

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

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00-00-00

Recording. First of all could you tell me your name please?

Yes, I'm Alan Haynes.

And could you tell me your father's name and date of birth and where he was born?

Yeah, my dad was Arthur William James Haynes, quite a mouth full, but he was born in April 1920 in a town called Stourbridge, which was then in the county of Worcestershire but it's now in West Midlands.

End: 00-00-27

Keywords:

April 1920
Stourbridge

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CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

00-00-00

So, could you tell me what was your father's posting in the armed forces during the war?

Well, in the late 1930s my dad was an apprentice engineer at a company called Westwood & Dawes in Stourbridge, and as the developments in Nazi Germany started to develop as they did, if you like, he along with a lot of other guys of his age, 'cos he was born in 1920, so in 1938 he was 18 of course, decided to join the Territorial Army. And because he was an engineer, he joined the detachment of the RAOC, the Royal Army Ordnance Corp, which was known as No.8 Army Field Work Shop. There were a number of detachments, one in Kidderminster, one in Worcester, one in Dudley, and my dad, because Stourbridge was the nearest place to Dudley, was in the Dudley one. When war was declared the unit was immediately mobilised and called up, put into uniform and to cut this type of story somewhat short, were sent across to France and Belgium as part of the BEF.

What does BEF stand for?

British Expeditionary Force.

Thank you. (Deep breath) And he came back from France and was posted into the New Forest?

Basically yes, I mean, there was quite a lot of events occurred between being sent to France and Belgium and coming back and ending up in the New Forest because he was part of the eventual evacuation via Dunkirk with majority of his unit. (Clears throat) Nothing to do with the Allum Green fate, but my dad after the war became a member of the Dunkirk Veterans Association. In fact, the Dunkirk Veterans Association were represented on the day the memorial venture to Allum Green was dedicated. The unit came back through Southampton and were billeted because of the sheer volume of people coming back from France and Belgium. They were billeted wherever they could get them. They were in school houses, they were in scout huts, they were in houses that had been requisitioned by the military. I know at one point they were at Totton just outside Southampton, and then they were at Burley for a while and then they were at Allum Green House. They were at Allum Green House from, er, round from middle of 1940 (clears throat) until the bombing occurred.

What further activity was he undertaking while he was at Allum Green House?

Apparently from what me dad told me, and of course dad been dead nearly what twenty odd years now, it was all fairly mundane and boring. (chuckle) They erm - the unit requisitioned a garage in the town centre of Lyndhurst called the Imperial Garage, which I think now is actually the Ferrari garage which is down to the far end of the High Street from

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Lyndhurst town centre, and they requisitioned it and were just doing basic running repairs on whatever vehicles they had available to them, trucks, Bren Gun carriers, just to try and keep them busy, but nothing particularly planned because it was all quite chaotic having just come back from Dunkirk. They were spending a day at work in what was the Imperial Garage in Lyndhurst and then going back to their billet in Allum Green House.

00-04-17

Right, let's move on to the bombing raid. What can you tell me – what do you know about the events of that night of the 5th of September 1940?

Well, there's a little bit of a background before the night of the bombing. Apparently, (clears throat and apologises) apparently about a week before the actual bombing occurred, there was a German bomber came over the New Forest and dropped a series of incendiary devices that, y'know, obviously caused planes burning, fires, and also some of them were florescent flares giving off quite a bright light, and the soldiers that were in Allum Green House, dad included, were ordered out with buckets of sand and what 'av you, to extinguish these flares. Now, my dad could never come up with anything to prove it, but he thinks that this raid about a week before the actual bombing was some sort of pathfinder raid to identify where likely targets were. So, come the night of the September 5th, 5th of September 1940, with no warning whatsoever, 'cos there wasn't any, as I understand it, there wasn't any particular effective air raid warning system in the middle of the New Forest as they never particularly anticipated any volume of bombing, 'cos most of the bombing was occurring at that time around London of course 'cos that period was the middle of the blitz. Planes came over from the south heading towards Allum Green House itself and if you look at the land in front of Allum Green House there were still even now a number of craters in a line heading down towards the house and a number of high explosive bombs hit the eastern end of the house particularly, (clears throat) and resulted in four guys being killed and about fourteen or so being injured.

00-06-32

So it sounds as though the assumption is that it was a specific raid rather than just a German plane returning home and discharging any unused bombs.

