

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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First of all, could you just tell me your name and where and when you were born?

Edith Daniels. I was born in London on 1st January 1928.

When did you move down to the New Forest?

I moved down here in 1937 because my sister got married to a person that lived in Holbury and I came down here with her and then my family moved down, the whole family in 1938. That was at Springfield Avenue, same road as Bob lived in.

Were you at school for the whole of the war?

Yeah, I was at Fawley School first off. Then I had a scholarship and I went to Brockenhurst to school, so I wasn't here during the day much from when I was eleven 'til sixteen when I left. So I didn't see much that went on during the day, which these people did 'cos they were local. All I remember is the bombs, the evening things. 'Cos I caught a car every morning to go to Brockenhurst, and used to go across Beaulieu aerodrome, right across that way by car every morning. So we used to see all the bombers and that on the Beaulieu aerodrome, but by the time we went to school they were all back from their bombing raids or whatever they'd been on. They were all there on the aerodrome. So we used to go

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across there every day to go to school. At Brockenhurst we didn't see any of the sort of daylight bombing and things that was happening on this side of the water 'cos we were right out in the Forest. So I didn't see much of that in the daytime, which everybody else was seeing from their local school.

00-01-55

Other than that, my memories are more sort of what happened at night when we were being bombed. We were actually bombed. My house, the windows all came in when the bombs fell up Springfield Grove. The windows all came in and the side of the house was all cracked down. I can remember that. I suppose I was about twelve or thirteen then when that happened. Sitting in the hallway with all the doors shut every night so that there was no glass to fly on us.

00-02-28

My father worked at night, 'cos my father was retired – he was well over 60 – he used to go to work every night at the British Airways as a night warden. So my mother was there with us on our own once my older brothers had gone into the army. We used to just sit in the hall with all the doors shut so that if the bombs came (chuckles) we weren't going to get any glass flying on us. That's the sort of thing that I remember as a child; when I was a school child.

00-03-03

Then of course when I got to sixteen and we were going out to the dances and that, well then that's when I remember all the troops that we used to see about. We used to dance with them. We used to go up - where is now the big Esso Club there used to be a small building there called the AGWI Club, 'cos the AGWI is now Esso, but it was a small refinery then. They had a small building there which was the clubhouse. We used to go up there two or three nights a week dancing. All the troops from all around were allowed in there free, so we always had plenty of dance partners (chuckle) and to be absolutely truthful, had a very nice time. Also, we didn't realise the horror of it all really but we were having quite a nice time going up there dancing and that.

00-04-13

Where Esso is now was an American army camp. That was all taken up with a big American army camp. There was a load of Canadians, armoured people, down on the road between Calshot and Lepe. There was American sailors at Calshot, with the RAF and British sailors. I know 'em all. (chuckling) It sounds awful doesn't it. (laughter) There was a load of marines down at Lepe, and there was French soldiers at Lepe. They had Polish

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soldiers at Exbury. I can remember they made up a netball team of the local girls to play these Polish soldiers at netball - they called it basketball - in the school playground at Exbury. So I can remember that. What else did we do apart from dancing and enjoying ourselves? Well, of course, when all the tanks came along ...

00-05-29

When I left school I went to work at British Powerboat. That Marchwood Park that they were talking about, originally at the beginning of the war that was used as a training place to train the people to work in the Powerboat building the motor torpedo boats. That's before they took it over as a hospital for the burnt airmen. I can remember a friend of mine worked in there learning a trade to work on building the boats in Powerboat, but when I worked in the Powerboat I worked in the office. I didn't do any of the actual physical work there. We were building the torpedo boats and that was very interesting to see all that going on.

Were there lots of people working there?

Oh yes, there was. I would say hundreds really. Hundreds working there. They used to come over on the ferry, and there was a train that ran through to Hythe, ran through to Fawley actually, all through the war. There was a whole train full come in every morning to work in the Powerboat and in the British Airways. Next door to them was British Airways and all the flying boats were there. There was hundreds come in every morning to work on them. We caught the buses down to work there.

00-07-00

Just before D-Day when all the tanks were along the road, I lived in Holbury, so to get to Hythe I had to get a bus on the other side of the road and go right round Rolleston, right round to Hilltop and right round to get to work in Hythe because the tanks were all on one side of the road. You couldn't do two lane traffic. So that was a long trip every morning to go to work. We just got on with it really.

When the bombing ceased a little bit, then we could start going about, going out a bit more and go into town and things like that until the D-Day started. When it came up for D-Day, all the camps were closed and they had big signs on the sides of the road "You are forbidden to speak to the troops". They weren't allowed out of the camps anymore and you weren't allowed to speak to them. Then one morning when we got up they were all gone. The tanks were all gone and that was it. All back to normal sort of thing.

How soon after that did you hear where they'd gone to?

