

## New Forest Remembers WWII Project

### Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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<i>So Iris, can you just give me your name and where you lived during the second world war?</i>				
Iris Cooper. I lived down at Ryecroft and that is down at Blackfield, down Hampton Lane.				
<i>OK, and how old were you at the start of the war?</i>				
6 or 7 I think. 7 perhaps.				
<i>And what were your experiences of the early days of the war?</i>				
Well, it was quite a happy childhood. 'Cos we used to go at Fawley school in them days. We used to have to walk home from school sometimes, 'cos Mum used to give us a penny, and if we had a penny for the bus if you didn't catch the bus you could walk home and save the penny, which was quite exciting 'cos in them days a penny was a lot of money. It didn't always represent sweets because of course they were rationed. But there was one of the fellas we used to go to school with used to go in the baker's shop and he used to buy a loaf. And he could afford the loaf and we always used to pay him part of our penny for a lump of this bread. It was just ordinary new bread just been baked and we all used to have a piece. We weren't allowed the crust; girls didn't, 'cos we didn't have enough money to pay for it (chuckle). But we used to walk home and we had quite a good life. We just - that was it, going backwards and forwards to school and I think it was enjoyable really. We enjoyed it, we had bikes, we used to go out on our bikes but we weren't allowed to ride them to				

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school. Which was – the school was about two – I think, I suppose nearly two miles from where we lived. But we used to catch a bus from the cross – Blackfield crossroads - go to school, then as I say sometimes we walked home. A lot to do with the weather of course, you know (chuckle), and if we had this penny.

*So, did life – was life at school affected by the war? Was your ...*

No, not really. We used to have to march as if we're going to the air raid shelter in twos - practice air raid shelters – same time every week and we all had gasmasks. That was an exciting day when these gasmasks turned up. Phwoah! That was frightening in a way 'cos these horrible looking things they were, and you had to put them on and breathe normally, which was an effort because you were a bit frightened of them. Yeah, and we used to have to take these gasmasks backwards and forwards everywhere we went. We had it drummed into us all the time "You've got to take these gasmasks" which was a damn nuisance. And they had a cardboard structure they were in and sometimes, you know, they just used to disintegrate. But we were lucky 'cos our – my Mum, my sister and I – my Mum made us canvas covers, so ours was OK. But a lot of people suffered, but we just used to have practices at school. This thing, never bothered at home. We just used to throw it in a corner when we got home from school and that was the end of it (chuckles).

**00-03-24**

*Did rationing affect you at all?*

Not really, because we were quite lucky. My Mum was handy with a needle so she used to convert a lot of neighbours' curtains into clothes for children and old bed clothes, anything – material any kind - she used to make it, whether she was making a petticoat or an underskirt or top clothes. She even made odd blazers out of Dad's blazers. And she cut down different trousers, 'cos most of the men had gone to the war and they were in Army, and they used to cut down the flannel trousers that men used to wear for skirts for school. She made lots of those and her payment was quarter pound margarine or few spoonfuls of tea or – I can't remember having cheese during the war, but it was mostly butter and she used to be quite chuffed to have some butter. And on Sundays she used to mash the butter with margarine and we had that as treat – Sunday – yeah. 'Cos we were lucky 'cos my dad used to grow vegetables and lots and lots of fruit in the garden, which of course meant that we were quite lucky as a family.

**00-04-55**

*And what about air raid shelters. Did you have to go in the air raid shelter?*

Yes, we had an air raid shelter in the house which was called – what was it called? – big

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square thing like a big table. What was it called? Anderson Shelter. There was one down the – in Blackfield, at the crossroads, but we never went there ‘cos Mum said we were OK ‘cos we’d got the one indoors. It was just big metal structure made of steel of some kind. Mum put a mattress in there, but I can’t remember sleeping in there. We went in there a few times. We used to go in there and then come back out again and get in our own beds ‘cos Mum used to say “Oh well, they’re not going to drop bombs here.” Which of course they did in the Forest, we did experience a few of those (deep sigh).