That's what everybody said, but I've never been able to prove that. I 'ave actually tried to get information from the *wunderbar kind* in Germany, both directly and through a cousin of mine that lives in Germany, and he's lived in Germany many years, and we've never been able to track down any luftwaffe records that refer to that specific raid. But everyone seems to think it was a specific raid on the New Forest. Now, I mean, the next thing I'll say, which again is more than anything conjecture, is the old soldiers, me dad included, used to say that because it was a big house the Germans thought perhaps there was a high ranking

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officer in the house. So it was a good target. That's really just as much as anything, perhaps old soldiers' imaginations working overtime.

Could you just tell me the – oh, you were going to tell me the names of the four men who were killed.

Yes, there was (cough and apology) there was Warrant Officer Class 2 H.S. Tyler, Harry Tyler, Staff Sergeant S.H. Avon, Staff Sergeant E.W.E. Gifford and Sergeant A.W. Blunn.

Thank you. Did your father tell you any specific anecdotes about any of those people?

No, actually, because the way that the No.8 Armour Field Workshop was set up, there were different companies within the whole unit, and none of those guys were actually my dad's immediate superiors, so although he knew them, he didn't know them well.

How many people – d'you know how many people were based at the house?

Actually in the house around 50.

D'you know what your father was doing at the time? Was he in bed?

He was actually on night shift. He was actually working at the Imperial Garage in Lyndhurst town centre and they were called back to the house. The guys that were working with me dad at the Imperial Garage, they were called back to the house in the middle of the night to help with the rescue of, y'know, the recovery and the damage to the house - during their night shift, y'know, which would have been the early hours of the 6th of September.

A horrendous time! D'you know what happened to the injured men?

Yeah, the injured guys were taken to the cottage hospital in Lyndhurst initially and then they were taken to a military hospital just outside Southampton. I've tried to trace records of the names of the injured and their injuries, but have not been successful. Medical records particularly during the war time are very hard to trace I've found, so despite my best efforts I've never been able to track down any of the actual injured people.

And what condition was the house in afterwards, were they able to continue using it or was it too badly damaged? (loud clearing of the throat!)

The one gable end of it, the eastern gable end, was completely destroyed. I mean, I've got a couple of pictures which - the museum have copies of in Lyndhurst – and I can put some on my blog as well - and basically the whole, pretty well the whole of the eastern gable end of the house was destroyed. The rest of it was pretty well unscathed.

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So could have your father back in or stay in the house?

Sorry?

Did your father remain in the house after the bombing?

No, they moved out. Although parts of it were relatively undamaged, they didn't actually stay there because they were fearful that perhaps of another raid. They went back to Burley, but then after that the unit was reconfigured partly because of the losing some senior non-commissioned officers and various personnel from within the unit went off to different areas. My dad went to Aldershot for example for some specific skills training and then later on in 1941 the unit was disbanded entirely and my dad joined the REME, the Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers at its foundation and found himself in the borders of Scotland, in a place called Hawick, and then went through the rest of the war via North Africa, Italy and Greece.

00-11-35

Well, at the time of the raid on Allum Green House, was it just members of the Royal Army Ordnance Corp at Allum Green House or were there people from other – d'you know of people from other units for instance?

Just the RAOC, just the RAOC, and in fact specifically No.8 Army Field Work Shop.

Did your father talk about the actual living quarters and living conditions in Allum Green House prior to the raid?

It was basically – the people that lived in it before the war was Dr Balfour, er and, (pause) sorry no it wasn't Dr Balfour (comments "Oh gosh what was the guy's name?"), he was the doctor that actually founded the hospital in Lyndhurst and for the life of me I can't think of his name. I understand that he had the house built, but when war was declared they moved out. They moved into one of the annex buildings. So basically all their furniture was moved out and the army moved in and they put in little cots, you know, trestle beds, so they sort of turned it into a temporary barrack house. It was much better living there than in a scout hut, because Wilf Briggs who was one of the guys that was in another part of No.8 Army Field Work Shop, one of their billets was in a scout hut in Ringwood, (chuckles) sorry Burley, Burley. (Big intake of breath) But basic, but I'm sure perfectly comfortable, and what they used to do I know was just walk – if you walk from Allum Green House out onto the main road towards Lyndhurst you go past a little village of Bank on the right and then you come to the Swan Pub and I know they spent many hours in the Swan Pub. (Much laughter)

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00-13-29

Yes I've been hearing that from many other people as well. Do you have any other anecdotes about his time there or the people based there?

(Clears throat again) Nothing of any detail, I mean, what I can tell you is (cough) Warrant Officer Tyler who is the senior guy that was killed, he came from the city of Worcester and his family owned and operated a large motor vehicle repair workshop in Worcester and they did a great deal of work for the Post Office in Worcester, and he was quite a marksman apparently 'cos he was a member of the Worcester Rifle Association. When his death was reported in the city of Worcester there was quite an article, which I've got a copy of, referring to the death of this gentleman that was quite well known in the Worcester area.

