughs]. [Coughs] But I think people at home didn't realise [18:00], I mean, just... everybody in SEAC, knew that, knew that, um, the Japanese wouldn't just throw their hand in and say "that's the end of that, we won't carry on". They, they expected there to be a very bloody conflict. Probably saying it would have been as bad, if not worse, than the second frontier, the invasion of Europe. In fact, it probably could have been a lot harder, the Japanese were a bit cleverer, when they got on to their own land they would have fought. But it's all speculation now I think on this. When I think on this and that... yep.

R: And you spoke about Burma being the Forgotten Army. Did you, did you feel it all like a forgotten army?

RK: No, not really, I felt we were just missing all the fun [laughs]. You know, I would have loved to have been here on VE Day. So be it.

IP: What about the V-J Day? I mean, the victory.

RK: V-J Day?

IP: Yeah.

RK: V-J Day, I was in Malta.

IP: Okay.

RK: We celebrated in Malta. I went to India just after V-J, V-E Day. My memory is getting a bit... but... [laughs]. No, no, we had the longest conga I've ever seen right down the main street in Malta [19:30], in and out every building in the place. It was a great day.

R: So did you say that was V-E, or V-J Day?

RK: That was V-J Day. ... No, sorry, V-E Day [laughs]. No, V-E Day. V-J Day we did a, we paraded around, 'round Madras. Um, in the blazing heat. In the march around Madras, we didn't feel very victorious, I must say [laughs]. Far from it. Y'know, sort around midday in Madras, marching, don't know how many miles we marched, it wasn't very funny. We'd just sooner have stayed in the camp I would say.

R: So why, why was that kind of action of a march chosen to, as a celebration? Do you know?

RK: Well, it was a victory parade, I mean it was a victory, what with the Japanese have given in. I mean, the Indians joined in, 'cause the, the Indians did more to actually drive the Japanese out of Burma than anyone. They were, they, the thing about the Indians, they knew the country. They knew the monsoon season. And the Japanese always reckoned 'pon we couldn't fight through the monsoon season [21:00]. Y'know, everything ground to a halt during the monsoon season. It was practically imposs-, the Indians didn't think so. They manhandled their trucks and everything else and kept all the supplies going right through the monsoon season. Which rather staggered the

Japanese, 'cause they thought they couldn't do it, but they did. Good soldiers, the Indians. Very good soldiers. Yeah. Like I said the Indian, the Gurkhas with them, virtually Indian... Anyway, that was a long time ago.

IP: When, when did you first learn about the bomb? I mean, before it dropped, did you know that it was something of a super weapon?

RK: No, not really. No, not really, I mean, it had always been the Holy Grail, hadn't it? As a sort of, I mean, it, it was a, it was lucky we got it first, because the Germans were well on the way to get, that was the, um, the raid in Nor- on the Norwegian fjord. Because it was in Norway they were developing the he-, with the heavy water. Don't ask me the technicality of it, but you need heavy water to make an, an atom, a hydrogen bomb. And in Norway the factory there, they'd effectively done it. That is why they did a commando raid on it with the partisans and destroyed the plant that produced it. If they hadn't have done it the Germans could well have got it first. And if they had, I wouldn't like to say, well, what [22:30] our situation would have been now. Not very nice, I don't think. But, no, you know, it was a fact before it was dropped there, that the Americans were in front of everybody else on it. No, actually, it wasn't an American scientist who did it, but still, that's another thing. It was a combination of English and German. I think he was a German, wasn't he... Oppenheimer, wasn't it? Mhm.

IP: So did you know who did it? I mean, did you think it was the UK that dropped the bomb, or the US? What, when it happened did you think it was the UK that dropped the bomb, or the US?

RK: Oh, it was the US, I knew that.

IP: The US?

RK. They were the only ones who had planes that could actually have done it any-..., anyway, because, um, the distances as far as we were concerned, and for a long while as far as the Americans were concerned, were too much. They couldn't have had enough fuel to fly there and get back again. In fact they, they, their initial raids on Japan that was set off with aircraft carriers, which was amazing, really. When we were in America, in Virginia, we, the, the carrier I came back on from there was what they called a light fleet carrier. They were converted tankers, and they carried the planes as dead cargo [24:00]. We were a dead cargo on the, on the tanker. And we laid alongside the Shangri-La, which was the American, it was the biggest aircraft carrier. And that one, they were Flying Forts off of, which was incredible. And we, we used to have to look up to them, you could, it was like a, like a bus alongside a mini [laughs]. You know, that was quite funny, a wonder of a carrier. But they operated quite different to us. The American never repaired their planes, if something went wrong they just put the part out and put a fresh bit in [laughs]. Didn't repair them.

