

## New Forest Remembers WWII Project

### Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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### Web Pages:

Oral History article:

<https://nfknowledge.org/contributions/memories-of-a-fathers-death-allum-green-house/#map=10/-1.6/50.86/0/22:0:0.6|36:1:1|37:1:1>

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*If we can just get a few facts together before you start. Could you tell me your name?*

Jill Avon. I'm calling myself Avon for family history purposes, I do. Most people know me as Jill Beattie, but that is my ex-husband's name, so I'm quite happy to be known as Jill Avon.

*Could you just tell me your father's name and date of birth?*

Stanley Henry Avon.

*When was he born?*

5<sup>th</sup> March 1909.

*And where was he born?*

In East Greenwich, London

*Lovely.*

Wait, we don't say A-von like the cosmetic company, its Av-on like the river.

*Right.*

**00:53 End**

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CHAIRMAN JULIAN JOHNSON CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

**Key Words:**

Stanley Avon  
Jill Avon  
Jill Beattie  
East Greenwich

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*You start when you want to then.*

My name is Jill Avon. These aren't my own memories of the New Forest during the war, but it's a detective story that brought other peoples experiences together and solved one of the most important mysteries in my family. My mother and I never knew exactly where my father died in 1940, because his death certificate only said Lyndhurst. But mum did know he had been killed in an air raid on the house where his army unit was billeted. When my local library installed computers in 2006, I thought this might help solve the mystery and in the end it did. After many fruitless searches and enquiries, I got in touch with the museum in Lyndhurst. Their librarian, Richard Reeves, told me what he knew about the air raid and that it had happened at a place called Allum Green. I finally got to Lyndhurst in 2008 and visited the museum with copies of photos and documents about my father which are now in their archives. Richard was kind enough to drive me to Allum Green house himself and show me the memorial bench. It was really sad to be there where my dad died, but I was pleased that I found it at last and very touched to see that he and his fellow sergeants hadn't been forgotten. The museum lets me know whenever they have another enquiry about the events of the air raid and passes on contact details. So far I have been in touch with two children of survivors of the raid, one in Canada and one in Australia and the widow of Sgt. Horace Whitehouse, who was there too. Also Alan Haynes, whose late father Sgt. Arthur Haynes campaigned for a memorial and Wilf Briggs who'd known Staff Quartermaster Sgt. Harry Tyler, while he was in No.3 Section, before he transferred to the ill fated No.2 Section. I did some more digging about my dad's unit, No.2 Recovery section of No.8 Army Field Workshop, RAOC and also managed to get hold of his Army record. At the National Archives, Alan found the war diary of 2 Corps, which contains records of all four Recovery sections. These covered preparations for their departure to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force in January 1940, their journey across France to Belgium and the retreat to Dunkirk. Wilf filled in with his own personal memories, so I have a got a pretty good idea of how the unit got on.

My dad, Staff Sgt. Stanley Henry Avon was born in Greenwich, London, in 1909. He got back from Dunkirk on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1940 and was sent with many others to Totton, and then to Woods Corner, near Burley. There the men were sorted out into their proper sections, after the chaos of the Dunkirk evacuation and No.2 Recovery section was billeted at Allum Green House. I was born in London in the middle of July and my dad and I met for the one

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and only time at out flat in Blackheath. Can't remember any of it at all. On the 5<sup>th</sup> September, when I was 7 weeks old, he wrote a letter to my mum which I still have, saying that he was going to see someone that evening about digs for her and me, so that we could be near him, but at 11.15 that night, a bomb hit Allum Green House. It fell through the upper storey and the ground floor and exploded in the cellar where the sergeants were sleeping. As well as my dad, three other men died. They were Staff QMSgt. Harry Stanley Tyler, mentioned already and Sgt. Aldred William Blunn, both from Worcester and Staff Sgt. Edgar William Ernest Gifford, born in Frome, Somerset, but at that time, from North Bradley in Wiltshire.