Now, (long pause) one small (cough), excuse me.

Do you want to stop and have a drink of water or anything or are you happy to go on?

(More coughs) I will for a sec.

Yes I'll stop the recording for a moment.

End: 00-14-46

Keywords: Territorial Army, RAOC, Royal Army Ordnance Corp, No.8 Army Field Workshop, Dudley, BEF, British Expeditionary Force, Dunkirk, Dunkirk Veterans Association, Allum Green House, billeted, school house, scout hut, Totton, Southampton, Burley, Lyndhurst, Imperial Garage, vehicle repairs, bombing raid, German bomber, incendiary devices, fluorescent flares, pathfinder raid, 5th September 1940, bomb craters, bombs, wunderbar kind, Luftwaffe, warrant officer, sergeant, cottage hospital, military hospital, medical records, Aldershot, training, REME, Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, Swan Pub, Worcester Rifle Association.

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00-00-00

Right, did your father talk about other settlements in the area, any activities in Lyndhurst or Burley, or specific incidents going to the pub at the Swan and so on?

He didn't a great deal to be honest and I always got the impression as I've already said that in the period after coming back from Dunkirk, certainly through June, July, August, September when this bombing raid occurred, it was all very chaotic, you know, nobody really knew where anybody was in any detail. There wasn't much of an opportunity to get into any organised form or make contact with other units, and for that matter, there was a great deal of fear of invasion of the UK by Nazi Germany. So they weren't really allowed to go very far, y'know, so not literally restricted to sort of a house or worse, but certainly they weren't encouraged to go further afield. (clears throat) One other small thing I am aware of while I think about it, is Sergeant Blunn - Alfred Blunn it was in fact – he's buried in Holy Trinity Church at a little place called Lickey which is not far from Birmingham, and he was apparently pre-war a very keen cricketer, and when his body was returned to Lickey for burial, he was actually buried with his cricket bat as a sort of memento of his er, of his er, of his keenness at the game before the war. And he was actually buried with some of the family members, so his grave in Lickey, although it's got the Commonwealth War Graves Commission normal gravestone on it, it's surrounded by other graves and memorials to other members of his family.

You say that after the raid he moved to Burley for a while, do you know where he was based there?

Woods Corner, which is a large house. If you drive from Lyndhurst towards Burley, it's a large house on the left. Literally, the name would imply on a corner, Woods Corner House. It's a massive house and it's – I don't – if it's a single occupant now that lives there it's a huge house in a quite a sort of manor house **planting**.

But they continued to work in Lyndhurst at the Imperial Garage?

Sorry?

They continued to work in Lyndhurst though and just travelled in from Burley did they?

Yes, and after the raid they didn't spend a great deal of time in Hampshire at all, and as I said, fairly quickly the whole unit was broken up and they were sent off – various personnel were sent off to different locations for skills training in their own particular trade, and me dad, as I said for example, was sent to Aldershot for some training and then following on from that they went off to different units and No.8 Army Field Workshop was disbanded.

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Right. Have we covered everything that you have learnt about his period in the New Forest then?

From, erm, at the time, yes, yes.

00-03-25

Do you want to tell me a little about the commemorative bench, and I know that is a much more recent activity but erm, it would be good to record.

Some of it in, y'know, the museum and on my blog and on Wikipedia. But basically what happened was that my dad eventually left the army in 1947, married in 1948, and then after mom and dad married, in the 50's and 60's they started to have little holidays and some of those holidays were in the New Forest. Now dad found Allum Green House, not that it was ever lost, but he found it and by this time it had been restored and the end that had been damaged was completely rebuilt and the house had been broken up into a number of separate private accommodation units, one of which was occupied by Dr and Mrs Balfour, and the son of Dr Balfour senior still lives in part of Allum Green House now as far as I know. (clears throat)

