

## New Forest Remembers WWII Project

### Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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<p><i>What was the house like at Ashurst Lodge when you were living nearby?</i></p> <p>It was still furnished, fully furnished. And we didn't go into the house very much because it was a little bit, er, you know, too posh right, for us common working people. But it was a beautiful house, there was no doubt about it; it was beautiful inside. And it, the staircase, I think, they erm, well this <b>Mr Braber</b> has altered it so much now it's nothing like the original. Nothing at all. And to be honest when I went there, when he asked me to go there, I was very, very disappointed. There was a beautiful walled garden there that had fig trees growing round the inside, peaches; all gone. The walls were taken down, it was a car park</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>And it, you know, it, none of the rhododendrons or azaleas were there, they'd all been dug out, turffed out. The bungalow we lived in had had another floor added to it, so it was not a bungalow anymore. And it was such a shame really. It was heart breaking.</p> <p><i>But when you moved there during the war, the owner was living in Scotland, there was still staff maintaining the place?</i></p> <p>There was still staff maintaining it, yes. Yeah. But when he decided that he was not gonna</p>				

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CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

come back again, they went back to Scotland. But the chuffer, Mr Alex Strong, he stayed there because I think he had a bookmakers business in Southampton. And he stayed, but the rest of the staff went back to Scotland.

*So which year did you move?*

1942.

*Right, so it was part way through the War.*

It was partly, it was early '42 and when we moved into there, the troops, there were troops already there in Ashurst Wood, and they had these massive Churchill tanks there. And I don't know what unit they were, but I know there was a lot of commandos because they had the commandos strip on their uniform. [said with a raised question mark intonation] But they moved out, and it was a funny thing because the road between Ashurst and Lyndhurst in those days, if you remember, the council used to employ workmen to keep the roads tidy and this chap, he kept that stretch of road absolutely immaculate. Dead straight, the grass was cut; these tanks came out onto the road and did they make a mess. They ripped the verges up, they tore it all to pieces, and they were put onto railway wagons at Lyndhurst Road Station and it was not long after that that this infamous raid on Dieppe took place and so we surmised that those tanks were part of the, I'm not saying they were, they may not have been, but it seemed as though they went off to the Dieppe Raid.

And at that time I was working in Totton. I was doing a three shift system: 6 till 2, 2 till 10, 10 till 6, and a friend of mine who lived in the...alongside the railway line, just the other side of the estate, used to come through our place to go home as well, he worked with me. I was on an early morning shift and at 2 o'clock in the afternoon I finished work and I was coming through and I thought, 'Hello! Some troops have moved in here.' We didn't know they'd moved in. And we got half way through and out come this officer, "And What do you think you're doing here?" And put us under arrest in the guard room! He didn't know that there was a big house and a farm further up the lane. He called the police. The police came out and explained to him that we had to come that way, that was the only way to get home and they took us up and showed this officer where we lived, and they gave us passes then to come in and out of the place, it was so funny [laughs].

**[0:04:29]**

But, em, this unit, one day up there they all disappeared, they were all running down the back of the estate and we thought, 'What's, what's happening, what's happening?' Of course being youngsters we walked after 'em and down there there's a little stream that is eventually the Beaulieu River, and it's only a little narrow stream there and just the other side of here, stuck with just about 2 foot of it showing was a either a Bren Gun Carrier or a

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Personnel Carrier, it got stuck into a bog! And they had this...this winch on the front of a lorry with *\*indistinct\** about a hundred yards long trying to pull it out and we were told to run away quick, so we don't know whether they ever did get it out or not. And it was the same unit that just above there, there is a tumula, tumuli – that's the one there, [identifies tumuli on photograph]; I think it's that, or it's that. And they dug down into it and turned it into a rifle range. And, you know when you come to think back, how dangerous was that? If anybody had been walking across the forest at the back, but they turned it into a rifle range. I don't know what this unit was, but anyway, they went.

[0:05:55]

Then the Americans came in; what a difference. They could...they did everything for us. They took us out to the cinema, they took us out to...to lunch, dinners in Southampton, they had an open air theatre in the camp and we could just wander in while they had all these shows and everything like that. And Dad used to go down to the kitchens in the mornings with a pony and trap and collect all the swill, the food that was left over, to feed the pigs on the farm. And they used to give him tins of ham, tins of biscuits, tins of beef, well we never went hungry, nothing at all! And erm... Oh, it was great! Life was great, you know, there, we could go in their tents and talk to them; they were so laid back, you know, these Americans. And then we got up one morning and they were gone! Every single one, there was just one or two left, gone. The tents had all gone. Everything. And there was just one or two left there because they, they still had the kitchen equipment there, and they'd gone for D-Day.

And after they went, coloured Americans moved in. Oh they were lovely chaps. They really were. They'd go out of their way to try and make friends with us, you know, because in America at that time a black person, you know, was nothing, were they. And they were really nice chaps and they used to, just outside the lodge gate there was a patch of green, and they'd gather big crowds of them gathered there and we'd go, and they'd be telling us about their home-life and that, you know, before their... but erm... The funny [laughs] thing was, every time the air raid sirens went in Southampton, they'd all dive into the trenches and you could hear t'em praying [laughs]. It was funny really, but they were such lovely chaps and while they were there this unit [taps photograph] moved in.

