

## David - Future Radio

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But a couple of weeks ago I caught up with the director Michael Sellers 00:00:00  
who is making a is nearly finished making a film that's titled "Return to  
Hardwick" Home of the 93rd Bomb Group. And this is going to be a 00:00:12  
documentary and I caught up with him in New York as you do. Wanted to 00:00:19  
find out more information because let's face we're always fascinated  
about the so-called friendly invasion of the Second World War. And this 00:00:26  
was Michael's reply... Michael take it away.

## Michael - Director

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Well I guess if I was to start from the beginning my grandfather who was a 00:00:29  
member of the 93 Bomb Group which he was stationed at Hardwick back  
in 1944 he was a bombardier navigator. I kind of knew about a little bit 00:00:50  
growing up about my grandfather's history. Not that much but I was kind 00:00:55  
of like well curious here and there I would ask him a few questions but  
never really got into it that much. As I got into my 20s I was out of college 00:01:05  
and he called me up one day and said "Do you want to go to reunion with  
me." And I said "reunion, reunion for what?" And then he started to 00:01:15  
explain that it was something that he's been doing since the 60s the 70s  
he went in the 80s and 90s he would go to his Second Air Division  
reunion's which the Second Air Division was in the 8th Air Force which  
the 8th Air Force was in Europe for those that don't know... but he said  
yeah they hold these reunions and they're all over the place. This one just 00:01:43  
happens to be in England back where he was stationed. So of course I 00:01:48  
was like hmm... a trip to England (laughing). Of course. No problem. So I 00:01:53  
was really enthusiastic about it and really started getting into it and  
started asking him questions and I decided to make a small family  
documentary at that point. And I got my camera. I was visiting him 00:02:07

## Michael - Director (continued)

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months before the trip anyway so I got my camera and started recording him and being the novice at that point. I mean I did go to two different film schools and was out of college but I had never made a documentary before, let alone for the family or anything like that. So. I started interviewing him and started getting questions so that's where I got a lot of my initial answers from him of what he did during the war where he was stationed and all that in his home. Months before our trip. And this was in 2001 and we all jumped on a plane and went over and and met up and the Second Air Division has this whole week of events that went on and... and at that point I think I had about four little DV tapes with me which back in the day of course we did shoot with tape. This is 2001 again and... I didn't have enough tapes. I kept them I kept shooting and shooting and I ran out of tapes probably the first day. And each one of those little tapes are about an hour. So I went out to the store and there and they had tapes. And I think I bought about 25 of them and I think I used every single one of them that week. And I was fascinated. I was hooked at that point of the history seeing it firsthand. And if I can go into it a little bit I'll give you a really quick brief of what that was. And again maybe some local people around Norwich and Norfolk know about these reunions of course when the Americans come back. But I was just amazed that they rolled out the red carpet for the Americans that arrived and they had an opening banquet. We met a lot of people from the Second Air Division that were organizing the event. One of the big highlights for me. Well there are many but one of the big ones was the dedication of the Millennium Library in Norwich which that was exactly when it was officially dedicated. It was built, obviously the old one was burt down years before

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## Michael - Director (continued)