Now at the Swan Pub – the Swan Pub features fairly heavily in the army – dad got chatting to the barman who'd lived in the area for many years and asked the barman about, y'know, did he know about the Allum Green raid (cough, excuse me!) and the barman didn't even though he'd worked there some years. So chatted about it and dad thought well there ought to be some sort of memorial, the kind to the guys that were killed. Now his initial enquiry was to actually to have some sort of commemorative plaque in the local church and he certainly met - my dad certainly met with the local vicar - this would be in the early 70's – and talked about costs and placement of it and design and all sorts of things. But the costs turned out to be prohibitive. So the next thought was perhaps a memorial bench, so without wishing to sort of overstate me dad's roll, he was very much at the centre of contacting all comrades who were all - a lot of them were still alive then in the 70's – and also going through the Dunkirk Veterans Association, Worcestershire Regiment's Association, British Legion to get, put feelers out if you like, to see if anybody would contribute to the costs and the logistics (clears throat) and I've got copies of some correspondence between my dad and colonels of the regiment and this sort of thing, which referred to the arrangements for the purchasing and erection of the bench. And also there's the Forestry Commission or the Parks Authority, whatever it's called, to allow the bench to be placed there. So over a series of months if not years, permission was got for the bench to be placed. Logistics were put in place to sort of bring everybody together on a set day and time for a formal dedication of the bench which was in May 1980. I didn't go unfortunately to the dedication, but on the day there were probably something like 40-50 people there including some retired senior officers, colonels, lieutenant-colonels of the army and a number of the guys that were part

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of No.8 Army Field Workshop at the time, me dad included, (cough) and Dunkirk Veterans Association was represented, British Legion was represented, and an army chaplain came and did the actual dedication, and Dr and Mrs Balfour who lived in part of Allum Green House at that time were kind enough to provide, you know, some refreshments, tea, cake, sandwiches, that sort of thing and I know my dad gave Dr Balfour senior a Stourbridge cut glass crystal bowl as a sort of expression of thanks for allowing them to be there, which I believe Dr Balfour junior still has. It was reported in the local press along with a photograph which I've got copies of and there's a copy of – a scanned copy of the photograph of the dedication of the bench on my blog. Subsequent to the dedication dad and mom used to go down there periodically to just check on the bench, and dad would go down there with his shears and he'd cut the brambles from around the side of it, that sort of thing. Sadly the British Legion branch in Lyndhurst closed and I think the nearest one is now Southampton, but luckily the local residents in Allum Green House specifically have been very kind to sort of keep a watchful eye over the condition of the bench and I visit the location myself periodically when I can although it's about a hundred miles or so from where I live. And on the – in 2011, yep I had to think for a moment, in 2011 which was the 70th anniversary of the raid, myself, Jilly Beatty who's the daughter of Staff Sergeant Avon and Wilf Briggs, who although he wasn't at the incident was a member of No.8 Army Field Workshop at the same time, we met up at Allum Green on the 70th anniversary and took a couple of pictures, y'know, we placed a wreath on the bench and again one of the residents of the house was very kind to offer us a cup of tea and we maintain contact as and when we can.

00-09-36

And you have contact with relatives of two of the people who died but not the other two. Is that correct?

I 'ave contact with the children of two of the people that died. Jilly Beatty is the daughter of Staff Sergeant Avon and she was only six weeks old when he died – when he was killed, and I 'ave contact with a lady and I still sadly can't remember the lady's name. We must speak again about this, I might think of her name at another point. She's in Canada, who's the daughter of another survivor of the raid, and Wilf Briggs his name 19 – 4 years of age – he was part of No.8 Army Field Workshop but not the – he wasn't actually at Allum Green at the night of the raid.

Yeah.

In fact, poor old Wilf, he didn't know of the, erm, arrangement to place the bench and the dedication of the bench 'cos at the time from what further reason, nobody – the sort of message didn't get through to him, and 'cos of if it had of done he would have definitely been at the dedication in May 1980.

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00-10-49

Yeah, yeah. Are you happy to carry on just a little bit longer?

Yes if I can think of anything else to tell you.

You just mentioned in passing that at one stage your father was based in Totton. D'you know where he was based there and what he was doing? Was that at Totton, at Testwood School?

That's it.

So, perhaps - I'm sorry I've taken the words out of your mouth – would you mind just telling me (laughter) –

And it really was simply somewhere to sleep. They took over the school – I don't know if it was a school holiday or something, I really don't know, but they took over the school and part of No.8 Army Field Workshop were billeted there simply in terms of, y'know, somewhere for them to sleep. Having come back from Dunkirk in a state of disarray.

But er, were there any other places he stayed apart from Allum Green House and Burley?

Apart from Testwood School, no; until they then disappeared off to other parts of the country.

Um, yeah.

Not that I'm aware of anyway. (long pause)

Right, well, I just think - I'll just stop the

End: 00-11-52

Keywords: Dunkirk, bombing raid, Sergeant Alfred Blunn, cricket bat, graves, memorials, Woods Corner House, Burley, No.8 Army Field Workshop, Allum Green House, Dr Balfour, Swan Pub, commemorative plaque, memorial bench, dedication, May 1980, Jilly Beatty, Wilf Briggs, wreath, Testwood School.

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