*The one in the photograph?*

That, in the photograph, moved into the house. Now every one of those were stationed in the house or in the stables.

*And are they British?*

They're British, they're all sorts of regiments. We don't know what they were, but it was

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something secretive because they used to get a lot of top brass go there and when the top brass came there used to be an armed guard on the gate where we lived, the bungalow. And this, the little chap there [points to photograph] the little tiny chap there -

*Fourth from the right in the second row back.*

This one.

Yes.

Yeah, he was Welsh. And he used to like helping dad on the farm. Ever such a nice little chap he was. And he told us, he told us, he weren't supposed to tell us, it was secret, but this was all to do with Mulberry Harbour and the pipeline that went from Fawley, cross the Isle of White, over to France.

*PLUTO.*

That's what all these people were involved in. That. All of them.

*So, there were several different regiments?*

There were several different regiments, yeah. There was Royal Engineers, Army Service Corps, everything.

*Did you see them doing anything-*

No.

*Have vehicles...*

No. We weren't allowed anywhere near the place. They were billeted in the house and their officers were down in the old stable block.

**[0:09:37]**

And...when the war....when the war, I mean, war finished and I sorta joined the army then, when I saw these Churchill tanks I said, that's for me. I wanna bit, and I did.

*Right.*

I got a photograph in there of me sat on my tank, my Churchill tank, but they moved out and

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then, 'course I joined the army then and I, you know, I gone and I finished with that and the time I came out eight years later, Father and the family moved out because the estate had been sold. and Dad wanted to buy the farm but of course he couldn't afford it and this chap Mansbridge bought the farm and when this bloke bought -

*Mr Brabeer.*

Yeah Mr. **Brabeer** bought the place, he had another road put up to the gate, round the back of the estate into the farm so that he didn't have to go up the main drive that went to the house. And he phoned me up one day, or his secretary phoned me up, and she said he'd like to speak to me 'cause there's something strange going on here. And he said that when they were digging the foundations for the office block, they came across a lot of bedsteads and office equipment, typewriters and things, and I said, yeah, I said, when this unit moved out they dug this massive great hole and they threw everything into it. Everything. So if you go up there now with a metal detector you'll probably find it, but of course you're not allowed to use metal detectors in the forest.

*No, no.*

Not at all. But it was...it was ever so interesting.

*So this, the troops who came in and occupied the house that was 1944, 194-?*

Yes that was about 1944/45.

*Immediately after D-Day.*

Yeah, yeah.

*Fascinating.*

Yep.

*And the British the Churchill troops and the-*

They were there, that was 1942.

*Do you know which regiment they were?*

No. I don't.

*And the Americans, you don't know which - ?*

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No I don't. I tried to find out, because I did my family history. And I tried to find out what the units were and they couldn't tell us. They said they were just scattered all over Hampshire, they didn't know which...which units the American units were at all.

*Hum. So did, you said they built the rifle range, did you see them actually using that?*

Yes. [Laughs] Yeah. We went down there while they were using it. It was only a small one they had about two targets in there; you know they dug a bit out this tumulus. I think it was, don't know whether it was that one, or that one [points to photograph]. It was probably the one right close to the stream.

*Humm.*

And erm...

*So they had two—*

It was a mound, you know these tumulus they are a mound and they just dug this piece out stuck this couple of targets in it and they were using it to...as a rifle range. Now when you look back now and you think, well that was damn dangerous, wasn't it? If anybody had been horse riding, or anything, cause you used to get a lot of horse riders up through there.

*Even still, during the war?*

Yeah

**[0:13:09]**

*So there was just somebody on the main gate checking passes. Could people come in any other way?*

No, when you get to the, part the way up the drive, the road goes up, now on the left and you can still see it there now there's a pit and in that, that was a deep pit then, the guard tent was in there, and you can still see part of it now and there was always a guard there.

*So that guarded the main entrance —*

That guarded the —

*- people were still free to come around —*

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Oh yeah. Round the forest, oh yeah. We used to get a lot of ladies on horses come up through there. The Americans, they used to hire horses and ride across the forest. And there they were shooting these er.... [laughs].

*Very dangerous.*

Yeah.

*Did you see any other exercises that they were doing?*

Er, no. I didn't partly, according to the website I've been looking it up on the internet, that er, round Brockenhurst the Churchill tanks were used quite a lot so there must have been an awful lot of them in the forest during the war. But these like I said they moved out, and, just before the Dieppe raids so I wondered if it was, but I know it was the Canadian troops that took part - course that operation it was such a failure that you don't hear much about it in history. They do not like to report failures.

*Hum.*

And it was an absolute failure that raid.

*So the troops – sorry.*

Yeah but, but erm. When he sold, he sold up, when the troops moved out of the farm, the house, [laughs] my grandfather, my mother's father, came down there one day to stay there. And he was very fond of shooting and he was out down the grounds shooting and the sirens went in Southampton. He come tearing back, he wasn't gonna stay there any longer, he said, with these flying machines about [laughs] and he packed his bag and went back down into Dorset [laughs]. Nah he wasn't gonna have that. But we did, we had, it was a lovely - it was a beautiful spot, it still is. I mean, you can go, I think you can go up there as far as the gate now, can't ya?