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in the 90s, and this was the new library. And they have this wing like they 00:04:27  
did in the old library dedicated to the Second Air Division which I believe  
the Second Air Division back in the day started raising money for that  
wing of the library. And this was the new one and we were able to go 00:04:39  
there and see it and have the veterans walk through, it was a really great  
time. And yes I've spent a many jolly hours there sort of looking and 00:04:47  
researching and specially sort of looking at the sort of stuff about that  
Metfield which was like sort of... this was my village. I was bought up and 00:04:58  
spent a lot of childhood. So when you were... you so... you were able to 00:05:00  
interview a lot of the people that were stationed in Hardwick and did you  
meet... obviously other people who would be stationed in other sort of  
airbases around East Anglia. No I didn't interview other people on air 00:05:16  
bases and I guess maybe if I could kind of get into that transition. This 00:05:23  
documentary... as for the family was something very... it was the  
beginnings of my fascination with what my grandfather did in the war and  
just learning that history. Fast forward through that. And it really kind of 00:05:36  
stuck with the 93rd Bomb Group. I mean I had access to those veterans. I 00:05:42  
would start going to local reunions in the states here. They would hold it 00:05:48  
in different areas of the states that we would go to. So I probably since 00:05:53  
2001 went to about 15 to 16 different reunions with my grandfather. He 00:06:00  
did recently passed away a few years ago and... I still go though. I'm an 00:06:07  
officer in the group. The 93rd Bomb Group still holds annual reunions 00:06:09  
here in the States. And occasionally we do get a group together to go 00:06:14  
back over to Norwich and Hardwick and visit that for usually over  
Memorial Day weekend about three or four days.

## David - Future Radio

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Did you find a particular sort of pattern of conversation in the narrative. 00:06:26  
When you were interviewing people their memories of that time or just 00:06:31  
wondered was it... was it kind of fascinating to know if there was any little  
pattern that you thought that they would mention the same thing or  
weather... yeah I just wondered what sort of struck you about the  
interviews you would do with the people based at Hardwick.

## Michael - Director

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Well first of all I think, excuse me, I think it became a... I think it became a 00:06:47  
record basically for this group to get them on video. I've actually spent, 00:06:58  
since I started in 2001, I had like little mini projects that I would work on  
and those projects entailed interviewing the veterans that were there at  
the reunions I mean when you have these reunions... earlier on there  
would be 15 to 20 veterans that would show up which was great. And I 00:07:18  
pulled out my camera and set it up in the corner and do a little lighting  
and turn on the camera and just start talking to them and that's where I  
mean... I'm really happy that they put up with me because I think they  
were kind of like getting used to me asking these questions and they  
probably gotten asked I don't know probably hundreds of times but this  
kid coming in and sort of starting from the beginning again and having  
them go through all this but it was really a record. And a lot of it was you 00:07:48  
know a lot of them and I learned early on that they don't they don't want  
to be called heroes and you know everybody kind of throws that term  
around but it's their friends that they were in the war with that lost their  
life that were the heroes. So I learned that really early on and really 00:08:05  
started to you know sort of craft my questions in a way that was, that was  
respectful but also trying to get answers about the Bomb Group itself and

## Michael - Director (continued)

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what they did and also about the history of Hardwick their air base that they lived on and worked worked from. And some of their missions that they would go out and do. Obviously my grandfather he was open to it and he would talk to he had a couple of crazy missions but he would talk about them. There are some people in the group that would not talk about him and I didn't and I respected that and didn't and didn't pry or go further, further. Some of them didn't even get in front of my camera and I just knew who to kind of target and maybe and talked to. Eventually I think after the years that I was there they started to get to know me and this kid he's kind of sticking around. So some of them did eventually get into in front of my camera and that was great. So, so really to answer questions about a record they did talk about the base they talked about the locals there and some of their interactions with the locals around the village of Topcoft which was close. And you know the base was big so they alot of them them just kind of stayed on their base jumped on their plane went and did their missions and came back. But I did get various stories like that.

## David - Future Radio

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Because I suppose just realize when you do that project or started doing the interviews, your timing was probably quite brilliant obviously you know they now that you know like you just said your grandfather's past away and obviously a lot of them probably have started to sort of go that way as well. So they probably aren't going to be a lot left. But also I was just wondering as people get older and so those memories don't necessarily fade but sometimes when things are too immediate you just don't want to deal with it and you would park it. But then you need either

### David - Future Radio (continued)

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the years even decades to make someone change and think well actually I might just say how I felt it because there's nothing to lose ahh you know acknowledged in one's self that you know when he's going to be dying soon so it's yeah. I just wonder if if that age thing kind of almost helped with people being able to just talk about after years never talking about it. 00:10:23

