

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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00-00-00

Would you like to introduce yourself please?

My name is John Toman, I was born in 1944 and I was 70 this year.

Lovely. And we have some photographs in front of us, don't we, of your Uncle Stephen?

Yeah, my Uncle Stephen on his motorbike. Was taken in Austria as the war was coming to a close and that's when the photograph was taken.

What sort of motorbike is it?

It's a BMW R75 with a 24hp engine.

And how old were you at the time because you were in the sidecar I believe?

Yeah, I was in the sidecar. I think I was 5 years old – 4 years old, 5 years old at the time.

What were the roads like and how comfortable was it, can you remember?

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Yeah, the roads, well we didn't have motorways at the time as we all know, but the roads were narrow and the journey from Portsmouth to the New Forest, it must have taken us hours considering all the old narrow and bumpy roads and what we probably met on the roads. Might have been hayrick or whatever, tractors, so I don't know how long.

Do you remember the area you went from? You got in the sidecar ...

What, the area of Portsmouth?

Yeah.

Yeah, Mile End it's called. Uncle come to the house, picked the three of us up and drove – a lot of these roads are closed up now – we went through the side roads in Portsmouth, through the shoreline along at Porchester and carried on through Fareham. Then we went into Southampton using at the time the main roads, but just back roads now, and then on to the New Forest.

00-02-46

D'you remember anything seen on your journey?

No not really, I can't remember any of that.

So here in the photograph, who's in the photograph here on his bike? Your uncle's there sat on a bike.

Yeah, and with his Austrian girlfriend at the time.

How long was he over here for?

He lived in the New Forest about five years. I think this was the early 1950's. He stayed there at a camp. One of his daughters was born on the camp, Patricia. She's living in Ireland now.

D'you remember anything else about your uncle? What else did he do?

He was attached to the King's Own Scottish Borderers from early part of the war, say 1941. I think the operation was Operation Torch in the North Africa campaign. He was part of the BBC that followed the King's Own Scottish Borderers through, broadcasting back to London whatever messages they sent them. He worked for the BBC all his career and he ended up the top manager of the BBC in Northern Ireland, Belfast.

He travelled to Belfast quite a lot then?

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No, he lived in Belfast. He is Irish anyway – all the family's Irish. The reason he stayed in the New Forest, the family were all Catholics – as mine are – but he married a protestant girl and both families come into conflict 'cos neither family wanted to marry outside their religion. So they got married over here – oh, I forget the name – anyway, he got married somewhere in the New Forest. I can't remember the name of it at the moment. Where was the Show coming on, when you got to the New Forest? What town's that in?

So where were they get married again, sorry?

They got married at Lyndhurst. My father and mother, both Roman Catholics, but they didn't have any trouble with different religions. They went down to his brother's wedding and they were best man and bridesmaids to 'em because no one else in either family would have anything to do with them.

Mm. Could imagine there might have been a little bit of conflict there.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, there certainly was.

What else can you remember about your uncle? There's a nice cheeky picture of him here that we're looking at, him sat on a bike there. Was that his Austrian girlfriend there?

Yeah, Austrian, yeah.

Well, there's not a lot I can remember actually 'cos once he left the New Forest he went back to Belfast and I didn't see him again except for funerals and whatever. That was it.

00-06-55

So your journey inside this sidecar, do you remember anything at all about ...

Not really, because I sat on where it's just a tight fit, myself and my brother sat on my mother's lap all the way to the New Forest and back home to Portsmouth. So no, I can't really remember.

I know going through Portsmouth at the time we must have passed a lot of bomb sites there because when I grew up a lot of the streets all around where I lived were just flattened. I expect at the time, most of Portsmouth was like that.

Can you remember anything about the speed of the bike or anything like that?

I don't think it was very fast. Couldn't go fast anyway for the state of the roads at the time. I should imagine it done about 50 at top.

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Nice bike though all the same.

Oh yeah, all the German vehicles and motorbikes should be.

Do you remember anything else about him being at Belfast or travelled to Belfast?

No, not really. I can't remember much about that. And no one would speak about wartime experiences and whatever. And now, myself and all my cousins, which is quite a lot in Belfast, we would all like to know what our fathers did but we know very little, 'cos our dads wouldn't talk about it. Like most dads who went through the Second World War. Never spoke about their exploits.

Needless to say your uncle never really talked to you?

