

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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So Betty, if you'd just like to say who you are and where you were during the war

My name is Betty Sheffield and my husband was a dentist during the war and he was posted to New Milton from Plymouth. OK?

Ok. Well what did your husband do whilst he was in New Milton?

Well, he was a Captain in the Dental, the Royal Army Dental Corps and he was sent to New Milton to open a practice to take the men who were waiting to go across to France for D Day. The practice itself was in New Milton. It was a little house at that time and it was turned into a two floor practice, just for the soldiers, no one else.

Where exactly were you living at this time Betty?

Well at that time he was an officer, therefore we could live out. We didn't have to live in barracks and his parents had a holiday home in Nash Farm as it was in those days, opposite Chewton Glen and we lived there for the year that he was stationed in New Milton.

When exactly was he stationed there?

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He was stationed there from March 1944 to the following April 1945.

So you must have seen a lot of the build up of troops?

Oh yes! Oh yes! We saw, everywhere you went, there were military vehicles and just piles and piles of them. Hundreds of men, but so well hidden that you couldn't see them until you knew that they were there. On one occasion we had to go to Winchester prison. I think there were some prisoners there that he had to deal with and the vehicles were absolutely; there wasn't an inch between them, it was quite fantastic. The day before D Day we went down to Barton Beach just to look. You couldn't get down onto the beach because of all the wire all along the beach, it was forbidden. The sea was absolutely covered with boats from one side to the other. You couldn't believe it. Then on D Day itself all the aeroplanes going across you know, hundreds and hundreds of them, they just went on and on, hour after hour after hour. It was fantastic really.

What was it like the day after D Day?

The day after D Day it was sort of flat because everybody was terribly excited about the fact that it had happened and we all expected it to happen, especially him, because about five days before that, every single patient that came in had to be in with two military policemen. They were absolutely forbidden to speak to anybody. Nobody knew exactly what was going on. Everybody suspected it but of course it was a day late because of the weather. It should have been on the fourth and should have been the fifth or the fifth and the sixth. I'm not quite sure which day it was.

So I understand Betty that your husband used to go and visit the Italian prisoners of war?

[00.04.55]

The day after that of course all the troops had gone and he was sent then to Setley Plain where there was a prisoner of war camp for the Italian prisoners of war. Mostly very nice chaps he said, he got on very well with a lot of them. In fact we had several letters afterwards thanking him for things he did that he shouldn't really have done I think. I think he made one or two dentures that he shouldn't have done, but there you are. At that time I think quite a few of them were allowed out to do jobs, gardening and odds and ends. I think a few of them stayed in England didn't they? Yes. He always used to get his lunch there. He said he had a much better lunch than I could provide! (laughs). The food was extremely good! He stayed there then, I don't know whether the camp shut? He was sent to Kenya then in April, it was my birthday, April 7th, so I remember exactly the day that he went. That was '45 wasn't it.

So Betty, did you hear about any bombs dropping on the area?

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Just previously you see there had been an awful lot of raids. Every day there was a raid and you prayed that the aeroplanes would go over 'cause you got used to the various sounds of the engines and you knew what it was and you prayed that they would be going over the top of you. There was one particular day where they... If there were any bombs that they hadn't dropped the bombs that they ought to have dropped them, they dropped them just to get rid of them and this one particular day, one dropped in the middle of New Milton and quite a few people were killed I think. It was very sad, but there you are.

End

Keywords:

New Milton, Dentist, Setley Plain, Italian, Prisoner of War, D Day, Bombing, Casualties, Barton-on-sea

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<i>So I understand that your husband had quite a lucky escape one night?</i>				
<p>Yes. I think it must have been '41. They had come down. His father was also a dentist. They had a practice in Swindon and they also had a practice in Southampton. They had come down from Swindon on the Saturday night and they must have realised that a raid had started and not to sleep in Havelock Road, this was. They decided not to sleep there, coming down to the chalet in Nash Farm. When they got back in the morning, the bomb had gone right through the centre of their house and it was completely demolished. Firemen were digging, looking for the occupants and they said "We're not there, we escaped".</p>				
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End				
Keywords:				
New Milton, Dentist, Bombing, 1941, Southampton				

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