IP: So, did, ah, did your views, did your feelings about the bomb change throughout the years? After...?

RK: Not really, I, I well they changed in the sense that, I mean, I knew, I got more and more to realise what a horrible weapon it is. And I mean it's even worse now it's a hydrogen bomb, which is different evidently, considerably more devastating than the atom bomb. That was just a little baby to what they've got nowadays. That is the frightening part of it. I mean, it gets big, it'll get bigger and more... You've got the business of Iran now, um, developing... I mean they say they're not, but, I mean it's obvious they are [25:30]. Um, I don't know what the answer to it is, quite frankly. I just

hope that there is never a lunatic mad enough to use it again. But I'm sure any country that got into such a desperate situation would, I don't think there is any way. Once it's been used, that's the frightening part of it. And it, it's almost got to the stage now where, um, even small groups are capable of manufacturing it or producing it. I mean, that's... I'm sure, I know, I don't know what your view on it is, I mean, I [unclear] you. You're against it, obviously.

R: Personally, from doing this project and learning more about it, that's, that's when I've become against it.

RK: Mhm. I can understand that. As I say, um, I just don't see how you can stop it now. That's it. And... it almost seems a big game of bluff at the moment: "you drop yours on mine, and I'll drop a bigger one back on you" sort of thing, and that seems to be it. But it's a funny way of keeping a peace, actually. It's a frightful way of doing it, 'cause there's always gonna be that a lunatic comes along who, who might not see it that way, who would drop it anyway [laughs]. [27:00] No, I've probably got a very unsophisticated view of it. I mean, as I say, from the beginning it was a blessing because it saved an awful lot of allies that would have been lost invading the mainland of Japan. So it saved a lot of lives on our side, originally. But, of course, it cost a lot of innocent Japanese lives. But at the time I don't think we were feeling very sympathetic to them [chuckles]. You look back now and you think "oh dear". You know, terrible all the people who died there, even years afterwards from the effect of it, you know. Just hope and pray that there's nobody mad enough to use one, you know. I won't be here to see it, anyway [laughs]. My time is short. Oh no [laughs]. On the other hand our children, our grandchildren... well, that's, I don't know what they do about it. You know, I think it's your generations' future now. But... I don't know.

R: Do you remember how you have first received the news of the bomb, and how much news you did receive about it?

RK: No, not really, we... By wireless, obviously, in them days, it's all wireless. And, and newspapers, of course [28:30]. But wireless mainly when in India. No, just broadcasted the Americans have dropped a bomb of devastating force. But of course, we, just before that they had, they had already a firebomb, was it? Was it Tokyo they firebombed? I mean that was nearly as horrendous. And it got quite a publicity. And that was only a trial run, to see if they could get there, to see if the bombers could get there and back. It was more or less a trial. But anyway, that was horrendous, as horrendous as the bomb itself was. They just set the whole place alight, didn't they, with, um, their buildings, then were, were very flammable. But, no, I, I, I don't think we've quite realised at the time that, you know when it was first announced, that it was the end of it. But, um... we didn't expect the Japanese to roll over quite so... they have proved us how bad it must have been, y'know.

R: So, so initially you thought the Japanese would, wouldn't surrender after these bombs?

RK: Well, no, no we didn't think so. But of course we didn't realise yet the actual devastation that they caused. I mean, it was only afterwards when we saw pictures of Nagasaki [30:00], Hiroshima... and the frightful effect it had on people. You know... no ... awful. As I say, at that time we, we were more jubilant about it than horrified, quite frankly. It was our ticket home [chuckles]. So... That's only as time went on that you realise the full horror of it, and the danger of it. ...Yes.

IP: So have you realised that this nuclear age was about to begin, after...

RK: Oh, yeah, oh yes. I, once it, once it... It's funny really, I mean the, the greater progress, since the end of the war, in technology. That has been absolutely amazing. You might wonder why our generation is sort of bewildered by it all. But when you think about it, at the end, at the end of the war there was hardly any cars on the road, even. There was no cars on the road hardly. Not that there would have been any petrol to put in them, anyway. Um, we, we lived in a totally different world. Um, there were no computers [31:30]. Well, there was, I suppose, Bletchley Park, but it was hardly a computer everybody could use [laughs]. Um, that's a bit different. Um, no, I... the world progressed so far, that's, what's even more frightening about it is that there's so much, the technology now is so much superior to then. What devastation could be caused nowadays, if somebody pressed the button? Don't wanna think about it. Fortunately enough I don't think I got, I got, I'll be gone [laughs]. But, um, no, that's... I just hope your generation can sort it out. Because our generation can't, now. It is up to you. It needs good will from everybody, all the different countries, you know it's... But if we'll ever get that, I don't know. Anyway, there's a lot of things, you got a lot of things going for you, actually. It's not a bad old world. Let's say it's the world, it's the people in it [chuckles].

