**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File title: Group Captain Leonard Cheshire speech at Sacred Heart School, Canberra. 1 November 1979

Duration: 21.33

Transcription Date: 1.08.20

Archive Number: AV-S:523

Start of Transcription

00:00 Group Captain Leonard Cheshire: November 1st, Canberra, Talk to School, MARIST, M-A-R-I-S-T, Marist Brother's School

00:09 [no speech to 00:15]

00:16 GLC: Correction. This is Sacred Heart School.

00:18 [Audience applauses to 00:22]

00:24 GLC: Good morning. I'm very pleased, indeed, to be here this morning. And I have enjoyed the beautiful mass that you sang so well. You practiced a lot for it, have you?

00:35 [audience remains silent to 00:38]

00:39 GLC: Yes. Now, I suppose that I'm keeping you away from class. Am I?

00:46 [students agree in unison to 00:50]

00:51 GLC: So, I better not be too long, had I?

00:53 [students exclaim in unison to 00:59]

01:00 GLC: Now, would you like me talk about the people that we are trying to help? What would you like me to talk about?

01:06  [a cacophony of students voicing their suggestions in unison to 01:09]

01:10 GLC: What?

01:11 [students continue to voice suggestions in unison to 01:13]

01:14 GLC: Oh, the war?

01:15 [student's voices grow louder to 01:19]

01:20 GGLC: Do the girls agree to that?

01:22 [students agree in unison to 01:28]

01:29 GLC: Well, I think I'll just tell you one short story then about the war. Then I'll do what the girls say.

01:34 [students/audience exclaim in unison 01:37]

01:38 GLC: Because the girls are in charge, aren't they?

01:40 [students agree in unison to 01:47]

01:47 GLC: Well, for part of my time I was member of a squadron called The Dam Busters squadron. You've heard about that have you. Well, we had to do, one night, a particular attack and we had to try and destroy a factory in France that was making engines for the aeroplanes of the German Air Force, the Luftwaffe. But we had to destroy this target without hurting...Without Killing any of the people who lived nearby, the civilians. The trouble was that at the time that we were to attack the target there were 500 girls working on the night shift in the factory. Now, how would you destroy a factory with 500 girls in it and not hurt the girls?

02:50 [a hubbub of students offering their ideas in unison to 02:58]

02:59 GLC: Well...

03:00 [students continue to talk in unison 03:01]

03:02 GLC: Now, I can't hear. There are too many answers. Well, I'll tell you. To begin with, we had to drop the bombs from very high up. They were very big bombs. They had, for a particular reason, to go very deep in the ground. So, you had to drop them from very high and that was not easy. That meant that somebody had to go in very low and drop a marker, like a beacon, a bright light, a magnesium light, that would be seen from a long way so that the heavy bombers could have a steady run. So, what we did was that the one who was dropping the marker flew over the top of the factory very low about 30 or 40 feet above the factory in a [inaudible] Lancaster which is a very big aeroplane, which made a tremendous noise. And we hoped that the girls would take the hint and know what was coming. You guessed it did you?

04:00 [a cacophony of students' voices to 04:02]

04:03 GLC: So, all the girls ran out...

04:05 [a cacophony of students' voices]

04:06 GLC: ... Except one. And this girl was very curious by nature. And your teachers or your mothers and fathers have probably told you to beware of curiosity. It doesn't always pay. And this girl went no further than the ditch the other side of the road and squatted down in it to see what was going to happen. And she, unfortunately, was hit a bomb splinter. But nobody else was hurt and the factory was destroyed. So, that was one night that we went out and were able to do what we were told to do. I don't think I'm going to talk to you anymore about the war because the girls don't want to hear about the war.

04:52 [a hubbub of students raising their voices to exclaim, as if to beg GGLC to tell them more about the war to 05:03]

05:04 GLC: Well, you know it was a dreadful war to fight and nobody wanted to fight that war. And all of us who had to fight it hoped only one thing. And that was that nobody would have to fight a world war again. And what I'm really here today to do is to try and suggest how each of us can do something to help see that we've not going to fight another war because you want to grow up and feel that you're going to live in a world that's free, don't you, and do the things that you want to do? That you want to feel that they're not going to be poor people in the world who have nothing to eat. So, that's really what I'm going to talk about. But as you ask me, I'll just tell you quite shortly how the Dam Busters squadron, before I joined it, destroyed the dams. Do you know how that happened?

06:02 [a hubbub of students' voices]

06:03 GLC: Some of you do. Well, in order to destroy a dam - you know that a dam as a big wall, you've got one here in Canberra - you have to explode a very large bomb 20 ft under water, actually touching the wall of the dam. Pretend that this wall behind me is the dam and we're all under water.