Yes, yes you...

Yeah.

*Yeah. So the troops that were, when they used the house -*

They were in Ashurst Wood but the troops that were actually in the house they were the only ones that were actually in the house. The other troops that were in the Ashurst Woods they never used the house at all.

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*And they were all in tents were they?*

Yes. Yes. Yep.

*Humm. Did they leave the house in a good state when they left?*

Well there was a small fire there. This is my brother, he sent me this letter and it says on there that erm, [reads the letter] 'Americans... mother,' my mother worked at the NAAFI, now I didn't know that. Er...[pause while he reads more of the letter]. Oh yeah, it said it were the troops in the lodge, that were those troops there, that had the MT section stationed in the stable block and the rooms above the garage were their quarters. The big house itself was occupied by mostly officers who at one time had a fire in the far side which did damage the floor.

My brother here, you see, he's got a Bible and New Testament given to him by an American Chaplin. In the New Testament it is written, 'To Gordon Benett, from Chaplin of the US forces, Easter 1944. In the Bible is written, 'To Gordon Benett, from Chaplin Thomas **Burkeith** US Forces.'

*Right, and they had a church tent then?*

Oh yes Americans had a church tent there. Yep. Oh the Americans made a proper, they had erm, an open air theatre, they had their own canteen. They call them, PX or something don't they, they called them? Where we call it the NAAFI they call it the PX. I don't know what PX stands for but. And they had everything there; it was like a little town when the Americans were there. But they weren't there very long.

*Can you remember how many troops there were at all?*

There was, I don't know exactly how many, but it was a lot. A lot of Americans, yeah. And like I said we got up early that morning and they'd gone. It was just before D-Day.

*And did they, they took everything with them?*

They, well I don't know if they took it with them but all the tanks were struck, whether the tanks were put in the huts that they used for the mess rooms and that, 'cause there were huts.

*And so they had huts and –?*

They had huts there, huts and tents there, yeah. They may have put the tents in there, I

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don't know. But you go there now and there is absolutely no sign, the only sign that there was ever troops there now is when you start to go up this little hill, if you look on the left there is depression in the ground where the guard tent was. Part from that there's absolutely nothing.

*And did you see any of their shows, do you know –?*

Oh yes, but I can't remember who they were now. They used to get singers, dancers and there at these shows and there...you know we used to be invited and we were sitting in the front row, ya know.

*Was that in a big tent?*

No outdoors.

*Oh, out in the open.*

Out in the open, yeah. Yeah.

*Fascinating.*

Yeah they didn't take any notice of air raids or anything like that, not these. But when the coloured Americans come there, oh they used to shiver and shake when the sirens went.

*It's so different.*

Yeah.

*Wonder why it's different? Were there as many of the black Americans?*

There was quite a lot. They, what they used to do, they...they worked on the docks.

*In Southampton? [Talked over].*

Loading equipment for the ships and that, yeah.

*Oh right.*

Yeah and my brother says here, he said, the black Americans dug slip trenches next to their tent and when there was an air raid they would slide straight out of their tents into the trenches. And I remember one night there was a raid over Portsmouth and the troops told

us the following morning they could hear people screaming [laughs] I said I should I hardly think so, not in Portsmouth. He said they left Ashurst Lodge, our family left Ashurst Lodge in 1946, well I was in the army then look.

*Humm. That's amazing, so many troops coming and going aren't there?*

Oh it was, it was, yeah. There was this commando unit when we went there, one. Then there was this other British unit, I don't know who they were, I think, I'm not sure, I think they were army service core, they weren't there long. Then the Americans came, the black Americans and then those troops that took over the house.

**[0:20:51]**

*The secret group.*

Yeah the secret group that took over the house.

*There's quite a lot of them, aren't there?*

There is quite a lot of them, that was a massive house.

*So they could just requisition the house?*

They did requisition the house yeah. They did requisition the house. Yeah.

*So the farm at the house was still functioning as a farm?*

It was still functioning as a farm, yeah. Yes, Dad used to have take the milk down to the bottom of the drive every morning for the milk lorry to come and pick the churns up, you know. There was only a few cows and some pigs 'n' that. I think it was probably just a pastime for **indistinct**. I don't know how long he lived there, or whether he ever did live there, but he bought the place. I never saw him, never met him.

*Oh right.*

But I met Mrs. Glenda Spooner, the estate manager, many a time. God, what a woman! What a woman! I shall never forget one time, erm, we're stood at the gate and she came up in a pony and trap, Dad was stood there with a chap, I think his name was Lucan, Mr. Lucan, talking. And father opened the gate, she drives through she stopped her pony and trap she turned to Mr. Lucan she said, 'Don't you raise your hat when a lady passes?' He says, 'Yes.' [Laughs] and she just went on. [laughs] But she thought the world of father,

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you know, and Dad could speak to her as he liked, and she'd take no notice, but anybody else, look out!

But I 'spect a lot of the older people around the forest remember Glenda Spooner, she'd written quite a few books on horses 'n' that.

