

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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00-00-00				
<i>So, could I ask you to give me your name and your date of birth please?</i>				
I'm Dionis Macnair and I was born in, Burley, Burley in 1930.				
End 00-00-13				

File name	DMM	007	_0002M0.WAV	Interview date: 1/12/12
00-00-00				
<i>So where were you living at the outbreak of war?</i>				
War was declared while we were on the sea coming from Malta to Gibraltar and the liner wasn't supposed to stop at Gibraltar, where my father had been transferred, from Malta. But he pulled a few strings and he came out in a Picket Boat and the ship, which wasn't meant to stop at Gibraltar, stopped not in the harbour but out in the Straits where it was quite rough and the Picket boat is extremely small and it bobs up and down and they put a rope ladder down the side of the liner and it's a very long way down the side of an ocean				

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CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

going liner, particularly for ... it was o.k. for me and my 2 year old brother was carried by a sailor and Mother and my eldest sister were fine but we had a nanny who was 70, only four foot- eleven tall and at least four foot eleven round the middle and she must have been absolutely terrified and she also had a very beloved felt hat and that of course blew off as she went down the ... and all the passengers cheered. But she made it. And so we spent the first ... the 'phoney' war, in Gibraltar and then we were evacuated from Gibraltar at four hours notice when France fell.

And you came back from, from there to Britain?

So we were, we came back from there to Britain. It took eight days instead of the usual four, zig-zagging across the ocean and we were supposed to go into Plymouth but Plymouth was bombed so they couldn't have us so then we were supposed to go into Southampton but they hadn't got any customs men so they wouldn't have us, so they sent us round to Tilbury and in fact we sat in the Chanel for 48 hours, at the time of Dunkirk. It was beautiful weather and flat calm and we saw some of the boats going over but thank goodness we didn't see them coming back. And we went up the Thames on this beautiful morning and they ... I thought it looked like my Beatrix Potter illustrations but what was scary was when, in the evening we disembarked and the blacked out railway stations were, were really very scary. We came down here and stayed with my Godmother for a week but the house had been let because we weren't supposed to be back 'till September and my Grandmother had come out and joined us in Gibraltar. So we all had to go up to my other Grandmother in Wales where I spent an absolutely idyllic summer mostly on the farm. (laughs)

00:03:06

So when did you come back to Burley?

In that September; September 1940 and have been here ever since. And as I say, I was born here and we always used to come here for all leaves and things 'cause my mother was an only child and so on.

*What are your main memories of the New Forest in the war as a child?
Did it affect life for you particularly?*

Well, we actually had an extremely happy time, we ... the Pony Club continued, there were a lot of little gymkhanas, raising funds to buy Spitfires and parcels for Prisoners of War and we rode our ponies and so on and there was only one little stretch of beach open, coastal beach open at Mudeford and we used to go down to that and Mrs Mackworth-Praed's governess car because of course there was very strict petrol rationing, practically no civilians got any petrol at all. My mother actually got a gallon a month which she had to go to the other side of Ringwood to collect and she managed to buy a Baby Austin for nineteen pounds, licensed and insured for 6 months because the Baby Austin actually was the most

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economical thing, the gallon, it did 30 to the gallon which in those days was frightfully good. Of course you had to get all your Ringwood shopping done when you went to get your months petrol. We got ... she got it because we were more than a mile from a railway station and there was no public transport to the railway station, there still isn't. And, also because my Grandmother was over seventy and we were a mile from the shops, from the shops and church and other amenities, village amenities. But as you can see, it didn't go very far. And my mother was working as a V.A.D. up at Bisterne Close where a house had been turned into a convalescent home.

00:05:30

- Journey from Malta from her father's posting
- Refused entry at Plymouth due to heavy bombing
- Petrol rationing

What is a VAD?