No, he spoke to his sons – Gareth and his other sons - Neil and whatever – and they said their dad hardly spoke to them. He did tell them about travelling through from North Africa, chasing the Germans out of Sicily, crossed to Italy, up Italy and into Austria. All he done was the BBC following the King's Own Scottish Borderers.

Must have seen quite a bit then?

Yeah, he certainly did. Well, I think he should 'ave done anyway, 'cos there was some the hard fighting going out there.

OK, all done.

End: 00-09-56

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File name	JPT	019	_0002M0.WAV	Interview date: 06-08-13
00-00-00				
(Sorting through photographs)				
Yeah, on the marriage. When they got married in the New Forest – as you seen that on the certificate – where the two families wouldn't allow it, but they got married here. The best man was my dad from Portsmouth, which was Stephen's brother, and he was the best man and my mother was the sort of maid of honour down there.				

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(more sorting over photographs)

Here is a picture of Stephen. He's suffering from cancer there.

How old would he have been in this picture here then?

Aah. He was the youngest of the brothers, and that's his son, eldest son and that's his grandson.

Oh right, so his grandson there is in the army?

Yeah, he was, yeah.

What regiment was he in d'you know?

I think it looks like – by the look of it, it looks like the Logistics Corps. Yeah, by the lanyard and by the cap badge. Looks like the Logistics, yeah.

And how long was he in the army for?

About six years I suppose. Mark there, he done his apprenticeship in the Belfast docks as an electrician and he left there and he joined the fire brigade and he stayed there 'til he retired. I think that was about 50. I'm not sure about what age that that is.

I don't know where all the other information is. I should have got it all out. No, it's not in there.

(much rustling of papers)

Oh, I've got a picture here. The house they've just pulled down or they're going to pull down, it's where the whole family grew up in Belfast. Waterford Street, yeah.

When was that picture taken, d'you know?

That picture was taken about 25 years ago now, yeah.

You can see half the house there has been ...

Yeah, it was a whole terrace house and it took five children to my name, so that house had seven people living in it – oh, and plus my great-nan, she was living there as well while she was alive.

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There's another one of the brothers. Ah, here's all the family. That was uncle Stephen's family. And here they all are in their **walking** gear, you know, in the services. Uncle Jim, Auntie Audrey, she died in New York.

So James there, I'm guessing Jim would be a nickname or something?

No that's his – oh, yeah, Jim, yeah that's his nickname. His proper name's James. Same with Margaret, Rita. There's Stephen again – the only younger photograph I've got of him. And Jack, although his name's John, and there's my dad, yeah, and my nan and my granddad.

They are decent photographs though, aren't they really?

Yeah, yeah. I've got it all on CD and everything. But I'll have a look through. There should be more photographs. Oh, that's a better picture. That's my granddad, that's my mum and that's Margaret you see dressing up.

Who are these two here?

Oh, that's me. That's probably about a year – oh, that's '46 – that's 1946 – and that's Michael, as I say he's two and a half year ...

What age would he have been in that photograph there?

I would only have been two years old, three years old, yeah.

(more searching through papers)

I know this is – that's my nan – that's her working in the linen there in Belfast. And there they are outside that house in Waterford Street that's been pulled down and that's my cousin **Linore**.

How long did they live in Belfast?

All the family still live there, most of 'em.

What did they all do for work?

Mainly they all worked in the linen mills, but all the sons, they joined the services during the war, so they could keep together away from it all. None of them went – oh, other than Stephen - went back there. They all stayed here.

I'll just have a quick look and see if there's any more.

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(more rustling of papers and muttering to himself)

I'm afraid that is it. Without going through it all but I won't be able to do that because I suffer my hand ... Unless you want to look through it, there's nothing I can really show you in what you're looking for.

The reason I actually got in touch with you is to see if ... well when what's-her-name – when Taylor was on TV she showed pictures of the prisoner of war camp at Setley. One of the front gates. They said there was an aerial one of the camp and I wanted that just to send to my family in Ireland because they was all too young to remember it.

Yeah, but obviously, Stephen seems like a cheeky chap, particularly there, sat on his motorcycle. But was he around much?

No.

Travelling a lot?

Oh no, once he went back to Belfast, probably in the early '50's, he just stayed in the BBC there in Belfast until he retired and that was it.

End: 00-08-28

Keywords:

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