R: Very true.

RK: Yes... yes, yes, I think. A fear of overconfidence, you know... [33:00] Anyway, it's been nice talking to you. As I said, I seem to have done all the talking.

IP: No, no.

RK: I think, you probably think, we're, we're, that cloth [refers to printed tea towel] sums it up, we're a funny generation.

R: I've, I'd love to hear a bit more about that period after the war as well, and, um, when you returned to the UK. This, this kind of, um, this... this stand-off with Russia. Would you say that that was a, that that was a prevalent fear in your life?

RK: Oh, yes, yes. The Cold War was a very well, obviously, it was... another war again. I think people don't- I must admit I never did. The small time gap between the end of the First World War and the start of the Second World War, you know, I mean I was just a kid. Um, I was born in 1925. And then I think my brother was born only, only just two years after the end of the First World War. You know, it wasn't a big gap there. ... And if you say, in reflection of the Cold War, the Russian situation, we were living on a knife edge, I mean with the Berlin airlift, when Berlin was cut off, I mean, now you probably know this period history of that city [34:30], the period, better than I do. That they, they divided Germany into the three different, or three main sections, let's see: American, British and French sections (coughs). And the Russians had the other bit. And of course they virtually battled their way right through the Balkans, the... I mean, Churchill gets a lot of criticism, but one of the things he always said, and he's been, he, he was proved right afterwards, that we should never had a second bomb, we should have gone up through the Balkans ourselves and cut up in front of the Russians, so we got there to Berlin first, but... but the Americans wanted to go the other way. But he always maintained that it would have been better if we'd been coming through the Balkans and come into Germany in front of the Russians. But I mean, that might well have been another pipe dream. But that's certainly one that he considered (coughs). Um, but there was a real fear in the Cold War. It wasn't, um, imaginary, I mean both, both, East and Western Europe were powerful, were on a war footing. And don't forget at that time they had an awful lot of war equipment that was still usable. And both had the bomb. Which was even worse, 'cause the bomb could have been used then, in fact [36:30]. Thank God it wasn't, common sense prevailed eventually, but it got very close. And like

all these things it only takes one silly incident, one small silly incident to spark it off. The First World War, the assassination of what was his name, Prince... started the second when... it was going to happen anyway, but it more or less lit the fuse. During the Cold War it wouldn't have taken much to have lit the fuse for that. A ship to get sunk or a plane to get shot down. We were running an airlift and [incomprehensible]. Don't get the feeling, the whole of Germany at that time and Berlin, we were flying all the food in. It was 24-hour flying service again. Anything had gone wrong there if the Russians had shot one of them down or something there would have been all hell to pay... But, that's history. Thank God.

R: Can you tell me how this fear manifested itself in day-to-day life, and would you talk about it with your friends and family?

RK: Oh, yes! Oh yes. But... I don't know it was a fear. It was apprehension, let's say. There's a bit of a difference, you know. I think at the end of the war people thought they just about had all they could..., [37:30] they'd just about seen the worst of everything quite frankly, and... life went on. British are very resilient people, you know, when you get down to them. Very resilient. Surprisingly so. We tended to slip back into our old ways very quickly [laughs]. Now I think, um, in normal time people have their own families and they've got enough to do to look after their own family, bring your own kids up, and, you know... the bigger picture is, um, not really something that worries them that much. They're more worried about what, that they can earn enough to their, as nowadays, to send their kids to university, I suppose. Let's hope it's always so. That's the difference. No, we didn't walk around worrying about it... but it was always there, I mean that was the... in fact I think it was just too horrible to think of having another war that quick... it was just unthinkable. When you think of that time, I mean my father was a regular Naval man - he was from Bournemouth... he spent his whole life in the Navy, he served through both wars, first war and the second war, y'know. Um, he wouldn't have wanted our generation to have to do the same, frankly one war is enough. We haven't had a lot of peace when you think about it, have we? [Chuckles] But, anyway.

IP: So were you aware of the peace movement that had started?

RK: Sorry?

IP: Were you aware of the peace movement that had started in the...

RK: Oh, yes.

IP: Right after the war, the Second World War?

RK: Yeah... yes, um, as I say, you, you got to remember we looked at it in a totally different light.

IP: Yeah.