*Hum, so she stayed at the house throughout the war, did she?*

No, no. She lived at this horse and jockey cottage at er, between, well near Hatchets Pond.

*Oh I see, quite a long way from the house.*

Oh yeah she used to come over in a pony and trap. Quite a long way to come, isn't it?

*Yes. So she just came occasionally?*

She came occasionally, not very often, just to check up on things that's all. Yeah.

*Hum. Do you remember any air raids that you...?*

Er – No... Only one. Only one. And I can't remember much about it. There was a... an anti aircraft gun at the back of the estate somewhere. There was one of these portable ones that, ya know, moved about a lot, and we had a massive great lump of splinter from one of the shells come down through our washhouse roof which was a corrugated roof at that time. Piece about that long. And my brother Gordon, he had it for a souvenir, but I don't know, I don't suspect he's got it now. But erm, not, not the air raids. I know that they used to, they used to, they built a dummy town didn't they? Out at erm... was it out near Dibden Purlieu somewhere?

*Oh?*

And the forest and they used to set fire to it and the Germans used to, probably thought it was Southampton, and dropped a lot of their bombs there. But I don't know much about the war time air fields and that, there was, apparently there was 11 of them weren't there, during the wars?

I got a several books, I got one that erm, 'Hampshire in the War', 'during the war'.....

*Hum.*

And er, yeah. I love the forest.

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*So did you, during the war, you were at work by then?*

I worked in a factory in Totton, we were making bits and pieces for Merlin aero-engines.

*-Metal-*

Yeah, Yeah. And there was a three shift system, 6 till 2, 2 till 10, 10 till 6. Erm, 6 till 2, 2 till 10 I was paid 6 pence an hour, and when I was on night shift it was 9 pence an hour.

*Do you remember the name of the company?*

Yes, Kroll. I can't remember the Christian name now. It was, K, R, O, double L: Krolls. They had the factory up Testwood, Salisbury Road in Totton and another one where Rushington roundabout now is. Yeah they had the two factories there.

*How did you get to work? By bicycle?*

Bicycle, yes. Oh that was another thing I must tell you. [Laughs] It's funny now but I mean I was stupid at the time. I had a dynamo on my bike and when I come back at night, late at night, come up this drive, got off me bike, what happens when you get off your bike? The light goes out. BANG! [Laughs] The sentry fired at me.

*Oh no!*

That was one of the black Americans. And of course I screamed at him, ya know, "It's only me. It's only me!"

"Get your - stay where you are! Stay where you are!" And they came down, it was my own fault ya know, I should have had more sense really. [Laughs].

*I gather it was quite dangerous cycling in the forest with bicycles anyway because of the black outs?*

Well yeah, yeah that's right. But we knew the road. Yeah, we used to cycle into Totton. You'd think nothing of it. I mean this as children, this friend of mine that lived up by the railway line, I was there, and there used to be a gate across there - there its finished now, and erm, we used to sometimes *walk* into Southampton and catch a bus home, or the other way around, you know, to go to the picture or something like that. And we used to go to the cinema, when they had a cinema in Lyndhurst.

*Right, again by bicycle presumably?*

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Yes. Yeah.

**[00:27:20]**

*Do you remember exploring further afield in the forest during the war?*

Yeah we [laughs] I dunno if I should tell you this. But we used to go up to here, to Gay Wood.

*Gay Wood.*

That was a massive big sawmill there and they had a miniature railway. And they had all these trucks lined up and they were on a slope. And we used to get in these trucks, let the break off. Rumble, rumble, rumble [Laughs]. Bang crash at the bottom, you know. But er, they won't do anything now, will they? No.

*So that saw mill at Denny was much bigger than the one in Ashurst?*

Oh yeah. That was, that was only a small one at Ashurst down where the campsite is.

*Can you describe the Ashurst Sawmill to me?*

The sawmill, I think there was a railway siding going into the sawmill from the station, but it, they employed, 'course we weren't allowed up there because there was all Italian Prisoners of War were working there.

*They were all Italians?*

Yeah there were Italians, they were quite nice chaps, you know, they weren't the arrogant type like the German prisoners of War were, they were quite nice chaps. They came from Setley. I don't know, but I was told that there was a Prisoner of War camp at Setley. There was? Hmm. Well that's where they came from.

*I'll – [cuts out]*

**[Ends 00:28:54]**

**Key Words:**

Ashurst Lodge, Scotland, Alex Strong, chuffer, bookmakers, 1942, troops, Ashurst Wood, Churchill tanks, commandos, Ashurst, Lyndhurst, railway wagons, Lyndhurst Road station, raid on Dieppe, totton, arrest, police, passes, Beaulieu River, Bren gun carrier, personnel carrier, bog, winch, tumulus, rifle range, Americans, open air cinema, Southampton, camp,