Well, that came on the news that "this is D-Day" and the troops we presumed they'd all

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obviously gone off down to Lepe because they were all facing that way. We presumed that that's where they'd all disappeared to. Even after D-Day there was still a lot of troops. I mean, we still had the dances and things right up to the end of the war. There was always troops about and the dances went on, and as I say, we had (chuckling) quite a nice time.

Apart from the fact that I had three brothers; two brothers in the army and one in the air force and one of them was killed, that was right at the end of the war. We were rather young and rather silly really in a way because we didn't really appreciate the horror of it and the worry that our parents had. People like my mother with three sons, not knowing where they were and what was happening to them. We were just having quite a nice time when the bombing had stopped and we could get out and go to the dances and things. So in a way, I can't say I hated the war because we were young and silly. We were only sixteen and seventeen. When I think about it now, I think should have had more compassion really but I don't think we did, not as youngsters. We saw what was going on locally, but didn't get the whole picture of it.

00-10-15

Before the end of the war I was friendly with an American soldier. He used to come to my house just before D-Day and (chuckles) also with a Canadian soldier I met. He wrote to me. He went over on D-Day from Lepe 'cos he was with the armoured corps and he wrote to me for months and months from going up through Holland and all the way through. Then suddenly his letters stopped and my letters were sent back to me. So I presumed that something had happened to him. Other than that we just got on with it really.

00-11-00

The most frightening part of it was the bombing. Every night when you were bombed and not knowing whether anything was going to happen to you. Luckily, when the bombs did land along the back of our houses, one of them landed between two of the bungalows up the road. Fortunately it was between the two bungalows, so nobody inside was hurt and nobody got hurt, so that was the nearest we ever came to anything happening. We had incendiary bombs. My brothers used to rush out and put the incendiary bombs out, but other than that we didn't really get any horrible damage done to us. You just went to work every day and got on with it and that was that.

00-12-07

Do you remember when you were working at the British Powerboat, do you remember any of the boats that they were working on – the names of them at all?

No, I don't really. As I say, I was in the office. I was in the pay office and bonus office and

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they had the different shops. They had the hull shop where they were building the hulls of the ships and they had the electricians and they had the coppersmiths— they were all separate parts. So I never really saw one complete. I used to do the bonuses for men in the hull shop and the electricians shop. I used to go across with their wages. They were just building. There was just a hull or they were just working on something. I don't think I ever saw one actually completed, when it went down the slipway and out. I don't know whether they did all the insides as well there. I can't remember whether they had like an upholstery shop that would have done the inside. I certainly did the wages for the hull shop and the electricians shop. My husband that I had, I didn't know him at the time, but he was working in the coppersmiths shop down there. He was a coppersmith working in the Powerboat. So they had all different shops doing different things before they put them together.

What did they use the copper for, d'you know?

The coppersmiths? Well they did all the metalwork on them. They would call them coppersmiths, but they did all the metalwork that was on these things. The electricians put all the electrics in but mostly I can remember the hull shop. They had the hull, and all the men were working building the actual hull of it when I used to go across.

It was quite interesting to see all the different things that were going on. We had a jetty down there but I don't remember ever seeing an actual whole boat completely done off there. They've got one now that they done up here, haven't they. They built one; redone it all and built it all. That's about the only one I've actually seen proper.

I stayed there 'til they closed. They closed about six months after the end of the war. I stayed there and worked in there. It was quite interesting to see what was going on, and of course we could see what was going up the river. One time we had a doodlebug come over. I can remember we were all flying for the shelter but it stopped before we got there and we all had to flatten down and hope it wouldn't hit us. That's the only thing we saw of those things. That's the only time I can remember anything about those; the latter doodlebugs and that sort of thing.

Did you have any air raids while you were at work?

No, by the time I got there the local air raids – I stayed at school until I was sixteen, so I was still over at Brockenhurst while all the air raids were going on on this side and by the time – that would have been 1944 – we still get the odd air raid but I don't think we were getting anything like – we could still do our own thing, go out every day and go to work and we didn't really expect to be bombed by that time, by the time when I went there. My husband can remember sitting on the Green here in Hythe and watching the Supermarine being flattened over on the other side of the river. So that sort of thing was going on on this side but I didn't see any of that as I was at school.

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00-16-24

Was it your father who worked at British Airways?

Yes.

What did he do there?

He was the night warden; he was on the gate and he used to patrol the place at night. He must have been well over 60 by that time, but he used to have to walk to work 'cos the buses finished riding about eight o'clock. He used to walk to work from Holbury. Then he was on all nightshift down there.

Earlier on when my elder brothers weren't in the forces, they were with us, but gradually as they became eighteen they disappeared, so it was just my mother and me and my younger brother that was left at night on our own.