Voluntary Aid Detachment. And she was on a night shift on one occasion and it was November, I think and the weather wasn't very good so she actually drove up. In driving back in the dark with ... the lights on cars in the war were both hooded and they were painted black, right across, just leaving a one inch strip across the middle, so they let out practically no light at all and to her horror, she found herself in the middle of a cricket pitch. So she never went out in the dark again in the car (laughs) for the rest of the war! I mean, the sort of things you did notice, was that the Forest itself was covered in army. Everywhere there were tanks manoeuvring and you can still see the tank tracks when they burn now, in a lot of cases. There were huge firing ranges. One all down Longslade and one up Church Moor below here, up the bog there. And so when the red flag was flying, you kept well away. The one out across towards Holmsley station, in the valley down there, had a large notice which said, 'Danger to those Mortar blind'. Well we always wondered what we were supposed to do about that. (laughs) But you very much stuck to the tracks because there was an awful lot of unexploded ammunition and what not all over the place and there were some very nasty accidents later on when, after the war. And there's still quite a lot out there in places. And, of course, in the north of the Forest there was the *huge* bombing range and of course there was Holmsley Aerodrome took a great bit of Forest and so did Beaulieu and Ibsley. And then they started ploughing up all Spy Holms, Magpie Green at Thorney Hill and Longslade, again, was all ploughed up during the war to try and grow food. They put ten tonnes of lime to the acre and they still didn't grow a lot of food. Also, of course, there was a terrific amount of timber clearing. The whole of the bottom of Oakley and Burley New except for a fringe round the edge was completely clear felled and the Forest, we were told, produced enough timber to build a bridge from Southampton to New York, nine foot wide and two inches thick. Which is an awful lot.

0:08:35.

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- V.A.D. work, driving during blackouts
- Large bombing range at Holmsley

Who worked on the timber clearing? Did they have to bring in people to work..?

Land Girls, were the, what did they call them?

Lumber Gills

Lumber Gills, yes, and they were all stationed, they, they commandeered Burbush House and they lived there. And of course, several houses were commandeered. There was this convalescent home and several were occupied by the army and just up here Burnt Axon was commandeered to put people who had been bombed out of Southampton. So we had quite a bit and as I say, the vicarage had two sisters with their two daughters, billeted on them. We had a lady and her daughter, bombed out from Portsmouth. And I actually kept in touch with Cesca for the rest of her life. She was the same age as me and we continued to ... she used to come and visit us every now and again. She did very well, she became a nurse and married and had two sons. So I kept up with her 'till she died a couple of years ago, which I think is quite unusual.

You were just told who you were to give your empty rooms over to?

Oh yes, empty rooms were not allowed. There was, I mean, there were certain things you inevitably noticed that every window had, every window pane had a cross of brown paper across it so that if the blast came, it would come out in one and not in shards, in theory anyway. And they said you couldn't have a bath more than five inches deep so a sort of plimsoll line was drawn round the bath (laughs) and of course there was rationing and rationing was extremely tough but I've always felt that Lord Woolton was one of the unsung heroes because he did a wonderful job. Until after the war, bread and flour were never rationed. There was National Flour, which I thought was rather nice but a lot of people didn't, there was no white flour at all. National Flour was grey and a bit gritty but I thought it was quite tasty and so that was never rationed. Fruit and vegetables were never rationed and in fact, everybody, I mean I went ... I was talking to somebody the other day who had been to Brockenhurst when it was a grammar school there during the war and she said all that grass, the car park, was covered in cabbages all through the war! Everything, everywhere anything could be grown, was grown. Everybody here with a garden, there was I think six of us living in Beacon Corner and except for a few potatoes, we were self supporting in fruit and vegetables and we, everybody kept poultry, we kept not only chickens but ducks and geese and have you ever plucked a goose? Because goose was what you had for Christmas. (laughs) Geese have got two ... you have to pluck them twice, once for the feathers and then for the down. And they're quite a job. But there was no nonsense, I mean, you learnt to ... we kept rabbits too and they weren't pets. We ate them. And so you learnt to ring a chicken's neck. My mother used to make lovely fur gloves from the rabbits' pelts.

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00:12:34

Of course, clothes were rationed and so you certainly had your sisters' cast off, you had nothing new, everything was cut down and adapted. But what you don't know, you don't mind. You don't bother and the same ... the food was extremely healthy, the fat ration was two ounces a week of butter and lard, a pound of sugar, I think, a month, a pound of preserves a month, sort of one egg. And then they introduced dried egg which most people thought was perfectly horrible but I rather liked it. And then you had the Spam and Snook and all these funny things that came.

So what was Snook?