### Michael - Director

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I think it did. I do think there are some veterans that they never showed up to a bomb group reunion and those are the people that maybe don't even want to go there. I think the reunions for the 93 group tend to create a warm environment a comforting environment. They know it's a place that friends are going to be at family members. I mean it really is like a big family reunion. So most of those guys that show up feel comfortable talking... Again there were a few here and there and they did open up later but most people are going to those reunions and that was my access to them, they most of them will talk and have talked. So. Yeah I think I think it's probably that comfort of the reunions knowing that they're going to be people there that they're their friends they don't have to go through this whole deal of who is going to be there. They already know who is going to be there. 00:10:32  
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### David - Future Radio

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Absolutely. And one thing that's always amazed me is when I've have sort of seen photographs and little bits of film from that period it was just how young you know the people you know they were. Being slightly bold at any age but they were sort of having to learn to fly planes and sort of having that sort of responsibility you know flying over to another country and bombing as well and thinking, my God if I got in the plane on a plane 00:11:31  
00:11:43

## David - Future Radio (continued)

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and the pilot looked as young as those kids did I would be going oh crikey I'm not feeling so safe. So it's an amazing growing period. You know I just find myself thinking my god you did have to grow up so quickly and not just learned to drive a car but you had to learn to take off on a massive plane with bombs and go over to enemy territory and drop those bombs and return. And yeah I just thought that was that was boggling really.

## Michael - Director

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That's correct and a lot of what you're saying is a lot of what we get from the locals when we show up. It's really, it's really an amazing greeting that we get. And still to this day and it's something about the film that I do touch on in there of exactly what you said. I mean you're running it through your mind and I know the locals even at the time when the war was going on and after were, were picturing that in their mind that these guys showed up. Now of course the RAF was there and they did their part as well. But it's that that extra energy I guess and and amount of people that showed up from, from the States and from America that really brought that force towards the war. And yeah there were a lot of young kids that showed up I have a few. Veterans in the film that in fact Fernley Smith is one of them that he was not of age but he just looked older. And when he enlisted he lied about his age and he was 17 flying a B 24 over Berlin. So it's amazing that, that he decided to jump over there and do that. But he felt like he needed to do his, his part. And a lot of those guys over there felt like they needed to do their part.

## David - Future Radio

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Absolutely. So you sort of, I can completely relate to what you were doing. To think you'd come home because I love all kinds of things. So I'm sort of

## David - Future Radio (continued)

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and I love recording stuff and then thinking this is great all this stuff will be recorded and then you know obviously the project started to grow. So 00:14:05  
then you now have the plan of making the film. And did that sort of, did 00:14:10  
that sort of come to a sort of one of those nights where you're just trying to get sleep you know what let's make a movie. Or, or did it sort of, was it 00:14:19  
more sort of a gradual process of deciding to turn this project into a feature film or you know film.

## Michael - Director

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All right well that's a great question and it's right in my wheelhouse. 00:14:28  
Really. Yes it's always been on my mind and again I think I mentioned that 00:14:33  
I did a lot of small projects. I created a small like we almost used it as a 00:14:40  
welcome DVD to the group if you became a member. And it was a 15 00:14:47  
minute documentary on the group and the reunions and just a real brief like, this is what we're about. So I always had these little projects that 00:14:55  
were going on and then the 93 Bomb Group it's a, it's a nonprofit organization. Part of the bylaws are to educate and to further the legacy 00:15:03  
of the group. So they're always looking for projects. And one of the 00:15:08  
projects even before the film was a stained glass window that was put in in Savannah, Georgia there is the Mighty 8th Air Force museum and they have a replica of an old English church in the back of the grounds there.  
And they raised 15 thousand dollars to put a stained glass window of the 00:15:27  
93 Bomb Group and other bomb groups have that as well. So that was 00:15:35  
one of their projects and they were looking to do another project. And the 00:15:40  
historian of the 93 bomb group and myself got together and I was, I think you know the film had always come up something to really, another way to remember the group and memorialize the group. So we had talked 00:15:53