RK: Um, we were just relieved that, that the war was over and we come through in one piece. And quite frankly, um, to our shame perhaps in a lot of ways, um, we'd just rather wanted to get on with living in to ourselves, quite honestly. I think that's why you've got the 50s and 60s, that were Hippie times. But it was a strong movement, but as I say it, it wasn't the fact that we disagreed with them, we didn't disagree with 'em [40:30]. If the bomb could have been banned we'd have been the first ones to have want to seen it and helped it. But it was the impracticality of it that was a worry. And the fear that say, us and the Americans, gave up, gave up the bomb, what if the Russians didn't? You know,

we're even now in a situation, now what if the Chinese didn't? Let's see... it's a bit of an indissolvable problem, I would say. But I hope you keep on trying [chuckles].

R: You just mentioned the time of the two Hippie decades.

RK: Yes.

R: Can you, um, tell me your opinions of the kinds of people that would get involved in the protests?

RK: My sons did! [laughs] Yes, I, you know, sometimes I think it was, they were too principled, quite honestly they were... love and sort of... but it wasn't very practical, somebody had to go out and earn the bread, I'm afraid. Oh I can remember my sons, I remember them too well! I had a few rows with them too over it, but, um, oh they grew out of it. When it come to having to earn our living, their views changed just a little bit. My youngest son, he runs his own business. My eldest son, he lives in Seattle, he's just retired now. He's bought a lovely house on one of the islands in Seattle Bay. But, um, they were as wild as you can imagine in the 60s, they really were [laughs] I mean but they, they... their view changed, I don't say their view changed, but they realised they had to get down to doing some work, then they had a family, you know your life changes... your perspective of life changes completely when you have a family.

R: So roughly how old were they when they started to get involved with the peace movement?

RK: Oh, how old... well, let's see.

[not relevant 42:55 – 43:09]

My oldest son would have been about 18, 17 or 18, when he became a hippie. You know, yet he always had a responsible job.

R: Do you know how young people got recruited to the cause [43:30], where they'd find about it, and how did they get involved? If it, if it wasn't from home, if you see what I mean?

RK: Um... no not really, I think it was just a general... young rebellion thing. A lot of it was a young rebellion. We didn't get a chance to rebel [laughs]. I always think, you know, I mean, I think the same thing about the youth today. There's so much temptation around them, there's so much... we, we didn't have to worry about that because there was a war, and our lives were controlled, and I'd have been as hippie as them, I expect, if, when they were in their 16, 17s. I'd have been the same as them I except only I didn't get the chance [chuckles]. You know, life was too disciplined at that stage. But I must admit they, they gave us a bit of a shock sometimes, when they used to come home with their hair and... [laughs]. You can laugh. Sometimes there was nearly murder committed sometimes [laughs] oh dear, but, oh their hearts were always in the right place. They always came home to mummy [laughs] they knew where they were well off. If you saw them now you wouldn't believe they were the same people. I sometimes, I take them through the albums, y'know, show them pictures of themselves and they [laughs] oh dear, course [laughs]. Mind you, at the time, I didn't think it was funny at the time. Looking back, now, I think it was hilarious [laughs].

IP: Were your sons involved in the CND, or the Aldermaston, uh, Aldermaston Marches?

RK: Oh, I, I don't know, quite frankly. I mean, they used to sort of go off, and... [chuckles]. What they were doing half the time, I didn't want to know. We didn't want to know, quite frankly, we thought it was better we didn't. We always made one rule, we always told them we would always be there, if they wanted to come home, they always could and would never be shouted at. And they all came back eventually, in their various guises [laughs].

R: And is the reason you didn't want to know because you had, um, the impression that they were kind of up to no good?

RK: Well, no, not so much that. I felt you had one or two ways of going about it, didn't you? You could turn around and say 'ay, y'know, toe the line' but I don't think that would've made it very... and the thing is we didn't want to alienate them. Um... after all, it is their lives, not ours. We just wanted to make sure they knew we were always there if they needed us. Which, at times, they did. I think I've had it repaid, or myself and my wife have had it repaid because they've been very loyal to us in the times we've needed them.

[not relevant 47:05 – 49:27]

As far as the bomb goes, believe me, I don't disagree with anybody who wants to get rid of it. I wish to God, but, ah, at that time that wasn't quite my attitude, certainly, at the time my attitude was one of big relief, "Let's go home!" [laughs].

R: And how long was it from the bomb to when you were been demobbed?

