

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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File name	F-M	001	_0001M0.WAV	Interview date: 08.05.14
<p><i>The first thing for us to do, Sir, is could you please introduce yourself and, if you don't mind, telling me at least what year you were born.</i></p> <p>Oh, not at all, not. I was born in September 1921 and I am 92 years of age.</p> <p><i>And your name?</i></p> <p>My name is Frank William Myerscough. Myerscough is spelt MYERSCOUGH.</p> <p><i>Lovely. Now, what I'm going to do, is I'm going to ...</i></p> <p>Ends 00:00:36</p> <p>Key Words: 1921 Myerscough</p>				

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VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

OK. If we could start with a general bio as we were talking earlier on. If you could include any years, to help us sort of frame your passage through, from let's say your journey into University and how you were recruited, maybe some of the aspects of what you were doing when you were recruited and then when you, as it were, when you ended that and as it were I suppose went back to civilian life. And if you could include any years in that, just to help us bracket that period.

Yeah. OK. I was evacuated with the school to Bangor in North Wales at the beginning of the War in '39 and spent a year in Bangor and then left school, having been awarded a scholarship into Liverpool University. And I went to Liverpool University for two years to do Engineering, an abbreviated course but a full Engineering course for the Honours Degree in Mechanical Engineering, and graduated from that in December 1942. And at this point I was interviewed by Lord Snow (as he became) for the Scientific Civil Service and he recruited me to join the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough, starting on Monday after New Year's Day 1943 – January. And I started in the armaments department as a Junior Scientific Officer. Within a year I was promoted to be a Scientific Officer and I represented Farnborough on Winston Churchill's Special Weapons Committee in Whitehall, in which Lord Cheshunt (should read Cherwell) (formerly Professor Lindemann) was his Chairman of the Technical Committee. But he supervised and directly talked to us about the political purposes behind the work we were doing. And on that committee there were three admirals from the Navy, three generals from the Army, three miscellaneous air commodores from the RAF, a couple of civil servants, and me.

00:04:04

The critical issue on which I had to address the committee was my advice on choosing a weapon to beat – well, to sink – the battleship Tirpitz and the weapon I recommended for this operation was Tallboy, designed by Barnes Wallis, which I had tested at Farnborough's bombing range in Hampshire. I also tested Lord Cheshunt [sic], chairman of the committee's, design as well. The problem with Lord Cheshunt's [sic] design was it was the design of a clever academic. It lacked the rigorousness roughness of a design which was compatible with the lack of knowledge that would be available to the bombers. And, of course, Lord Cheshunt [sic] was very upset at me choosing Tallboy rather than his weapon. So much so, that he got up and said to the Weapons Committee, "I cannot understand why Farnborough sends such a young and inexperienced man to our deliberations." For I was 22 at the time. And the admirals and the generals nodded their heads and the RAF men were silent. So I got up and said, "Lord Cheshunt [sic], we are here to discuss the technical advantages of the message, not the personal qualities of the messenger." And the RAF men thumped the table in approval. Now you see, the fact is that as a rough slum kid from Liverpool, I was willing to fight anybody if I knew that I was right. I wasn't a middle class, polite guy and I think that's a useful background.

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00:07:47

So from that, what year was the testings of the Tallboy?

We tested Tallboy in 1943. Now I have to be very careful about dates, it's very difficult, I wasn't thinking about dates. After D-Day and the landings of the Allied forces in France, we were making good progress across the French landscape and it was clear to the technical leadership of the country that the War might well be over within a year. And therefore, that being so, we shouldn't put our energy into designing new weapons from scratch because it always takes more than a year to design, develop, test and train the troops in the use of the weapon. And therefore the object had to change. The strategy should be now to get into operation as fast as possible the weapons that are already in the pipeline of design and testing, and so on. And in order to do that, I agreed to move from being a Scientific Officer at Farnborough to being Technical Advisor - Scientific Advisor perhaps is the best word – Scientific Advisor to the armaments section of the Aircraft and Armament Establishment at Boscombe Down.