Snook was a kind of a fish, I'm not quite sure what but fish was virtually unobtainable except for a tinned salmon from Canada and you get a certain amount of that on points. You had twenty points a week which you could spend on other things in the grocery. But of course there was a lot of barter and everybody with gardens when they had a surplus, they bartered it. But also they did a terrific lot of preserving. The eggs, when there was a surplus, were preserved in water glass, which nobody's ever heard of now.

Was that 'Isinglass'?

Yeah, in buckets. And there was a lot of preserving of fruit and vegetables in Kilner jars. Great thing about that was you could preserve it without using any sugar. My mother also kept bees, so she had honey to exchange and so on from time to time and so you know, this village, during the war was completely self-supporting.

00:14:33

- Lumber gills
- Giving up empty rooms in the houses
- Lord Wilton and rationing
- Being self- sufficient
- Spam and Snook, egg preservation

Before the war, there were thirteen shops in the village, though one of the ... we had two butchers and three green grocers, three grocers and that, of course got down to one of each. And there were a lot of little businesses so it's, it's very sad that that has completely changed. And, of course, it was a very open, everybody knew everybody and we had the village policeman who had to put his uniform on before he could arrest a carrier pigeon that alighted on us one day (laughs) and, which actually was a mistake because they, those carrier pigeons were very ... they carried very important messages and people wonder why, you know, they make such a fuss about the noise from Herne Airport. I never notice aeroplane noise because Holmsley was just up there and those bombers or whatever, went

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off every night and came back every morning and so on, and you just shut them out. Holmsley Station won the prize for Southern Railways for the most transport ... for the most traffic per number of people employed. Well, the number of people employed was one and, of course they shipped out all this timber from the Forest, went from there ... gravel, a lot of gravel and of course, Holmsley ... leave traffic and things like that. And you could walk to Holmsley from here and get a train and get up to London that way so it did actually have quite a lot of traffic. And then, of course, it was axed by Dr Beeching after the war which was sad in a way (laughs) but ... so I can remember the railway with the steam trains which used to set fire to the Forest with great regularity, sparks from the trains. And on one awful occasion, they ... the fire came up across the Moor and on here and they mis-positioned the Ringwood fire engine and the fire engulfed the Ringwood fire engine (laughs) and they only just managed to stop it before it got up into the houses. So that was quite something, so there was that. But things like the Burley Show continued, the pony show continued, the stallion show continued and again, we used to either ride there or go in the, in the pony cart and as I say, I can remember one ... they always ended the Burley Show with musical chair ... with musical tyres. And it always rained and now you'd remember waiting hopefully that nearly everybody ... it was the last event ... nearly everybody would have gone home and I would at last win a prize (laughs).

00:17:47

This was the sort of thing but, you know, one did a lot with the ponies and so on. And actually the ponies made a very valuable contribution to the war effort, and do you know what that was? Sir Berkeley Piggot was the Chairman of the Commonsers Defence *and* the Pony Society, *and* the Pony Club *and* a few, *and* the Polo Club and a few other things and he had one room in his house for each of his different societies and migrated round them. But he managed to organise a round-up of about 130, I think it was, mares off the Forest and a vet came and took blood from them, took a pint, or nearly a gallon actually of blood from each pony because Tetanus vaccine is grown in horse blood or was in those days. And of course, we used to import it from Holland and when Holland fell, that collapsed, so the Forest ponies came to the rescue! Because, of course, there was nothing more valuable at the time, than Tetanus vaccine for the wounded, and so on. I think he did it about three times, and I think you'll find that Mrs Tillier has got a photograph which would be worth following up.

Is Mrs Tillier still living in Burley?

No, she, she's ... oh, Fawley ... but she's very 'Forest' (laughs)

So people who had ... presumably your parents had ponies?

No,

They didn't at that stage?

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No. My mother bought me a two year old from Sir Berkeley for my thirteenth birthday. I'd been lent or given, I mean, my sister who is nine years older than me, she had a lot of friends here who had ponies and, of course, they were grown up and they went off to work, to fight in the, well to do different jobs in the war and I got to ride their ponies that were left behind. I had a grand time riding everything and the Mackworth-Praed's ones and Mrs Mackworth-Praed lent me one for the summer holidays on one occasion and one of my sister's friends gave me her old pony. Unfortunately, he was an old pony and after a year he started getting frightfully poor because his teeth went and he had to be put down. And then, as I say, my mother bought this two year old on the Forest from Sir Berkeley and in due course, when she was four, we broke her in and I've now got sixth generation down from her. (laughs)

So people who, people who, Commoners who had ponies, during the war, did they just let them out on the Forest as had been done previously?