06:24 [students exclaim awe to 06:26]

06:27 GLC: Now, you can't drop the bomb from high up and right down because it won't be accurate enough. It's impossible. Even if it was and it hit the water, it would probably deflect and go sideways. You couldn't shoot a torpedo into it because there's a torpedo net. Now, some of you know what happens don't you.

06:47 [students talk among themselves to 06:53]

06:54 GLC: Skipped, yes. There was a very great scientist called Barns Wallace and he had a boy, a son. And day he saw his son throw a stone into a pond, and it skipped. You know how to do that. So, that made him think of a skipping bomb. It meant that the aeroplane had to fly at exactly 60 ft above the water. Exactly 60 ft. If you were 70ft, that 10 feet higher, the bomb would sink, it wouldn't skip. If you were 50 ft, the bomb would blow your tail off. And nobody wanted that to happen. And there was no instrument to tell you as accurately as that. So, the squadron was commanded by a very great man, indeed, and a very brave man who was killed later called Guy Gibson. He was one of the greatest that the Air Force produced. And I ought to tell you that the Dam Busters had a great many Australians in it. And many of them, my wife and I have seen on this little tour of ours. Right, so Guy Gibson had the idea of putting a search light in each wing tip and they came inwards - a beam of light came inwards - and met at exactly 60 feet. So, the bomb aimer had to put his nut down in the bomb compartment and watch these pools of light, you see. As you got lower and lower, they came closer and closer and closer. When it got to 60 feet they met. And the bomb [inaudible] would say, 'Stop'. Because if they crossed it meant they were too low, and it was very dangerous. So, he would tell the captain in his own words, 'Come up'. The words he used might have not been too polite. He wanted to get the aeroplane up as quickly as possible. I wasn't on that attack so I can say this, it was a very dangerous attack. Because all the guns were on this wall and they were firing straight at the aeroplanes that had to come down the side of a mountain and very quickly level off at exactly 60 foot and fly straight into these guns. And some of them were firing upwards like that, just giving a curtain a fire [sic]. So, no matter what you did you had to fly it through it. And it was no good thinking about the guns. You just had to think about your target and fly straight. So, the squadron on that day in May the 18th, I think it was, 1943 did that attack and destroyed those two bombs. But they lost 1/3 of their aircraft. So, it was an expensive attack. I'd like to come now to the people that we are trying to help. And for a moment I'd like to try and take you in your mind, in your imagination, to India, to northern India where we have - when I say we, I mean my wife and myself who is here today and if there's time I know she'd be pleased to answer any questions you might have. She's sitting there at the door with a blue scarf on her. No, this side. You better stand up darling. There, she is.

10:37 [audience claps in applause to 10:46]

10:47 GLC: Now, I ought to tell you that each of us, we have a number of little homes in different part of the world for people who are disabled. That people who can't walk. Some of them are completely in bed. And we're trying to give them a home where they can feel it really is home and the opportunity of doing something with their lives. And you may think that a paralysed person can't do anything. You probably think that all she can do is just lie down and be looked after. But that isn't true. I know one girl called Hillary, who was a very good athlete when she was young but got polio. And the result is that she can move no part of her body at all, except one big toe. Now, can you imagine that? She can't move her hands, her legs, her head, anything, only just one big toe. She can't even breath. But she had a machine that keeps her breathing. And this big toe is in-touch with a little switch, a little button, which is called a micro-switch. And by pressing her big toe there's quite a number of things she can do. She likes music, she's very fond of music. And he has a hi-fi set. She can turn it on. She can choose the channel she wants. She can turn the telly on, the television on and watch whatever programme she likes. She can also type. You can and see her and you talk to her - she can hear, but she just lies absolutely helpless like that with her mouth open, quite helpless but you look at her and you talk to her and she answers you on her typewriter and  you pull the piece of paper out of the typewriter and you can see her answer type-written. But sometimes it's a very funny answer. She can pull your leg, have a joke with you. She also likes composing poetry - she composes poetry. Now, it's wonderful that a girl who is as helpless as that should make something of her life. Don't you think so? Well, in India in this settlement called Raphael after the archangel Raphael, the angel - the guardian angel of healing - if you read about him in the Book of Tobias, it's a lovely story. We have 300 people who are in need of one kind or another. As you go in - it's 30 acres...Is the little estate given to us by the government of India. You cross a river which is dry most of the year but in the monsoon it's full of water, raging very fast running river. And as you come in on your right is a leprosy colony for people who suffer from leprosy. I haven't time to tell you much about leprosy except this. When you get it two things happen. First, people are afraid of you. They think they're going to catch it from you. Whereas it's very difficult to...Not easy to catch. But people are afraid of you, so they don't want you. The next thing that happens is that you lose any feeling in your hands and your feet. I suppose you're a mother and you're cooking, and the saucepan get very hot, you pick it up. Well, you and I, if you pick it up, we drop it quickly because pain is...Protects you. But they don't know it's hot, so they hold onto it and get burned and they get an uGLCer. And, gradually, you'll find that this keeps on happening and, so, they lose their fingers. A lot of them have got no fingers at all. One or two got no hands. It isn't the disease that's done this. It's the fact they can't feel. So, although we don't like pain, pain in fact is a blessing because it protects us, it warns us. This is a blessing in one sense.