00:10:13

The reason for them needing me there was that the armaments section was entirely composed of men in the RAF who had a rich experience of operations but had no scientific knowledge. And so I was there to provide some scientific rigour to their work. Among the things I started when I got there was tackling the U-Boat menace. The only retaliation the Germans had to the successful attack coming towards them on continental Europe was their U-boat attacks on our civilian operated convoys and their designed weapons operated out of the Netherlands, like the V1 and the V2. And therefore it seemed obvious that we should put a lot of emphasis on destroying their ability to use this retaliation. And the best weapon for this was Grand Slam, which was a 10 ton development by Barnes Wallis from the design of Tallboy which he had done to successfully bomb the Tirpitz. I had of course worked out the ballistics of Tallboy when I did the tests on it at the Aircraft RAE's bombing range. And therefore I had that data from which to estimate what the ballistics would be of a 10 ton version, which was much bigger.

00:13:41

The normal process of testing designs of weapons involved the use of dummies filled with concrete or sand, materials with the density of high explosive. I saw Barnes Wallis about the testing of Grand Slam and I suggested to him that we'd lose three months at least in getting this bomb into operation if we went through the process of testing a dummy first. And he was willing to listen to me. The RAF were very unhappy about that. The RAF were unhappy because they knew that this bomb was too big to fly with the bomb doors shut. We had to have the bomb doors open and therefore there was no knowing how the airflow

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would go inside the bombing compartment of the aircraft. And therefore there was a serious risk if we didn't fly it appropriately, carefully, that it could impact the structure of the plane and blow it all up. So they didn't want to do it with anything but a dummy bomb. In this impasse, I suggested that I'd take responsibility as the bomb aimer and so I flew in the plane as the bomb aimer in the nose of the plane and the RAF - albeit reluctantly - agreed to fly it with a live bomb.

00:16:46

It was a very nervous process, releasing that bomb over the little country town of Fordingbridge, where it needed to be released in order to hit the target in Ashley Walk. The target in Ashley Walk had been built, or maybe modified, to simulate the submarine pens in Peenemunde, the major place for the revictualling and rearming of U-boats, and similar pens in northern France. The bomb fell 100 yards from the target, which was to be expected really. The crater it made was 140 feet wide and 70 feet deep. It convinced the RAF and the Ministry that this would destroy the submarine pens, whereas all previous general purpose bombs that had been dropped on it merely chipped the concrete.

00:19:06

I took photographs from the air of the bomb falling over the River Avon and of the target and the crater in the Ashley Walk bombing range on the flight. There was also a photograph taken later of the armaments section of the Aircraft and Armament Experimental Establishment with the modified Lancaster bomber and Tallboy on one side and Grand Slam on the other and fronted by the staff, with me on the end of the front seats. Photographs were also taken of the crater with a human being standing on its edge to give an impression of the size. This enabled a decision to be made in March 1944, '45 (corrects himself), March '45 to make 40 Grand Slam bombs and they were dropped on the V2 and the V1 launching pads in the Netherlands as well as on the submarine pens and soon after that the Germans sued for peace. I am not saying, though, that the two are necessarily related, it might just be a coincidence. That's the end of my story, I think.

That is lovely. Can we just touch on, just before we start going back to a few of those things (and we're about halfway through the recording time that I've got). So I think that what we've covered is amazing, is the first thing. What if we could just briefly cover then after the testing of the Grand Slam I suppose we then come up to, did you, as it were, were you wound down in your roles and your responsibilities directly at the end of the War, or did you carry on after the end of the War? Just a little bit about how, and obviously then going I suppose into I suppose into civilian life, or did you stay in that particular sector? If you could just cover a little bit on that.