Yes, to a degree, but with the blackout and all the army vehicles and all the firing and so on, the number were reduced; there were ... it was reduced to under a thousand, it was nine hundred and something that were turned out. But there were some and of course, cattle. Cattle, of course were dairy cattle in those days and they used to come home. There was no mild round here. You either had your own cow or you got milk from your neighbour who had a cow. And I, because I learnt, when I was up with my grandmother in Wales, to hand milk, I used to earn an honest penny by doing relief milking for people's, when the people's gardener who usually milked the cow, had his afternoon off, I'd go in and milk the cow. (laughs)

00:21:52

So, as long as the animals could, could provide their own food and were not taking food from humans, you were allowed to keep them?

Oh, yes, oh yes

What about the pigs, and the pigs, were they still there at that stage?

Oh there was an illegal bacon factory up at Old House. Yes, you were encouraged to keep pigs and pigs, of course, in those days lived on swill. And my sister, in fact, was at university for most of the war and one of her vacation jobs was driving round Winchester in a pony cart collecting swill from hospitals, restaurants, army camps, anywhere and taking it back to the pig farm for, for pigs lived almost entirely on swill and of course, now you're not allowed to do it, because unfortunately, there's so much imported stuff, and people put all sorts ... there was an awful thing called Tottenham Pudding which was all the swill that came out of London but it tended to contain broken glass and spoons and all sorts of rubbish so you had to sieve it and you had to boil it for a certain number of ... a certain time

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and, of course, people didn't always do it.

So how was the illegal bacon factory, was that just somebody setting up in a, in a garden shed?

(laughs) Well, I mean, old Deacon lived up at Old House, not in, the house was commandeered by the army who wrecked it, but there were two little bungalows in, in the grounds and he lived in one of those and he had a smallholding and he used to do a lot of, of contracting, haymaking and ... of course all the cows lived on bracken, collected from the Forest and he used to do that sort of job and he kept pigs up there. And he used to slaughter them occasionally. In theory, everything you produced that you didn't eat yourself, there was a controlled price and it all had to be sold through the Marketing Boards which was extremely sound because it meant that prices, food prices didn't rocket but nearly, a lot of people kept the pig on swill round the back of the house and they would have a litter of pigs. They would have one for themselves, one they would probably give to a friend or neighbour the rest went, all but one, would go to the Ministry and the other one would go to Mr Deacon. You were allowed to keep one, you see for yourself.

00:24:41

- Carrier pigeons
- Holmsley Airport
- Steam railway and Ringwood fire engine
- Burley show etc, carrying on through the war
- Sir Berkeley-Piggot
- Tetanus vaccinations from New Forest ponies ***** v interesting
- Keeping animals
- Controlled prices from the Marketing Board

And then, did he rear them?

No, no he slaughtered them and preserved them and salted the bacon down and so on, and then you got it back. But, so there was more pig meat round here than there should have been, put it that way. And unfortunately, the army reduced the number of red deer to three.

So was that intentional?

No

Just by, firing, from firing ranges?

I mean, meat was very valuable and the Mackworth-Praeds used to give parties, they were about the only people who did and they gave, they were extremely public spirited up at

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Castle Top. He was an Olympic shot and they had shooting rights and a rod on the Avon and they also had quite a lot of land. They had six cows, I think, and pigs and poultry and a big garden, including a mulberry tree and orchard. And they used to give parties, and my sister went to a dinner party there once where they had roast swan and moor hen soup and Felicity Hardcastle ('Ferocity') who ran the telephone exchange during the war, and also the cubs, 'cause of course the cubs and the guides and things all went on, and she taught them how to bake hedgehogs and squirrels in clay, in the earth. After the war, she became a vegetarian. (laughs) But, you know, there was an awful lot of ingenuity because you couldn't really live on your rations alone, you had to get some extra, and as I say, there was a lot of barter, there a was a lot of what have you and a lot of black market.