15:10 So, we have a 110 there who live in little houses. They have a garden; they keep a garden. They weave cloth. They make their own shoes. They have a barber who cuts everybody's hair. So, they do their best to work. Then we have a home for handicapped children. That's children who are mentally handicapped and most of them can't speak. One of them called Boley just was brought to us one day with a label around his neck giving his name. Somebody had taken him to the railway station, hired a tonga - a tonga is a taxi, really, but it's drawn by a horse, it's a little tiny cart. And rickshaw - you've heard of those have you? Well, it's a tonga. Now, somebody had put him in this tonga, gave the tonga [woller?] - that's the tonga driver - some money and said, 'Take him to the home Raphael'. And he turned up with this label around his neck. That's all we ever knew about where he came from. And he's made great progress. One of the little girls there called Hemlata [name] was a tiny, lovely looking girl. She couldn't walk and she couldn't talk at all. But there was an Indian speech therapist who spent months and months with her. And when we were there 4 years ago, she was trying to say, 'Ma-ma, ma-ma'. That was all she could say. Now, she can talk. And she could even walk a little. She's got such a lovely smile. Then there's a home for children who are destitute who have no homes of their own, either no parents - they've lost their parents - or else there's some difficulty at home like, perhaps, TB or something and it's not safe for them to live there. So, they live in this little house. And when we were there 4...5 weeks ago, they put a concert, a little show. And it was quite lovely. They had little songs, they did little miming, little acts they put on, dancing, even three of the mentally retarded children put on an act and the leprosy patients did a dance. One of them, a woman as I say, had no hands at all. But there she was dancing. And, finally, we have a little hospital where we treat people and take people who are very disabled, indeed. Now, all this home called Raphael is paid for from Australia and New Zealand. All our other homes collect their money locally - the local people collect their money. But Raphael, which is a much bigger home than most of ours, is kept going by Australia and New Zealand. And half the help we get comes from schools. In fact, it's wonderful to see how children and the young students and others are interested in those in need. And the school think up all sorts of way to raise up money. I'd like to tell you one way which is different from most. A little group of children in England, aged between 7 and 11, organise what they called a 'sponsored shut up'.

18:43 [audience laughs softly to 18.44]

18:45 GLC: They went to their parents and they said, ' Will you sponsor me one dollar for every 15 minutes that I can keep quiet?' And I might tell you that their parents are very pleased to do this.

19:04 GLC: And they borrowed a church, and there were quite a lot of them, there were about 50 of them, I think. And they were allowed to take little toys and books into this church. And I know you can't guess how long they kept quiet. I'm not going to ask you to try and guess - 6 1/4 hours.

19:21 [audience gasps to 19.22]

19:23 GLC: So, their parents weren't quite so pleased when this was over.

19:27 [audience laughs]

19:28 GLC: Because it cost them about 25 dollars each.

19:31 [audience laughs to 19:33]

19:34 GLC: And they sent us a hundred and sixty-eight pounds. That's just about 400 dollars. And don't you think that was wonderful.

19:43 [a hubbub of noise from the audience to 19:45]

19:46 GLC: So, today I would like to thank you for the help that I know you give in different ways to those who are in need. And I just want to say one thing. You will find, perhaps, that when you say, 'When I would like to help a little child in India or, perhaps, in Ethiopia where there's been a dreadful draught,' people will say, 'Well, yes. But there are 3 million children in India in need of help and what's the use of helping one?' And they'll make you think that the little thing that you're going to give them, which might only be 50 cents, is not worth it. But it is worth it. In life it isn't the big things that matter so much, it's the little things. And if each of us does a little thing, and does it well, it's worth it. And if all you do in the whole of your life is help one person and give one person, - like little Hemlata in Raphael - the opportunity of a better life, it's worth it. It's been something really worthwhile. So, never be stopped doing something because somebody says it's too little. I've kept you long enough. And thank...

21:07 [the audience erupts in a cacophony of pleas, as if to ask that Leonard Cheshire to continue talking to 21:19]

21:20 GLC: Yes, well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to ask my wife to come up and she will answer questions. So, thank you ever so much. Bye-bye.

21:26 [audience applause to 21:34]

21:30 Speech Ends

21:33 Recording Ends

End of transcription