

"Born in Bruxelles in 1921, I dreamt of flying since I was 15 years old. I joined the Belgian Air Force Training School on 1st June 1939. I graduated in April 1940 but I didn't take part in the 18 days campaign due to my inexperience and the lack of planes. On the Belgian surrender, I escaped with a few friends and joined the resistance. After a few failed attempts, I managed to cross the demarcation line between Belgium and France, but I was arrested by the Vichy police. I was sent to a prisoner of war camp in July 1942 and escaped shortly after. I crossed the pyrenees with the help of a former smuggler. I was then arrested in Reus, Spain, and sent to Miranda a month later. Chained up, we stopped over in Zaragoza where 17 of us were kept in a cell of 6m x 3m for 3 weeks without being allowed out.

In August 1942, we arrived at the Miranda camp. In March 1943, I went on hunger strike for 8 days. We were then freed because the Americans had just landed in North Africa and the Spanish had changed their political objectives.

Shortly after boarding a ship in Gibraltar, we were attacked by submarines. Despite the attack, we managed to reach the coast of Britain safe and sound. After a short period of retraining at the RAF College at Cranwell, I was appointed to the 609 Squadron in September 1944 until the end of the war. I was involved in 67 missions, during one of which I was forced to make a parachute jump because my plane was badly damaged.

I did my job like thousands of others to win this wretched war and enable our wives, our children and our grandchildren to live in a free country.

I married the woman who had been my pen-friend since 1939 and we are still very happy together. We have 4 children and several lovely grandchildren.

Following the war, I managed to fulfill my childhood dream and worked as a flying instructor for Sabena Airlines until 1981."

Jean De Bruyn interviewed by his son on his 79th Birthday