So what happened to the deer? How did the army, did the army kill them for the meat?

Oh yes, of course they did, particularly when the 'Yanks' arrived. (laughs)

What do you, how much did you see of the troops?

Enormous amounts, particularly in the build up to D-Day, every tree through the village up round Bisterne Close, under every tree there was a tent or a vehicle. It was absolutely solid and, of course, in, all over the Forest there was this. And then one morning, they'd just all gone. It was extraordinary. And, I mean, I can remember riding up through Berry on one occasion with Old Deacon, with Olga Goldby and we met Old Deacon and he said "You'd better not go up there me' dears," he said, "there's a stick of unexploded bombs." So we turned and went down through Burley Rails where we found a parachute hanging up in a tree. It looked as though there was a body hanging on the end but fortunately it was only equipment. The body had had a rather, he'd undone himself and let himself fall through a gorse bush and into a bog, clambered out of that and was picked up on the road by the police. It was a German plane that was shot down and the pilot managed to bail out, as I say, he was picked up. But, and of course, there was a big POW camp near Boldre and a lot of them were Italians and they were also working in the Forest, Italian prisoners, and my grandmother who ... there were German prisoners too .. and my grandmother had, spoke very good German and she was quite glad to be able to use it. (laughs)

0:28:39

Did you see the Prisoner of War Camp at all?

No, we never went over that far, you were pretty restrained. We did once bicycle to Lymington to the open air swimming bath there and that was hell because on the way home, the bearings in the back wheel of my bicycle seized up and turning the wheel was absolute murder and my mother kept on saying, "Why are you being so slow, come on, come on!" and of course, I hadn't a clue why the ... it was like streaming through treacle, it

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was awful. Then it was discovered that it was (laughs) the fault of the bicycle.

I gather it was quite frightening cycling through the Forest at night, ... with the limited amount of light.

Well, I mean, we were so used to it, there were never any, there weren't any street lights anywhere, there were no outside lights. And of course, the blackout was vicious. If you showed a chink of light, you were fined very heavily and, of course, the churches, if they had services in the dark, they had to put up wooden shutters across their windows, all their windows which were up for six months of the year. So, most of them didn't but some of them did. As I say, the blackout was absolutely ... but you got used to it and you could see yourself, I mean, starlight and moonlight was amazing.

00:30:09

But I can remember riding back from the Pony Club on one occasion after the 'Yanks' arrived, the black 'Yanks' and we met some at Bisterne Close and literally all you could see was their teeth and the whites of their eyes and we did think that was a bit scary but we were on ponies so we just kicked on. You felt, you know, you felt you could go faster than them on a pony. And there was also a flasher around and so, we got quite used, we'd look out for him and turn in the opposite direction and canter off. (laughs)

- Telephone exchange employee
- Lead up to D-Day, Forest packed
- Unexploded bombs and German 'plane crash
- POW camp near Boldre

So seeing, well, coming across American soldiers but particularly black ones must have been quite a novel experience for you.

Oh yes, it was a novel experience but, as I say, children take things for granted. What's there's there, you know, I mean, I frequently would like now to say, well, how? why? where? ... but you didn't, you just took it, you accepted it and, as I say, I actually had a wonderful childhood I reckon, and there were no television, there was no computers, so you couldn't sit for hours in a totally unreal world. The food might have been a bit dull but we didn't know any better so we thought it was o.k. There was never any choice and we were firmly rubbed into us that sailors have lost their lives bringing this to you so *you* eat it! And you knew perfectly well you weren't going to get any choice and you did. And another thing, of course, Lord Woolton did, which he insisted and he got, half a pint of milk for every child every day in school, whole milk and school dinners, of course. School dinners, we mostly, we rather liked them which tended to be, what was it?, 'slop and stodge' was what we called the puddings (laughs) but, and then when the Americans came, every now and again, we had waffles and they were absolutely delicious but that was only after, after the Americans came and that, unfortunately didn't happen very often.

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00:32:26

So did the soldiers, did some of the soldiers come into the school to ...

No, no, no, no, but because they were, I expect they got them from their NAAFI or something, you know. They used to produce quite a lot of treats, the Americans. And, I mean, they used to take girls out and give them stockings, silk stockings, which of course you couldn't get at all and all this sort of thing, so they were a bonus.