**00-05-46**

*What do you remember about the bombs dropping in the Forest?*

That was exciting, ‘cos we used to watch where they used to drop, ‘cos we used to see the explosion going up. We used to get on our bikes and rush in that direction hoping to see the holes, you know, where they were. We also had incendiary bombs in our garden, which upset Dad a lot because of course, some of the – we had apple trees and several soft fruit trees – they caught on fire a few times. And of course Dad was out there - rushing out there with the – if he was home, with a bucket, if not, Mum had to. And other neighbours all used – they all clubbed together, go and help each other. And the man next door to us (chuckle) had chickens – lots of chickens, and they used to squawk like the devil when the what’s-a-name went off – the warning. All these chickens, it was ever so funny – we all as children we used to laugh – they all rushed, trying to get into this little hole, all these chickens. Forty chickens trying to get into this little hole when the air raid ... But do you know, when the warnings went they all rushed in and then afterwards they used to kind of walk out – a few used to come out and then a few more brave ones, you know. They’d stand there as if to say “No, we’re not frightened of it”. But if it ever – ‘cos sometimes you’d get the air raid came and went, then within minutes it used to go again and you’d think “Not again!” But these chickens used to rush around (chuckling) and of course that was entertainment for us children. We enjoyed that bit.

**00-07-27**

We were quite chuffed because the Americans moved in at Blackfield crossroads. ‘Course we didn’t know anything, we just knew they spoke different to us. And when they used to wave to us as we went to school Mum would say “Don’t have anything to do with them – they’re foreigners”. But anyhow, we went – we used to go to school and I took up violin lessons. So they used to ask me to have to play for them. ‘Course I didn’t, I was too shy (chuckle). And then they used to say “You have a reward” and we had doughnuts with holes in. Never seen a doughnut before. I can’t even remember seeing an ordinary doughnut before then, but these had holes in and they had like a long stick and they’d thread them all on. And of course some of us were brave enough to go and get one and then it got to the stage that when we come home from school we all used to rush (chuckles)

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- 'cos by this time I'm at Hardley school – and we used to rush to get these doughnuts. Yes. They used to give us one in each hand and we used eat them going down the road. It was great fun.

### 00-08-30

And the most exciting thing happened one day. I think it was getting near the end of the war, perhaps getting towards D-Day time. This soldier gave me a big tin, a big fat squat tin. "Take that to your mother" he said. 'Course we shook it and felt it and very heavy. Anyhow, of course, we did take it to Mum and it was apple pulp. She was so excited. It meant that if she had enough lard and what have you, fat and everything, she could make some pies. And she did, for the neighbours and all around, it was lovely, all these pies. It was a real highlight. That's really stuck in my mind as a child, yeah.

### 00-09-19

*Tell me about what you remember about the build up to D-Day.*

Yes, well (clears throat) we had all these soldiers come and live in our gardens. There was all – mostly like little jeeps they were in, but we don't know – they had like a canvas – I suppose like a tent thing. They were in our gardens and Mum had said "Look, just carry on as normal, take no notice, they just come and they go." And they were very nice people. They apparently plumbed into our – you know, the water thing in the garden where you get your water from – they plumbed into that and they had all wires up into our big oak tree that we had in the garden. But we could walk underneath, it was safe and everything. And they were just nice people, they jjust used to say hello to us as we came home from school. I can't remember how long – I suppose they must have been there a year or so I suppose, quite a long time. And one day, when we come in from school they were taking all the wires down, rolled them up on these huge great drums they had. I thought "I wonder what they're doing?" And they'd also – the water-cock, is it called a water-cock in the road? – they'd unscrewed that. Anyhow we went to bed. About four o'clock in the morning there was this awful noise. I thought "What's the heck's that?" So I got up and looked out the window and they were moving. All our soldiers were gone in our garden and our neighbours both sides. they'd all gone. And they were just going down the road. And it's so exciting, watching all these people. Watching all these people going, you know. And so my Mum said "You won't be able to go to school today 'cos you won't be able to get up the road". There was trailers with tanks on and "ducks" are they called? Lots and lots of those. There was tanks and there was one or two - like folded up aeroplanes. I don't know what they were like, they were on these things. And my sister and I we just watched them all the time and of course all the kiddies in the area came out. We were quite an audience, all us children. And um, that's what Mum said, "You won't be able to go to school today" and we didn't. And that went on all day.