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shows, kitchens, pony and trap, swill, pigs, farm tins, laid back, gone, D-Day, coloured Americans, black person, gate, air raid siren, trenches, praying, photograph, house, stationed, stables, British, regiments, secretive, bungalow, top brass, armed guard, Welsh, Mulberry Harbour, pipeline, Fawley, Isle of White, France, PLUTO, Royal Engineers, Army Service Corps, billeted, Mansbridge, Mr Brabeer, estate, foundations, digging, forest, 1944, 1945, Hampshire, horse riding, drive, road, guard tent, shooting, exercises, Canadian troops, operation, failure, flying machines, Dorset, tents, NAAFI, Lodge, garage, damage, Bible, New Testament, American Chaplin, Gordon Bennett, Chaplin Thomas Brekeith, church tent, canteen, PX, huts, mess rooms, docks, Portsmouth, screaming, 1946, army, secret group, requisition, milk lorry, Mrs. Glenda Spooner, estate manager, Mr Lucan, Hatchets pond, air raids, anti aircraft gun, shells, washhouse, dummy town, Dibden Purlieu, bombs, work, Merlin aero-engines, Kroll, Testwood, Salsbury Road, Rushington roundabout, factories, bicycle, dynamo, lights, sentry, black outs, bus, Gay Wood, sawmill, miniature railway, trucks, Denny, campsite, Italian Prisoners of War, German Prisoners of War, Setley, Prisoner of War camp.

File name	FNB	007	0002M0.WAV	Interview date:21/04/13
[00:00:00]				
[Coughs]				
<i>Can you tell me what you remember about the – ?</i>				
Yeah, they fence, they fenced the road off from Godshill the Fighting Cocks at Godshill right along the main road and up to Fritham. It was all fenced off and they, before they started to use it as a range they closed the whole lot off, they had troops in and the...the Forestry people had to clear all the animals out before they started using it as a bombing range.				
<i>So that was a 6 foot high fence?</i>				
It was 8 foot I think it was, yeah. The whole way round. And they had...they used to close it at one end where the main road for Downton turns off, they used to close the road there where they were using it and close it at Godshill so that the planes could come in and it was there that erm, Dead Man's Bottom I think they call it, was where a Lancaster crashed. Now it's further over on a, the other road.				
[0:01:07]				

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*Frogham yes, Frogham.*

Yeah. The Lancaster crashed there; I don't think the crew were killed. But apparently what it was, it was the turbulence from the plane that was in front of it. Because if you look at there, there's like a valley that comes up through. And they were coming up through this valley, the two Lancasters, and the turbulence from the one in the front caused the other one to crash. But I don't think the crew were killed.

*Right.*

And there was another funny story. That erm, they closed the road because these Mosquitoes were coming in to drop these bombs. And this one Mosquito came in, boom, and dropped this bomb. The sentry at the gates opened the gate and there was this one motorist, was halfway across and all of a sudden this other Mosquito came in at head height [laughs] and hit his car and went straight into the ditch. That's it, one of the stories, you know, I don't know, there are so many stories about, you know, about the range and that up there.

*You never saw any -?*

I never saw any of that no, it was all secretive anyway.

*Hum.*

But I think, isn't there a small museum at Gorley? And they got part of the old bouncing bomb there, haven't they?

*Humm yes.*

I think it's at Gorley.

*Yes cause they tested all those didn't they.*

Oh yeah, they tested everything up there. They had a mock ship up there didn't they? Yeah everything up there. We, I walked up there up to the top of the hill, but didn't go any farther, I just couldn't. It's a long walk. I had the wife with me then. But erm, it was a long walk up there, but there's quite a few bomb craters up there. You could tell they're bomb craters, because I've seen bomb craters before.

*Humm. Yes. And then across the other side of that road there was another testing range*

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*wasn't there? Millers?*

Was there? I don't know. I know the vibration from the big bomb they dropped up there, the biggest bomb that ever dropped on, used during the war, was dropped there at Ashley Range, and the vibration shook the, what's the name of the house? Oh I haven't got it on here. I got a photograph of it in there in a book, shook the house to pieces, a big lodge to pieces.

*Oh right.*

A mean all these lodges at one time they were used by, I mean Ashurst Lodge was one, erm, Rhinefield House was another, they were all used by Forest officials at one time weren't they. Head keepers and things like that.

*The house that you said was shaken to pieces, that wasn't Amberley? No, because Amberley was very close to....*

No, no. If I can find it on the map.

**[Ends 00:04:21]**

Key words:

Fence, Godshill, Fighting Cocks, Fritham, bombing range, Downton, Dead Man's Bottom, Lancaster, crashed, turbulence, valley, closed the road, mosquitoes, sentry, gates, motorist, museum, bouncing bomb, tested, mock ship, bomb craters, testing range, vibrations, biggest bomb ever, Dibden Purlieu, bombs, work, Merlin aero-engines, Kroll, Testwood, Sailsbury Road, Rushington roundabout, factories, bicycle, dynamo, lights, blackouts, bus, **Gay** Wood, sawmill, miniature railway, tracks, Denny, campsite, Italian Prisoners of War, German Prisoners of War, Setley, Prisoner of War camp, Ashurst Lodge, Rhinefield House, Amberley.

File name	FNB	007	0003M0.WAV	Interview date:21/04/13
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[00:00:00]

*So, ah, we were talking about Ashurst sawmill, so –*

Yeah I can't remember much about the sawmill. I know that apparently there's er, my son he delivers bottled gas up there in the summer, and he says that some of the concrete bases that the saw-benches were on are still there.

*And that's where the campsite is now, isn't it?*

That's where the campsite is now, yeah that's right.