Where did you go to school? Was it in the village?

No, not then. When I was six, I went to the P.N.U School which then was round on Forest Road but that evacuated down to Cornwall, the beginning of the war and the Army took over the building there. No, much to my *fury* I was sent to boarding school. Mother thought it was safer and of course, there were scholarships for service personnel. There had been before the war because, you know, service personnel moved round so much that boarding school was considered to be the thing for them. So, I went first of all to a school that had been evacuated from Switzerland to near my grandmother up in Shropshire, on the Shropshire boarder with Wales, which was very small. And then I went to Down House, Newbury. So I was only actually here in the holidays until I was sixteen and by then the war was over. But, the holidays were much more important than the term. I loathed the school (laughs) and I left at the first possible opportunity. (laughs) Both my brother and sister went to university but I wasn't going to go to university.

So you mentioned the Cubs and the Brownies continued during the war , what was ...

And the guides.

What other social life was there?

Well, they used to have dances in the village hall and I mean, because there were hundreds of soldiers and a bit of a shortage of girls, you went to these dances when you were about fourteen, which was great fun. And, so, as I say, that was one ... I remember one up at Avon Tyrrell and there was, and one at Holmhurst, various, you know these sort of 'village hops'.

So where did the musicians for these dances come from?

Oh, they were all amateurs but I mean, a lot of people had them as, had it as a hobby, there were a lot of people who played various instruments and got together and played for dances and things. Or there were gramophones. And so some of them were done from gramophone records. And, of course, nanny used to be installed in a room in Beacon Corner, my brother was put in the dining room, because that was supposed to be the safest

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room in the house, downstairs in the middle of the house. So, the nanny was in the end sitting room, which had been a sort of day nursery, and she used to listen to 'ITMA' and 'Much binding in the Marsh' and I used to love going and listening to those with her. So that was, you know, there was that, the wireless was great and everybody used to come in to listen to the news and ... but I always felt that it was very tough that my father, from the time we left Gibraltar, which was three days after my brother's third birthday, he ... I can only remember seeing him for about three weeks in total during the war. And by the time he came back, of course, my brother was eight and I think that was very tough on both of them. But that was normal, there were an awful lot like that, weren't there? Hundreds. And of course, an awful lot never came back at all, so in that way, you know, you can be lucky. Father never wrote a letter if he could possibly help it. He wrote to mother but he never wrote to anybody else, but mother always saw that we had birthday and Christmas presents, which she bought from father (laughs) and she'd tell us as much as she could about what he was doing and so on, so she kept him in the picture, both ways. She did a marvellous job because there must have been terrifying times and, I mean, when Southampton was bombed it got very noisy here

['ITMA' - It's That Man Again (or, commonly, ITMA) was a BBC radio comedy programme which ran from 1939 to 1949. and 'Much binding in the Marsh' - Much-Binding-in-the-Marsh was a comedy show broadcast from 1944 to 1954, firstly by BBC radio and subsequently Radio Luxembourg.]

Could you hear it from here then?

Oh Lord yes, you could look out and see the fires and the flashes and the tracer and the barrage balloons being illuminated by the search lights and so on. And actually, ninety something bombs were dropped on the Forest and none of them hit anything! Within the actual Forest, there was a stick just below Castle Top and for ages, there were little ponds, round ponds which were all over the Forest little round ponds where these bombs went off. Castle Top was shaken a bit and cracks and things appeared, otherwise, it didn't do appreciably much damage. Though of course, there was a church bombed at Holbury, I think, right on the edge of the Forest. That was destroyed and there was a lot round about but, so it could be, it could be quite scary but we ... people were very busy, so we tended to be chucked out in the holidays and told to come back for tea and we entertained ourselves with our ponies and our bicycles and our playing silly games like 'kick the can' and these sort of things. We used to race the ducks and, you know all sorts of, of, and I know there was a splendid occasion when the chickens all got drunk on rotten apples (laughs) and there was another one where they trod on a bowl and it fell over its head and this bowl was running round and you couldn't see the chicken underneath. We had a lot of fun, and so on, but it was all very simple but probably extremely healthy. We had to take a lot of exercise outdoors for lack of anything else and, as I say, we were thrown out and told to come back in time for tea. So we actually had the most wonderful freedom. Nobody locked a door and we went through all these army camps and so on and nobody would ever have thought of molesting a child, they were far too occupied with more serious considerations. As I say, apart from the flasher, you know, they, I think they enjoyed seeing us go through and so on. And it was great and I ... we had a great childhood actually. And though the war obviously