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**00-11-45**

Later on in the afternoon, the area – that was all the English people mostly, English soldiers – the Americans started coming down. When they started coming down they emptied their pockets. Threw the money in the road! My sister and I and other children would dash out in the road picking up all this money, you know. Obviously they were going and they didn't need it. We had dishes both sides of the road, quite deep dishes they seemed to us as children, and all the money was in there. And there we were scrambling in this ditch trying to get the money out (chuckling). I never did know how much we had 'cos of course we gave it to Mum. 'Cos in those days a penny was a lot of money. So I don't know how much we had in the end. Don't know if my sister ever knew but we didn't. Can't remember that bit.

**00-12-33**

*One of your elderly neighbours was also ....*

Old Mr Nash. He used to seem to us a very old bent man who lived across the – down the lane across the road from us. And he was there in the (chuckle) – I mean, how that old man got in that ditch I don't know, but he did (laughs). And he was brave enough to go in between the vehicles as they came down, whereas we wouldn't, we were too worried about that. And he (laughs) yeah. On reflection, it was quite funny after it was all over, laughing, you know, 'cos as Mum said "I bet that's D-Day", and of course it was. We didn't know it at the time, we didn't even know what - children what D-Day meant, you know.

**00-13-16**

*What was life like after D-Day?*

Well, of course, we always had to keep very quiet when the news was on and that. Oh crikey! All the news – everybody had to stop what they were doing. Even traffic used to stop. What traffic there was, there wasn't much traffic about. And you used to have to stop to listen to what the news said, not that my sister and I understood what they were talking about really. My dad was in the forces at the time, but luckily he wasn't stationed very far away, just down at a place called Calshot. So he used to be home sometimes. And then, 'course then, of course the bombing took place after that. Buzz bombs used to frighten my mum.

*Did you have any buzz bombs ...*

Rockets, rocket bombs. You know, there was two kind of rocket bomb. There was a drumming sound which I could just think – I could imagine that now. Drumming, drumming,

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drumming. And it – the worrying thing was if it stopped above your house, which it did on one or two occasions, and you'd lie there waiting "Where's it gonna go"? Of course, my mum always said "They never come straight down, Uncle Tom said so, he always said they drifted". So we used to wait to see where they drifted. There was one in – the nearest I suppose about half a mile away from us. We remember that. That was the very first one. A place called Exbury. And then there was just one or two dotted about, but they didn't seem to bother us too much because of course they were after the docks or the Esso – where Esso is now. That's what worried Mum. So ...

**00-15-09**

*So Iris, what was it like if you had to travel into Southampton?*

Well, we only went about once a year during the war. And when we used to get near, just the other side of Hythe, the police used to come on board and we always had to show our identity cards, and they always asked Mum where we were going, how long we were going to be there and all this that and the other. And I can remember Mum saying "I'm only going to buy my daughters shoes. I can't get any decent ones in Blackfield". Shoes, and I shall be back when I've bought them". That was it. That's how Mum used to be, she got quite irate about this (chuckle) questioning going on. And of course we were straight in, buy shoes and come out and I hated them because they were brogues I had to have. I was at the teenage age where I would like something a bit more classy but I didn't get them. That was it. Going to Southampton.

**00-16-09**

*And I understand you used to go out sometimes if there was a plane crash and you heard about it, you used to go and ...*

Oh! Yeah, well, we used to go when the bomb – when the bomb had been dropped, my sister and I used to get on our bikes and peddle like the clappers in the direction. Sometimes we got near it and sometimes we didn't, but there was also a lot of other kids there before we got there of course (chuckles). But exciting! And one of the most exciting times was when that – a German plane crashed in Exbury, which isn't very far from Blackfield. That was exciting. We got on our bikes and we peddled to Exbury and this plane was spread over three fields. And of course, to us it was huge. We never saw any bodies or anything like, because being children you look at things like that, but we didn't see anything like that we just saw this (laughter) ... And by the time we got there it was just smouldering. There wasn't any fire or anything, so whether there was a fire we don't know, just a big crash. Yeah, that was exciting. Yeah, I can't remember anything else much after that.

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