## Michael - Director (continued)

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about it probably about five years ago at a reunion in Dayton, Ohio and that's where it came up officially to to mention it and talk about it. And 00:16:04

also in that way there was a reunion coming up shortly that the historian was organizing to Norwich and Hardwick. So the timing was kind of like if 00:16:14

we're going to do this we have veterans here that come to these reunions. We're going to go to Hardwick and visit the base and the locals there. So 00:16:20

the timing was getting close, like if we're going to make a movie we need to do it now. And I raised my hand and said I would help. Obviously my 00:16:29

grandfather was in the group at that time. And I was interested in the 00:16:35

history and have been to a lot of reunions so they know who I was. The 00:16:41

historian was into it and he has some films and photos to start out with. So it really started from there we got the vote from the group and they 00:16:45

said yes we want to do this.

## David - Future Radio

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And when was that? When was that? was... 00:16:51

## Michael - Director

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So I'm trying to think back so that was probably 2014. And that was the 00:16:56

initial like we're going to do this. And then, 2014, 2014 we talked about it. 00:17:05

I did say OK if we want to make this official and make a feature film which 00:17:10

we're talking feature film we're talking 60 Minutes or above. We're going 00:17:17

to need some money. And the group said that they would initially throw in 00:17:19

ten thousand dollars from their bank to start the process going. So I said 00:17:27

OK. I said that's great we can definitely start with that would be writing 00:17:29

research, even some preliminary money to make some travel over... you 00:17:40

know with the trip that we were going to do to Hardwick. So that's what 00:17:42

started it off. So 2015 was the initial trip to Hardwick and that was when

### Michael - Director (continued)

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we got the bulk of our footage and we had 30 people that signed up for a reunion back to England and it is a small group but it was the 93rd Bomb Group basically representing and that is where we got a lot of the footage from, from the film, from actually on the ground and sort of what my idea going into the film was going to be. So yeah. 00:18:16

### David - Future Radio

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And are you also using that footage you did earlier where you were 00:18:17  
interviewing people as well. Just wondered if that was quality a good 00:18:23  
enough quality to use in the film.

### Michael - Director

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Very good question. In fact yeah if I could back up at that 2014 reunion 00:18:27  
and the historian and I had kind of been talking that the film may be  
mentioned that they may actually approve it. I did bring some HD 00:18:38  
cameras with me and we did secure a room in the hotel and any veterans  
that wanted to we didn't force them of course but veterans that wanted  
to... we think this might be part of a larger project and if you wanted to  
come in for an interview we will be set up in a room so and so and you can  
come up and talk to us and we I think we had every veteran of the reunion  
that year come up and get interviewed. So. So that was with lights and 00:19:07  
just preparing for the future for this feature. I mean I set it up properly 00:19:13  
and mic'd them up correctly and we got nice high definition video. So yes 00:19:19  
that's pretty much the initial interviews that are, that are in the film. I did 00:19:25  
shoot with an older HD camera which I'm glad it was high definition but  
years before that with a smaller project that I was talking to you about.  
And I do have some of those in the feature also because it's if you've got 00:19:34  
the interviews and if they're talking about it I definitely wanted to use it.

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**Michael - Director (continued)**

So I was happy that I had that older film as well. 00:19:41

**David - Future Radio**

Yes obviously some, some people might have passed away by then. So 00:19:44  
now in 2018 almost into the end of the year where were you with the  
project and sort of the completion of the film.