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caused misery for millions of people, one unconsidered consequence in this country was that Lord Woolton's efforts ... because at the beginning of the war, a lot of the soldiers from the slums were rejected because their physical health was too poor because their diet was too poor and yet during the war where everybody got exactly the same rations and then you used your ingenuity to augment them and, of course, there were cafes, you know, British restaurants where for a very cheap sum, you could get a midday meal. No choice but there you were. And the toy factory down in the village became a little Wellworthy's subsidiary and a lot of people from the village worked there and Mary's café did these cheap lunches, so did Picket Post ... 'The Copper Kettle' ... and when the rations ran out on Friday, you used to go and have one of these cheap lunches to augment it and everybody did.

00:41:39

So there was one of these British restaurants in Burley?

Well, it wasn't actually a British restaurant but it was under the same ... they weren't allowed to charge more than five shillings, I think it was, for a meal. It may even have been less. And so everybody used to go there on a Friday and that was a great social occupation. So, but as I say, the unconsidered consequence of all this fresh air and exercise, all this extremely healthy rationed food and the fact that we had masses, we had to have a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables, locally produced organically, and we were told that you should eat, if you possibly could, you should eat your vegetables within 24 hours of picking them because otherwise they lost a huge amount of their vitamins. So, of course, we did. Picking Brussels Sprouts in the frost was not a popular occupation, collecting rabbit food wasn't a frightfully popular occupation either. You used to have to get 'Blind Holly'. They lived on that a lot in the winter.

So you'd collect that from the Forest, [yes] to feed the pet rabbits, the pet rabbits who were going to be eaten?

Oh yes, the rabbits, they weren't pets (laughs) we bred them, so we had quite a lot of rabbits.

Yes, somebody else said that to me, that they lived on, the only meat they had, really, was rabbit.

And, well, chicken of course too because you, as the ... you kept them for two or three years and when their laying started to drop off, you had boiling fowl. And if you reared, you had the cockerels and of course, we had ducks and geese so of course, we ate them too. Goose was the Christmas fayre, apart from one goose at least, and it used to produce an enormous amount of goose grease fat which was invaluable because the fat ration was so small. And so there was a lot, as I say everybody made jam and preserves and everything like that. So everybody worked extremely hard but of course, we had to take outdoor exercise, we didn't have screens to sit in front of, we had an extremely healthy diet but we

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were just in time for the antibiotics which were at their most effective when they first came in before the bugs had built up any tolerance to them and a certain amount of vaccination. So, the result was, the most healthy, long lived generation there has ever been, and is ever likely to be, the way we're going at the moment.

Talking about health, was there a G.P. in the village?

Oh yes, there was a doctor.

There was no problem with getting medicines and seeing a G.P.?

There was no problem seeing him, and he would come at any time of the day and night. He was on twenty-four hour duty, three hundred and, he was just on his own and he was twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. And most of the G.P.s like the clergymen and the other people, were all over the age of military service; they were all over 45, and they must have worked their backsides off. And, of course, all male school teachers too, were over the age of 45 and, you know, and then of course there was the Home Guard.

- Lord Woolton and school milk and dinners
- PNU school
- Dances in the village hall (village hops)
- Southampton bombing
- Holbury Church bombed
- British Restaurants, 'Wellworthies', The Copper Kettle
- Antibiotics and GPs

Did you know anybody in the Home Guard, you had a Home Guard in Burley did you?

Oh yes, our gardener was a very keen Home Guarder! All the little slit trenches they dug, I couldn't think why, I mean, they were a perfect hazard for falling into, these blessed slit trenches because they were about that wide and about that deep and they were in the most unlikely places on occasions.

00:45:51

What were they intended for?