*What about Ashurst Hospital do you remember anything about the hospital at all?*

No. No. I just know it was a, I think it was still a hospital during the war wasn't it?

Yeah.

I, I don't know. I don't know.

*Could you catch the train there for getting to the – ?*

Oh yeah, Lyndhurst Road, Yeah. Yep, There was the station master, what was his name? Gulliver I think. Oh yeah, you could often catch trains there, you know, we used to catch a train there to go into Southampton or Totton, or whatever. And we went to the pictures [laughs].

*That was the main leisure activity was it?*

Well yes, I mean we was only youngsters then, teenagers, you know. And then, but when the Americans, they took us everywhere, they took us into Southampton to the cinema. They took us out to, to tea, cafés, you know, restaurants. They were so laid back.

*It must have been exciting for you?*

Oh yeah. Oooh it was. Yeah. And they used to have the open air... they taught us to play that game of theirs where they, horseshoes, ya know.

Yes.

Yeah, ah they taught us everything then and they taught us to play their card game they called Black Jack, that we called Pontoon, and we always won [laughs]. We always won.

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Yeah.

*You don't remember any of the names of any of the officers at all?*

No, no, no, I can't remember any names at all. All I know is that this, this little chap there, fourth from the right.

*The Welsh one.*

The Welsh chap. He used to come and help Dad on the farm.

*You mentioned erm - ?*

Because this, this was when the war, this was 1946. But they were still using the, you know, the PLUTO 'n' that.

*This was 1946 when the house was occupied then?*

Er, it's me brother, he said th- [long pause]. Mmm Oh no it doesn't say here.

No?

But he told me... yeah we left in 1946, that must have been before then.

1945?

Yeah.

*Probably then, yes.*

Yes cause erm, he sent me this, via the internet he's got the original photograph and this chap has signed it at the back.

*Oh the Welsh?*

Yeah, yeah. I'll see if I can get him to send me a copy with his signature.

*Yes that would be useful yes.*

Yeah. But he said, me brother said, if you look at the badges, but you can't tell it on this photograph, he said they are all different badges, units 'n that. But you can't see from here. Though this chap's got a different type of beret look.

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Yes.

Same as that one.

*So, how big was the house, did it have a lot of bedrooms? That's a picture of Ashurst Lodge there.*

That's as it was then.

*Oh that's at that time –?*

That's the side. That's the side of the house and that, is the front.

*On the front of the book, yes.*

See it, see it there the two big bays.

*Hum.*

That's the front, this overlooked the lawns and this, well there's some what's left of the magnolias, the rhododendron, this was the side and now that's the main entrance there into the offices.

*So it had a lot of bedrooms then didn't it?*

Oh yes, ever such a lot of bedrooms in there, it was a huge, huge house mind. Well you can see it by that, the front of it. And it had a magnificent staircase in there but this Mr. Brabeers taken all that away, done away with it all. The whole of the inside been changed altered altogether. But It must have been a big place for all that lot.

*Yes this is all the soldiers.*

All the soldiers to be there yes.

Yes.

Yeah a lot of them. Oh there was, we had some lovely times there. I know it was war time 'n' that, but thanks to the Americans we never went short of food.

**[0:05:08]**

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*Yes. And that was exotic food to you I suppose?*

Well it was really, I mean tinned chicken, tinned meat and tinned ham and sweets, biscuits, everything. Every time father went round the back of the kitchen to pick up the swill, you know that he fed to the pigs, they'd give him this stuff from the cookhouse you know, [laughs]. Yeah that was the Americans.

*You mentioned you went up to Denny Sawmill and we won't talk about you're erm -*

No.

*- misdemeanour -*

No.

*What do you remember about that saw mill, cause it was much bigger than - ?*

No I can't remember much about the actual sawmill itself, I mean we only went up there to get up into mischief [laughs]. As boys do [laughs]. But erm, yeah and we used to cycle there to, it's a long way mind. We used to cycle from there, but we used to go across the forest, there was a track. It's not marked on this map I don't think, but then none of the tracks are, are they? But we used to cycle across the forest and come out on the main road here somewhere. But in that Matley bog, someone told me that one of the Churchill tanks, when they were on manoeuvres round there went into that bog and the crew only just got out in time. It sunk and apparently it's still there.

*Humm.*

But whether there's any, whether it's true or not I don't know.

*So when you were out cycling did you see any other military activity at all?*

No, not a lot. Not a lot. We used to, when I worked in Totton, we used to see Deltas during the war, we used to see some of the raids that was going on in 'n' around Southampton 'n' that, and erm, I don't remember a lot about it, but I do remember them shooting one barrage balloon down. It just came down a ball of fire, and then what's-his-name, Hill, Hunters Hill, out of er, Colbury when you come up towards Ashurst, I can remember a mine dropping in the road there. Made a massive hole in the road, huge hole. But, you know, I mean it was a long time ago the old memories there.

*You've got a lot of memories, memory's very good. So the air raid on the Tar Works in*

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*Totton was that before you?*

I think that was before we moved there.