On the seventieth anniversary of the air raid in 2010, Wilf, Alan and I met for a small personal commemoration at Allum Green bench. We'd wanted to have friends and family of the other three soldiers there too, but although we spent two years making enquiries via the internet, Worcester and Wilshire newspapers and family history societies and a national genealogy magazine, we had no luck, apart from a couple of people who remembered odd things like seeing someone's grandfather on his allotment or were very a very distant cousins by marriage, but we couldn't find anyone close enough to be interested. However, we'd found enough information about them to work out their family histories and Wilf comes from Worcester and is familiar with the formation of the four recovery units and their officers and many of the men, but we still got nowhere, so there was just the three of us.

My mum remarried seven years later, but she kept my dad alive for me with all her memories and all the documents and objects that she had saved, photographs, his passport and books, pocket watch and violin, together with his Army effects and many items concerning the St John Ambulance Brigade, which he'd joined when he was 19. I've got receipts for their wedding and engagement rings and all the household goods from their first home and I'm still using their sideboard and a bookcase that my dad made himself. There are many letters of condolence from friends, Army officers and comrades, St John's and mum's former employers. I grew up knowing he was a kind and generous man. He was from a very poor family and he'd lost two brothers and sisters as babies because of poverty and he wanted to help other people, which was why he joined the St John Ambulance Brigade. He didn't wait for conscription, but volunteered two days after the declaration of war, expecting to be placed in the Medical Corps because of his experience as an ambulance officer. But he was allocated to the RAOC where he was made a "tiffy" or Armaments Artificer almost straightaway because of his years of experience as a fitter and mechanic. This was a shock for him and all the family because he'd wanted to take care of the wounded, not to help injure others. Mum and I used to visit his grave in Charlton cemetery quite regularly, even after we moved out to Kent to be near my mum's twin sister. This was all part of the ritual of visiting his mother who lived the Greenwich terraced house that he grew up in. I get there when I can and my ashes will be buried with him when I go.

I've visited the memorial bench three times now and have always been very touched by the kindness of the residents, especially Jennifer and Patricia Lane of Allum Green farm and I

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really can't thank them enough for their generosity. The residents jointly take care of the bench and they had it refurbished just before the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, so it's looking quite splendid now. I'd never been to the New Forest before 2008, but I will go back from time to time from my home near Norwich, especially as my mother's family came from Mudeford near Christchurch and my family history research regularly turns up yet another relative who moved into the Forest, maybe visiting places I haven't been yet. It's a sad story, but I know my mum, who died 16 years ago, would be pleased I found the place at last. She'd be thrilled to bits about the bench though, very glad that her husband of only 17 months was remembered there as at home with us.

The end.

### **07:35 End**

#### **Key Words:**

Stanley Avon  
Jill Avon  
Jill Beattie  
Allum Green House  
Horace Whitehouse  
Arthur Haynes  
Harry Stanley Tyler  
Aldred William Blunn  
Edgar William Ernest Gifford  
Wilf Briggs  
Dunkirk  
25<sup>th</sup> May 1940  
1940  
Lyndhurst  
Totton  
Burley  
Woods Corner  
RAOC  
Royal Army Ordnance Corps  
8 Field Workshops  
2 Recovery Section  
3 Recovery Section  
British Expeditionary Force  
St John's Ambulance  
Greenwich  
Air raid  
Bombing