I'm not sure. (laughs) Practice at digging trenches, I should think, and getting down into them and firing out, you know, because there were two or three up the hill, here, looking out over the Moor, in case the invasion came up from Mudeford, I should think, you know. But there was one on the side of Lucy Hill and I could never think what on earth that was meant to do. (laughs) And then of course, they dug big trenches across the Moor, for instance, up in the north where there are those big areas of moor, to stop German planes landing. So, when they filled those in, they tended to subside and the heather was growing over the top

and they were lethal. So (laughs) you learnt self-preservation, which children don't learn now which is very sad and could be disastrous I think. Also, of course, everybody realised that nowhere was safe, so people took more risks, you know, children were nothing like so over protected as they are now. Nobody had time for one thing, everybody was busy and so on but on the other hand, everybody knew everybody so everybody looked out to everybody else. There was a real community spirit, and the W.I. used to make all their preserves and cooking and so on, they did, and how to make your clothes ration go further and alter your dresses and so on. They did an awful lot of that sort of thing. And so, mother did that. She was very cross because in 1941, they did away with what they called the 'immobile V.A.Ds' that was the ones whose had children under five, so they couldn't be sent away. And so then she joined the W.V.S. and she used to drive a mobile canteen round the aerodromes and, of course there were no plastic cups in those days, they were all china and the mobile canteen was a very elderly vehicle that suffered from 'wheel wobble' and there were nine right angle bends between the depot at Ringwood and Holmsley and round all of these 'rattle, rattle, rattle, rattle, rattle' and you went up and you served tea and coffee and little snacks and things round the perimeter of all the various workshops round the perimeters of the airfields.

00:48:43

Did you go with her?

In the holidays, I sometimes did and served. On one occasion, she got onto the runway and that caused frightful consternation, flashes and shoutings and so on. She was swiftly escorted off while the large 'plane bore down (laughing) from behind. And then on the way back, you washed the cups in Sopley stream, no detergent, cold water, but there you were, that's how it was done, nobody died. (laughs)

Do you remember anything else about Holmsley Airfield when you were out there?

00:49:20

Well, as I say, I can remember the blacks there for one thing. There was one that ... they were allowed one small bar of chocolate each and there was this black chap who had a distorted finger and he came back for a second one and I said to mother "No" and she said "why?" and I was far too embarrassed to say why, why, how I'd recognised him. So he got away with it, but I think quite a lot of them did that. Like I say, there was quite a lot of this sort of thing. (laughs) But it, one of the things was, of course, there was a saw mill at the bottom of Oakley and another at the bottom of Burley New and the pile of sawdust grew to be about six foot high and about thirty feet, well nearly twenty yards across where they sawed up all this wood and that was just out on the open Forest from there. So there was quite a lot of innovations and an awful lot of the Forest was taken.

So did it look very different by the end of the war?

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Yes, and of course, up on Spy Holms for instance, where they put down this ten tonnes of lime to the acre, you got a wonderful growth of the little gentians and ladies tresses, orchids, and now there's the dilemma that the lime has now leached out, it's taken a long time, but it's leached out and the heather's come back and, of course, you lose, you've practically lost those and there's a dilemma at the moment as to whether any of that should be kept because it's part of the history of the Forest and they would rather like to keep these flowers. And they're so small that hardly anybody knows they're there.

Do you know what crops they tried to grow there?

Corn, I mean, that was essential, that was what they really wanted. Either dredge corn for animal feed for cattle and pigs and, you know, particularly cattle, and, or corn to go into the National Loaf because that was the real problem, that was, with all the sinking and so on, to get, without rationing bread, which he was determined he wasn't going to do, it was a frightful job to get enough, to import enough grain.

Presumably the climate and the drainage was just not suitable?

No it was the soil, the soil was far too acid and very thin. (laughs) It just is not grain growing country, not on the places they ploughed up. They used to grow it in, in, you know, on some of the holdings in the villages, which of course all the villages were built on the better soil. And quite a lot of, I mean, Burbush, for instance, they ploughed up quite a bit there and grew ... the field at the bottom here was ploughed up and corn was grown in a lot of fields in the villages, by... [ended]

End 00:53:03

- Home Guard
- Slip trenches
- Community spirit WVS mobile canteen
- Hilarious story about washing up, brilliant quote
- Sawmills
- Lime leaching and wild flowers

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