*Right.*

I think it was before we moved there yeah. But, I mean, I can remember some of the people I worked with at the factory. But outside of the factory, I can't remember a lot at all. I remember being stopped by a policeman because I was riding somebody else on the crossbar of my bike. And I could see this policeman the distance and I said, 'Get off, get off, get off!' He got off, but too late, he'd seen us. I got fined five shillings, [laughs] for riding two on a bike.

*That's quite a lot of money wasn't it?*

That was a lot of money then, I was only on 6 pence an hour. Yeah

*Won't do that again. So you had a brother did you have any other?*

I had a sister, a younger sister and I'm the oldest and we're all still alive.

*And were they at school?*

Yes, erm, my younger brother and sister they went to erm, Bartley school up here. Cause we lived there and I can remember that school being built. Now see there's another thing, I was only about 2 / 3 years old when they built that, but I can remember it. One of the workmen that was digging out the foundations he dug up a horseshoe and he gave it to me, now I can remember that and I said to that when I went to this Copythorne do. 'Cause I said, when was the school built? And they said it was built in 1932, I think, I said well I can remember when they dig the foundations out of that. 'Cause we lived in a little bungalow opposite there. School.

*So you lived in the area before moving out to Ashurst Lodge then?*

Well I, yes, yeah, erm. I was born at New Milton, father, my father, had a milk round then, but he sold it. And we moved, I think it was then that we moved to, up here to Copythorne. And father worked on a farm here at Copythorne and from there... where did we move from there? Because he was always on the move, somebody was gonna pay him 6 pence a week more, he'd move, ya know. And because he was, he was wounded during the first world war.

*Oh I see.*

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'N' he couldn't do heavy work at all. Ah, we moved down to a little village called Muchelney down in Somerset and from there we moved to Dorset, and Dorset we came to Ashurst Lodge.

*I see so you're returning to the area...-*

Yeah but he always wanted to come back to the forest. You know he was born at Brockenhurst, his father was born at **indistinct** and his grandfather was born at Bramshaw, so, they've always lived in the forest.

*Did you go out to Brockenhurst much during the war, do you remember much out that way?*

No, no. No. Erm, my grandfather he had Tilebarn farm at Brockenhurst.

*Humm right.*

Where the, I think it's an outward bound place now is it? Opposite... Yeah I think so yeah.

*So was he there during the war, was – ?*

No, e grandfather he died during 1917.

*Ah.*

And father, my father went into the Canadian army actually and his job, he would never talk about it, he would never ever talk about it. It was only after he died that mother said that his job during the war, he was with the Service Corp, was to take horses to the front to replace those that had been killed. And he got wounded and... in his leg, and he couldn't do, could only do light work when he came out. And he took a job as a dairyman and he loved working with animals, right up to the day he died he was working with animals.

*So on the farm, at Ashurst Lodge –*

He was in only one.

*- and you were allowed to keep all the animals they didn't reduce the number of animals?*

No, no they only had a few; I think there was about four or five milking cows. I should imagine that they were kept there originally just to supply the estate. I should imagine, and there's a few pigs, chickens and, you know, typical little small holding was all it was, he was the only one working there.

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*Where did the milk go to? Was it collected?*

Yeah it was collected. He used to take it in, down to the bottom of the, to the main road in churns, and there was taken there, I don't know where, to the milk depot, wherever that was. Picked up in the lorry.

*I gather that there were very few ponies in the forest during the war?*

**[0:12.58]**

There was quite a few, I think there was always been ponies in the forest, there's always been ponies there yeah.

*Hum. You say you went to the cinema in –*

Lyndhurst.

*In Lyndhurst.*

Yeah.

*Do you remember anything else about Lyndhurst during the war?*

Er, yes! The navy took over, is it the Crown Hotel? The navy took that during the war and there was a steell archway going over the gate and it was too low for some of their vehicles. So as a bit of exercise they decided to blow it up, blow the top off. And they smashed practically every single window in the whole town, 'cause they took over the whole town during the war.

*Oh right.*

And erm, down just below er, where that erm, used to be called the Imperial Garage, they do Bugattis, a car that I shall never be able to afford. During the war when the tanks were on manoeuvres over around there, a tank came up there, that road which is one way system now, up there, straight through the Imperial Garage window. [Laughs]. Straight into the window. Course that building, where the Imperial Garage is, I don't know if you know this, it's nothing to do with the war time, but that was meant, built as a railway station,

*Oh, it even looks like a station doesn't it!*

Yeah, it was built, but the people of Lyndhurst said 'No, we don't want any railways, smoky

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old trains coming here,' so that's why it diverts to the Ashurst and goes down through there instead of going to Lyndhurst.

*I see and that's why that building looks like that.*

Yeah.

*Because there were troops, engineer troops, in the Imperial Garage in the war, weren't there, working on -*

I don't know, was there?

Yes.

Yeah?

*Yeah.*

I know the cinema was where Budgens supermarket is now, it was called the, I don't know if it was the Forum or the Odeon. The Forum I think, and there was a long passage way going down and the cinema was at the back. It was only a very small cinema, it was a lovely little place.

*Humm.*

Yeah, we often used to go the cinema there.

*I think there were quite a few troops around Lyndhurst as well weren't there?*

Yeah I should imagine there was, I don't know. I know there was erm... no, that was during the First World War wasn't it? There was an ammunition depot at Bolton's Bench or something weren't there where they used to store during the First World War, yeah.