00-17-15

I can remember one day, my father used to be a night warden, so he used to go to bed in the day. He was sleeping in the back of the house and my mother went round the back of the house in the morning to get some coal from the coal – we had a coal bunker round the back of the house – and she thought there was a bomb sticking out of the coal 'cos there was this bomb thing. So she put her coat on and ran up the road to my sister to ring somebody to come and get it. My sister said to her "Well, where's Dad?" and (chuckling) she said "Oh, I've left him in bed". (laughter) Dad's bed was here and the bomb that mother thought, it was outside the window, but she'd forgotten him. (chuckling) She ran up the road, (chuckling) but luckily when they came it was just a dud shell. It wasn't a bomb at all. (laughter) We've always laughed at that. My dad said "Well I'm glad you all thought about me". She ran up the road and left him in bed. That's the sort of silly thing that happened.

There was always shrapnel; we were always going out looking for shrapnel. There was shrapnel all over the place.

00-18-30

Those guns at Hardley, they were a big artillery barrage there. We presume that's what these planes were looking for when these kids were being machine gunned. As I say, I didn't see any of that. My younger brother was a school when – Bob was at school – and he remembers running across and being machine gunned. He can remember that. No, I didn't see any of that, I was sitting quite comfortably over at ...

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00-19-03

In the Forest we never even got sirens going or anything during the day.

Did you not have any air raids?

No, not over there. I'm surprised in a way that being Beaulieu was sort of on the way to Brockenhurst, but we didn't even have shelters in the school at Brockenhurst. We just had plasters on the windows so that if – I think a couple of times the siren went and we just sat in the corridors. So it was completely different to the schools on this side of the river.

At Brockenhurst I gather they grew lots of produce in the grounds. Cabbages; I know you told me about picking caterpillars off cabbages. You don't remember that?

Not when I was there. (chuckles) When I went there it was a brand new school. It had just been built 'cos they had an old Brockenhurst, but this was a brand new school. It just had a big sports field out the back, but we certainly never did anything like that, not all the time I was there. I never went out there. No, definitely I didn't do anything like that. I can't imagine where they would have been. I mean, I was there 'til I was sixteen and I don't remember 'digging for victory' (chuckles) in the school grounds or anything like that.

Because you were all at different schools, perhaps I can just ask you what do you remember about Brockenhurst school during the war, apart from – it didn't affect you at all apart from going in the corridors several times.

Not from that. I believe that as we got to fourteen/fifteen/sixteen, I think the boys in my groups used to go over there doing night watch in case of anything, but us girls didn't. Also, we did - at one time a school at Portsmouth was bombed and the pupils came up here and they were lodged in a big house in Brockenhurst. We went to school in the morning and they went to school in the afternoon. So we had to go to school at 8 o'clock in the morning instead of 9 o'clock, and finish at 1 and they went in the afternoon and finished at 5. So they divided the college up for the two schools, 'cos this school had been bombed in Portsmouth. So that's another thing that happened over there. I was going to say we had a half-day, but we actually still did the same amount of hours but in different times.

I heard a little story from one lady about the boys leaving notes in desks for the girls the next time. You didn't have that?

Well, let us say we were sixteen. (chuckles) I can remember vaguely one boy chasing me round the corridors trying to get me into the gym but I can't remember him catching me. (laughter) No, we didn't. We were much younger, I mean we were sixteen, but we were

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children really, still children. This lad was a little bit beyond his sixteen group I think, but other than that ... (chuckles)

00-22-36

You mentioned, when you had the bus journey to work ...

Oh that was a shocker!

... can you remember when you were doing that journey just before D-Day because I gather there were a lot of troops camped at Hilltop. Were you still able to go over there?

Oh yes, 'cos I went to work every day right up 'til D-Day and the only way we could get to work, 'cos the tanks were on say the right hand side of the road – might have been the left hand side of the road – so that if you wanted to go to Hythe you couldn't go that way because the traffic from Hythe was coming down. So you had to go across the road and catch the bus at that was coming that way to take you right round to come out at Hythe. I went to work every day right up to D-Day.

On that bit of road there wasn't any troops at Hilltop. There wasn't any camps at Hilltop, camps of soldiers. (third voice says "No") No there wasn't, not there. Not on that area, 'cos that was just that bit between Rolleston and Hilltop, and there certainly wasn't any camps or anything there. The buses used to go round that way quite, you know, there was no problem with that. It was quite a long trip to get to work that way round every morning. That was only for the last – when the tanks appeared – for the last couple or three or four weeks before D-Day. That was only for those few weeks. Once the tanks had all disappeared, then it all went back to normal. We just went back to - buses went normally.

00-24-29

Can I just ask you, I know we talked a bit before about the prisoner of war. You say you knew a girl who was at Calshot and married a prisoner of war.

Well, she lived at Calshot, the girl that married the prisoner of war. I didn't know her. I can only remember the sort of talk; there was a lot of talk that this girl had married a prisoner of war and I thought she was a Calshot person that lived at Calshot, but it wasn't anybody that I knew. I don't ever remember seeing any prisoners of war and I pretty well remember all the different types of troops that were around here, (laughter) as my grandchildren keep telling me. (laughter)

Anything else particular or should we just see that we round up ...

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Yeah, I don't remember anything. I think Rosie got a little bit about Fawley.

End: 00-25-26

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