**Michael - Director**

Yeah. So I can run through really quickly so yeah 2015 we shot and I think 00:19:57  
at that reunion, that was in the spring... those reunions for the 93rd are  
usually targeted around Memorial Day... the U.S. observation of Memorial 00:20:11  
Day. And that was spring. So that Fall we had a reunion and I showed 00:20:14  
them a seven minute clip. It was sort of the prologue to the film I had kind 00:20:21  
of have an idea that I was reading one of the news letters of the 93rd  
many issues back and got inspired by this guy who wrote his.. a veteran 00:20:33  
that wrote about his trip back to Hardwick in the 70s. So. I actually 00:20:37  
created a prologue that recounted his visit and it was done and still shots  
almost and and images of the base and of a B-24 which we have are  
lucky enough in the states to have access to a few B 24s that are still, still  
operational. But I sort of put this prologue together and they loved it and 00:20:57  
that was the initial part where if we really want to do this you guys are  
going to have to add some more money. So that was 2015. So 2016 I 00:21:06  
showed 30 minutes of the film... 2017 I showed an hour of the film and  
then just this reunion in 2018 I showed and about an 84 minute cut of the  
film it was a rough cut. And that was just last month at their reunion in 00:21:26  
Washington D.C.. So that's where it's kind of up to now. I'm actually in a 00:21:30  
fine cut stage with the film and hopefully 2019 is our year to get, to get it  
out there.

## David - Future Radio

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Excellent. Michael that is so good. I'm very excited by this. This does 00:21:40  
sound like a great project actually. And just lastly I mean what sorta what 00:21:47  
being the kind of the highlights you know the bits that you just, it all  
sounds like is probably a bit of a highlight but I just wondered if there was  
any particular bits that you just went wow that was just incredible. I had 00:22:00  
no idea.

## Michael - Director

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I think you know what the highlights for me are is that when you start with 00:22:03  
a project. You're kind of like yeah I want to get this and this either 00:22:07  
interviews with veterans or certain shots out in the field which would be  
Hardwick and Norwich. And that was starting to happen and the people 00:22:18  
were there and my camera was there and we were grabbing it. What 00:22:23  
happens was when you come back and you start looking at the footage  
you have to start writing. You have to start putting it together and in a 00:22:28  
documentary that can be a little tricky because some pieces are just..  
always just not there. Unless it was just perfect right out of the gate. 00:22:35  
Again you don't always get that. But this wasn't perfect I was just missing 00:22:41  
pieces. And I did go back in 2017 and 2018 just recently in the spring and 00:22:46  
a lot of that was to get some of the shots that are going to fill in the gaps  
for my film. Some interviews that I needed. There's some locals there. In 00:22:58  
fact one local his name is John Archer. He was a kid at the time and 00:23:05  
would stand over the fence looking at the guys taking off and Hardwick.  
Never really got a proper interview with him. The other thing that I really... 00:23:12  
was a really great highlight is I have a friend Nick Coleman. Nick Coleman 00:23:22  
has Nick Coleman Television who he's kind of actually around that area  
near Hardwick and he has a drone. And it was always my idea to be... get 00:23:31

## Michael - Director (continued)

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to get this bigger sort of sense of the base and all the areas around the base. And Nick really helped out in bringing his equipment over. He was there in 2015 when we shot which was a godsend with equipment. And each year I go back there and I hire him and we go out and shoot. And those drone shots really start giving you the big picture of, here's the base. And what I've done is a lot of before and after shots which I'll throw a drone up where a shot was taken back during the war out of a plane. And then all dissolve into the current day shot of what that area looks like. So that could be officers quarters that could be sections of the airbase itself. And it's really neat to see the before and after of how... it was such a bustling area back then during the war. And it needed to be and then it was turned back basically to farmland. And you can see that transition. So those are the real highlights for me of going back and doing that.

## David - Future Radio

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And that was the director Michael Sellers talking about the film that he's nearly finished and will be coming out next year 2019 titled "Return to Hardwick" Home of the 93rd Bomb Group a documentary. So do check that and if you want to know more information there is a website. And also a Facebook page. So umm Google to your hearts content. [End of interview — December 2nd, 2018]