RK: Oh, I should think probably about 6 months. We were lucky in the Fleet Air Arm. We hadn't got the numbers in the Fleet Air Arm that they had in the Army, in the Navy, in the Air Force. So we had a very low demob number, as there weren't so many of us to get rid of. So we were... my brother, who was, um, in the Army, he went up in there 1939, Munich Crisis, before the war started. He was in the territorials. And he didn't get out, get out of the Army until 1947. He was in, called the military paratroopers. But they were sent to Greece, were they were... Greece has always been a spot of trouble, well they were rebelling in Greece at the time and our troops went there to calm it down. And then he was sent to Palestine through Israel.

[not relevant 50:45 – 51:05]

R: [51:00] Can I just ask you a few more details to kind of get, kind of get a kind of 3D picture in my head about V-J Day? So, you did this victory parade, and what did you do for yourselves to celebrate amongst the men?

RK: Oh, not that much, there wasn't much we could do really. I, I, I mean, our airbases were mainly outside the towns. And so unless you were allowed to go in ashore. All you had was a navy(?) canteen where we could get a couple of beers and something to eat, but nothing really. I think we played football the following evening. We, we had quite a good football team. Um, no, life just went on more or less until we, we moved to Bombay to come home.

[not relevant 51:53 – 56:32]

IP: I want to ask you about your sons, did you have any discussions? Back in the day, about, you know, the bomb, and because they were hippies, so maybe you had any?

RK: Oh, no, not really. Um... I mean really, I mean there wasn't any animosity for Ban the Bomb. We agreed with it actually. [57:00] It was the impracticability of it that we didn't agree with. And plus the fact, I think, really quite honestly, that we had enough of war and just wanted to get on and live and... You know, we tend-, we tended to, um, turn a blind eye to a lot of things. It was so we just wanted to get on and enjoy life. We'd led a pretty controlled existence until then.

[not relevant 57:30 – 1:03:40]

IP: So, are you happy or proud, even proud that you took part in the war?

RK: Sorry?

IP: Are you happy or proud, both, that you took part in the, in the war? That you survived it?

RK: Oh, yeah. I think, I think one thing that, um, you know it is often youngsters who are really cynical about wars you know, but I think the last war was the one that was justified. It was a justified war. Um... it wasn't a money-meant war or anything else, it had to be, Hitler had to be stopped. There was no, you could almost say, it was almost a crus-, a form of crusade. I don't mean quite saw it like that back at that time, but... it was justified. And I think we, our generation would be justly proud, [1:04:30] proud in the way we reacted to it. Not that it makes any better people, but, um, it's surprising, um... the loyalty, and, and a bit of patriotism. I know patriotism is, um, what's it called? Something of fools, but I think it's a good thing to be a little bit patriotic about your country. We're lucky to live in this country. This is a great country, I don't care what everybody says. Um, all the criticism, all the politicians spouting about this isn't right, that isn't right... This is a damned good country and we're lucky to live in it. And that, that it gives us responsibility, too. But... I'm, I'm happy I've lived here all my life. Didn't mind the odd holiday in Spain or somewhere, but [laughs], I wouldn't wanna live in any of 'em. This is the only country I want to live in. The trouble is just about a couple of a million of Africans who wouldn't mind living here as well, at the moment, and a terrible price they're paying for it, you know. It's about time we got out there and did something to help them live well in their own country. But, there you go. I'll be singing Rule Britannia in a minute but the trouble is I'm tone deaf.

[not relevant 1:06:06 – 1:06:29]

All in all, the war was a terrible time, but it was funny how it had the effect of drawing people together. And I, I, I'm not belittling you, don't think I am. But people were much nicer to people, to one another. You know, I 'spose that's the sense of sheer danger, sheer... You know, funny how people come together in a crisis. Um, it often takes a, a disaster or something to bring the very best out in people. ...there is one, ah, no [laughs], no I shouldn't. But there is one thing I will say, I think youngsters today are one of the most misrepresented people there are. I know I, often, you know, but I've met more kindness from young people, and I know from my own family, [1:07:30] kids today think much more of being helpful, and, than our generation did. Um, and, and the amount of voluntary work that they do, and what have you, well we didn't do that! Quite frankly, we were selfish, in fact. So I think youngsters, they get a very bad press, a press they don't deserve, in fact. There is, there is a part that aren't so good, well pretty horrible actually, but I should say the average youngster today more caring than we ever were. You know, more caring. But we don't like to admit it [chuckles]. But I've, I've had more kindness from young people... no... So I thank you two for today!

R: Thank you very much!

RK: A pleasure! Just give me a chance to spout I just feel I've talked too much.

R: No, not at all!

T: No, that was very good!

R: We'll, we'll just turn this recording equipment off [1:08.50].