00:22:57

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After the Peace was declared, the Air Ministry authorities asked me to stay on on their permanent staff. I didn't want to do that, I didn't want to spend the rest of my life designing weapons for killing people. And so I asked permission to be released. But they said to me they would release me on condition that I would in my spare time, on being released, write my memoirs for incorporation in the Scientific War Records at Whitehall and they would pay me three guineas a week. So that's what I agreed to do. And I joined Unilever. I thought that the desire to move into food production instead of weapon production was an appropriate change of career and I stayed with them for five years. But unfortunately I didn't make much progress in Unilever and so I went and joined their American competitor. The great advantage of Americans is that they do not judge people on the basis of their social background, they judge people on their ability to do the job and I had a very successful and rewarding career in Proctor and Gamble. But ...

00:25:20

Can we just start that again?

Sure.

You were just saying that in ...

Yes, I've just got to find the date ... It's now 2014. What date is that book? (Rummages) Does it say? I can't ... You know, I'm nearly blind. Gareth, does it say?

This was first published in 1998.

Yeah, that's right. OK. Approximately ... approximately in 1996 Squadron Leader Tim Mason called me from Boscombe Down asking could he come and see me to review my War record at Boscombe. I asked him how he found my name. He said "I found your memoirs in the Scientific War Records in Whitehall." And so I took him out to Ashley Walk and let him see the former target of Grand Slam, which was now covered in grass and shrubs. And there 100 yards away was a big lake, which was originally the crater. I think that tells you the story, that's it.

That is brilliant. What I would like to do in the last sort of half session that we've got, is just to go back on a couple of these areas and see what we can explore on that. So I think that the first thing I'd like to go back is just for my ... (phone rings).

Ends 00:28:01

Key Words:

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Winston Churchill
 Special Weapons Committee
 Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough
 Tallboy
 Aircraft and Armament Establishment, Boscombe Down.
 Grand Slam
 Ashley Walk
 Submarine pen
 Boscombe Down

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<p>00:00:00</p> <p>... that I was responsible and the aircraft could be blown up if I made a mistake. The most important thing was getting the pilot to fly straight, without cross wind. So it was aligning for the purpose of that release, pressing the tit. The tit is the release mechanism for – the part - we always called it the tit, even though it may not look like a tit (laughs). But it's amazing how the whole process, the approach to the aircraft and getting in my seat and so on, is a complete blank.</p> <p><i>No, I can fully appreciate that, no I can appreciate that. OK. We then talked about the 40 Grand Slams being made and go through to there and the second visit. So what I think we'll do then, in the last bit that we've got on the recorder is if we ...</i></p> <p>Ends 00:01:17</p> <p>Key Words:</p> <p>-</p>				

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<p><i>... is track, let me get it down. This is track 246. And so, if you could ... Which one do you think more comfortable, Grand Slam or Tallboy – I know they're very similar, but which one would you feel more confident describing to me?</i></p> <p>Tallboy.</p> <p><i>Tallboy. So, in your own time, could you describe the Tallboy bomb?</i></p>				

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Yeah. The Tallboy bomb was a 12,000lb weapon. It was shaped very like a fish, only in three dimensions, not just flat like a fish might be. And, but it had fins on the rear, tail fins which were on a slight angle. And they were designed to enable the bomb to rotate and that would add to the stability of the bomb and make the ballistic settings more accurate. And when we tested it we painted the bomb with black and white stripes along its length so that we could measure the rotation on film as it came down. The remarkable thing about this bomb was its super-streamlined design compared with most bombs, which were relatively fat and often elaborate stability-promoting tail ... well the whole thing round, tail round. And the object in doing this was in order to make the bomb streamlined the big fundamental problem with dropping - aiming - bombs is the fact that you are usually over enemy territory and you have no way of working out what the air speed and direction – the wind speed and direction – is over the site that you are bombing. And therefore it's normal for the air speed to be worked out by guessing from the actual flight of the plane from firm English territory to un-firm enemy territory en route, and that is done by the navigator. And that is why most bombs are designed as general purpose bombs and are dropped hoping that they will hit a factory but they may well hit a church. And that is true of German bombs and British bombs. We did as much damage to them, if not more so, because we bombed more times than they did to us. Do you think that helps?