*They had a bombing range at, a bombing raid at a house called Allen Green near Lyndhurst, but that was probably before you moved.*

Yeah I think most of the air raids took part before we moved there. 'Course that would have been about 1940/41 the main raids on Southampton weren't there?

Yes.

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Now just now and again when we moved there.

*So in that build up to D-Day when obviously you had a lot more troops coming into Ashurst Lodge.*

Well we didn't know, we didn't know that D-Day, you know anything about it.

No?

We didn't know anything about this Dieppe raid. I only surmised that those troops were part of the Dieppe raid, they may not have been, I don't know. But it was strange that they were, all these tanks were taken out, put onto railway wagons at Lyndhurst Road station and taken off, and then about a week or so later this raid on Dieppe took place.

*And at D-Day they all left in the night?*

They left during the night, yep.

*So you hadn't been aware of extra movements?*

No. Nothing at all. Everything was as per normal, you know, the day before and then when we woke up in the morning, it was empty, they'd gone over night. Just like that.

**[0.17.06]**

Yep. And then this, this business when they moved in, it was so secretive you know. We weren't allowed anywhere near the house. I mean at one time, before they moved in we used to go up round there, around the gardens and that you know, but we weren't allowed anywhere near it when they moved. No, it was found out afterwards that they were all to do with this PLUTO and Mulberry Harbour thing.

*Right.*

These troops.

*Well we've covered a lot of memories; I think we've, we've [laughs]. You've got an amazing memory!*

Well it's on somethings yes, something's yes. But it's like they say, you can remember things that happen years and years ago and yet something that happened yesterday or a couple of days ago [laughs].

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*Tell me about it yes.*

But I do, I am, I'm very interested in anything like this.

Yes.

You know history, especially this area.

*Were any of the other big houses in Ashurst occupied by the troops, because there were several big houses there weren't there?*

Er, none of, none, I don't think there was many big houses in Ashurst at all, it's only a very tiny village then. And that Happy Cheese restaurant was there then, there's two now isn't there? There's one called The Angry Cheese.

*There was one called The Angry Cheese -*

Yeah.

*- wasn't there, yes.*

There was at The Angry Cheese or the Happy Cheese

*Happy Cheese now, isn't it. There was an Angry Cheese.*

Was there?

Yes.

That was there when we lived there. But it was only a very small village then. Those roads, as you're going through Ashurst towards Southampton, on the left hand side there were very few houses there.

*Hum.*

Very few.

*So its a completely separate self contained village yes?*

It is now yes.

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*It's got swallowed up hasn't it?*

Oh yeah. I wouldn't say it's for the better. Still people gotta live somewhere don't they?

*Yes. So Ashurst was your nearest village wasn't it?*

That was out nearest village.

*Was that parade of shops was there was it?*

I can't remember. [pause] I can't remember to be honest. I can't even remember where Mother used to do her shopping. Oh I think it was delivered in them days wasn't it? Yeah it was delivered then from the Co-op or whatever it was. I know, I remember, I always remember the old postman; he was a submariner during the First World War. And his erm, hum. I was only talking about another **indistinct** I could have told you his name yesterday. White, his name was and he used to be, his brother had a transport company in Lyndhurst. With tra...cattle lorries.

*Oh right.*

And er, they had a place behind erm, what the name of that public house? The first one on the right, always got beautiful flowers outside in the summer, at the bottom end of the high street?

*Yes, down by the erm, Imperial Garage?*

Yeah – [cuts off]

**[Ends 00:20:04]**

**Key words:**

Ashurst sawmill, saw benches, campsite, Ashurst Hospital, train, station master, Gulliver, Southampton, Totton, pictures, main leisure activity, Americans, laid back, play games, horseshoes, card game, black jack, pontoon, officer's names, Welsh one, farm, 1946, PLUTO, occupied, 1945, photograph signed, badges, units, beret, Ashurst Lodge, main entrance, offices, bedrooms, staircase, soldiers, never short of food, exotic food, tinned meat, pigs, cookhouse, Denny sawmill, across the forest, Matley bog, Churchill tanks, manoeuvres, sunk, military activity, Deltas, raids, barrage balloon, Colbury, mine, massive hole in road, memories, Tar Works, factory, policeman, fined five shillings, brother, sister, Bartley school, Copythorne, New Milton, milk round, wounded, First World War, Muchelney, Somerset, Dorset, Brockenhurst, grandfather, father, Bramshaw, Tilebarn farm, died in 1917, Canadian Army, Service Core, horses, the Front, dairyman, milking cows, chickens,

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small holding, few ponies in the forest, Lyndhurst, Crow Hotel, navy, exercise, blow it up, window, whole town, Imperial Garage, tanks, railway station, troops, engineer troops, cinema, supermarket, Forum, Odeon, ammunition depot at Bolton's Bench, bombing raid, Allen Green, 1940/41, D-Day, Dieppe raid, railway wagons, Lyndhurst Road station, Mulberry Harbour, happy Cheese restaurant, The Angry Cheese, very small village, postman, submariner, White, transport company in Lyndhurst, cattle lorries.

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