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<p><i>You mentioned that the unit stayed in Totton and Woods Corner as well as Allum Green. Do you know where they stayed there and what they did?</i></p> <p>Woods Corner is a large house isn't it? That's where I believe it was. When Alan and Wilf and I went for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration, Alan took us round in his car and Wilf suddenly said, "there, there, that's the place!" and we stopped at Woods Corner and I know Wilf was in No.3 Recovery Section and my dad was in No.2 and Wilf and some of his section stayed in the village hall in Burley and we went down to visit it.</p> <p><i>And some of the unit were in Totton at one stage, I gather?</i></p> <p>Yes. I think they came straight back to Southampton from Dunkirk and Totton's not far from there is it.</p> <p>No.</p> <p>... before they went into the Forest</p> <p><i>I gather Testwood school came into it?</i></p> <p>Yes. That's a familiar name to me.</p> <p><i>Do you know what he was doing when he was at Allum Green House.</i></p> <p>I understand that they were repairing damaged vehicles and possibly weapons</p> <p><i>Do you know where they were working?</i></p> <p>I think in grounds behind Allum Green House. There is a theory, there are several theories, about why the house was bombed. The one that is the oldest is that it was a stray bomber coming back from Southampton, just depositing the last of his load, but if you look at the map, it's not a direct line back to Germany. Another theory is that German observers had seen the men working in the grounds of Allum Green House and decided that that was a place to get rid of. Another was that the German command believed that big houses in the country were used to house senior officers and possibly by mistake they thought they were getting rid of several senior officers in the British Army.</p> <p><i>Yes. Yes. Do you know anything about the living conditions and he living quarters in the house where your father was staying?</i></p> <p>No. Not really. I do know that the sleeping arrangements were that the officers had the</p>				

upper floor, and I know that the sergeant's mess was in the cellar and that is where the bomb exploded. It wasn't just a mess, it was the sleeping quarters as well, but I'm afraid that's all I know,

*Do you know how much damage there was to the house?*

Quite a lot. I have photographs that various people have sent me. I think quite a lot... I'm not sure the direction here... but that end of the house, the far end away from the farm was fairly well demolished and there's an auctioneers catalogue for the house, which I think might be 1948, which said that there was considerable damage done.

*Do you know how many men were in the house at that time?*

No I don't.

*I think you've probably covered it really, but what have you heard specifically about the events of that night, of the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1940?*

We obviously they'd all gone to bed and there is an RAF report, which Alan Haynes found, that says the first bomb was dropped at 11.15 and this is what happened and a then bit later... there was so many... there were the four casualties, they thought five men had died, but it turned out to be, they thought it was five men had died but it turned out to be only four. There was something like 11 injured and they were all taken to Lymington Hospital. This RAF report says that rescue attempts were difficult because they couldn't use lights, because there were still planes circling overhead for quite a few hours afterwards.

*Thank you*

There was also... I'm trying to think of her name...there was an exhibition at the museum... not sure if it was 2010...but I didn't go to it ...that was the last time I went 2010...maybe the year before... there was an exhibition about the area, it wasn't particularly about the war and there was a letter, a memory of somebody called Nancy, there was this diary, I've got a copy of that, and apparently she lived in... I'm not sure how old she was at the time... she lived in the end cottage, not far away and she and her mother heard the planes coming over and then one of the officers, it was... captain, a Captain Sturridge, one of the officers, came over and told them that Allum Green House had been hit and that they were getting various people to come and help and she was describing what a dreadful night it was with her and her mother in the house alone. I can't remember her other name....

There will be something in the museum

*You mentioned that you have various photographs of the house and of your father. Would you be happy if one of us wanted to get in touch with you and, we would never take*

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*anything like that away, we would just come to the house and take photographs.*

When I first got in touch with him, I sent him various photographs, trying to remember which, but I don't think... I'm not sure...if they were of the particular house.

**07:15 End**

**Key Words:**

Stanley Avon  
Jill Avon  
Jill Beattie  
Allum Green House  
Captian Sturridge  
Arthur Haynes  
Wilf Briggs  
Dunkirk  
1940  
Lyndhurst  
Totton  
Burley  
Woods Corner  
RAOC  
Royal Army Ordinance Corps  
8 Field Workshops  
2 Recovery Section  
3 Recovery Section  
British Expeditionary Force  
Lymington  
Lymington Hospital  
Testwood school  
Air raid  
Bombing

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<p>Coming back from Dunkirk, the ship that was lined up for them was sunk before their eyes and they then had to hang about and go back into the town again and wait about for something else. There is also... Oh...</p> <p><b>00:12 End</b></p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Stanley Avon Jill Avon Jill Beattie Dunkirk 1940</p>				

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