Ends: 00:04:21

Key Words:

Tallboy
Bomb
Tail fin

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<p><i>This is - I'm going to speak up because of the mike. This is looking at the photograph of Grand Slam over the River Avon.</i></p> <p>Yes.</p> <p><i>So if you just want to tell me about that in your own time.</i></p> <p>Well, it was released over Fordingbridge and it flew due east over the Avon into the New Forest. And there is the beginnings of the New Forest and Ashley Walk is further over here.</p> <p><i>Lovely. So if we put that one just down. So we will then...</i></p>				

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I think there is a village that it went over called Gosport or something.

Godshill?

Godshill.

That's it, yeah, yeah. So, the next photograph we're looking at is the Grand Slam crater and the sub pen. So if I pass that to you. If you have anything that you wanted to add to that.

Well, the crater is 140 feet diameter and 70 feet deep and it's 100 yards, approximately, from the target. And there's nothing much else I want to say about that, I don't think.

That's OK. Lovely. OK. And then the last photo we've got, this is the group photo.

Yeah. Armaments section.

Let me pass that back to you. So if you introduce that and tell us what we're looking at.

This is a modified Lancaster with a Tallboy on one side and a Grand Slam on the other side, with the crew of the armaments section in front of it. That's it. And that was taken in 1945.

Can you tell me where you are sitting in the photo?

Bottom left hand, bottom left hand corner. There, bottom left hand seat, if you like, seated bottom left, seated bottom left.

Lovely. Do recall any of the names of the individuals in this photograph?

Yeah, some of them. Group Captain Fraser was the head of the department, Group Captain Fraser. Squadron Leader... Doesn't it say on the back? Here you are, there's some of them that I tried to work out. Does it say?

It does. I was wondering if you could just tell us so we've got it on the recording, so when people are looking at it you have some of the names here. So if you can just tell me some of the names for the recording?

(Laughs) Oh I'm not good at ...

Well no worries then. That's OK, don't worry about it.

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I can't read it.

That's OK, that's OK. 'cause we'll scan both sides of it so we'll have the information.

I'm virtually blind now.

I do apologise.

That's alright. I need a spotlight and a magnifying glass to read anything.

You told me something about ... for the recording, how you were dressed for the day.

Yes I was in my suit. It was a ... what did we call that suit? ... (muttering to self) ... There were suits that were produced during the War for people who needed suits and they were specified because you gave in coupons for them. Now my mother always had my coupons but I had to get coupons off her to buy a suit for that photograph.

And you normally wore, during your working day you normally wore?.

Yeah. And when I went, for instance, to Winston Churchill's Special Weapons Committee, I was in a Merchant Navy sweater and corduroy trousers.

Brilliant. OK, let's press "stop" on that.

Ends 00:04:56

Key Words:

Grand Slam

Ashley Walk

Crater

Sub pen

Lancaster

Tallboy

Special Weapons Committee

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So, this is looking at, so this is track 248, Grand Slam crater photo. So, if in your own time if you can tell us about this photo.

Yes, I'm just looking what's on the back there. Can you see?

Do you want me to read that? It says, "The Grand Slam crater, 13.03.45".

Oh, there you are.

(Laughs) yeah, a date as well. So if you in your own time if you could just tell us what this photo is all looking at.

This photograph is looking at the first Grand Slam crater on the test run in ... at Ashley Walk. Scaling the 70 foot high crater with a 6 foot high man on the edge, on the lip of the crater. Is that good enough?

That is lovely. Let me press stop on ...

Ends: 00:01:56

Key Words:

Grand Slam
Ashley Walk
Crater

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