

## New Forest Remembers WWII Project

### Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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File name	B1M	007	_0001M0.WAV	Interview date: 22-11-13
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**00-00-00**

*Could I just ask you to tell me your name and where and when you were born?*

I'm Belinda Montagu and I was born Stone Farm on the Cadland Estate where my father farmed before the war.

**End: 00-00-14**

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**00-00-00**

*What are your main memories of the New Forest in the war, as a child?*

Well we only went as far as we could ride on our ponies or on our bikes, 'cos there was no petrol, and so we did get around quite a lot but my memories particularly before D-Day was the enormous number of troops that were stationed in the Forest. They built concrete roads

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and the jetties down before D-Day and you couldn't put a pin between all the vehicles and stuff before they went off. It was extraordinary watching it all.

*Can you remember specifically what changes they made to the roads? You talked about the concrete roads ...*

Yes, they widened the roads with concrete areas in order to park vehicles before D-Day and they built, as I say, at Cadland a concrete road down through the estate where they built the pier for loading all this stuff. There was vehicles and troops and supplies in every corner, jammed in before that D-Day.

**00-01-21**

*Did you say that you were not actually in the Forest ...*

I was at school in Dorset actually when D-Day happened, but prior to that one had seen it all building up. My mother was head of the ARP and Civil Defence in the Fawley area. We had other families living with us in the war who had wanted to get out of London. We had evacuees in the early part who were perfectly awful because they'd never been in the country in their lives, they'd never eaten fresh vegetables or fresh food and I thought they were ghastly. (laughter) They picked their noses and wiped it under the table. (laughter) I always remember being very shocked at that behaviour.

**00-02-06**

*The troops based around the Lepe area, were they mostly Americans?*

We did have Americans. Cadland House was still standing and that was the headquarters, and we had General Patton - I think it was - there for some time who was a big American General. We also had Air Marshal Sir Arthur Cunningham because he'd been C&C at Calshot before the war and we had all his family living with us during the war. Then of course my step-brothers used to come home on leave and their step-sons used to come who had been great friends of my step-brothers. I always remember their eldest son being killed in France and the awfulness of that. I remember various people having their sons and so on, killed in the war and how that brought it home completely to one, that that was a frightful tragedy.

**00-03-16**

*When you were at school in the New Forest ...*

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No, it was in Dorset - St Giles's House - and I went there the other day with my son to see the house and have lunch with the present owners. It was a London day school – PNEU school – evacuated out of London during the war. A lot of the children there had parents who were prisoners of war. I remember when the Guards Chapel was bombed, one or two children lost their parents 'cos they were in that chapel on that Sunday when it was bombed in London.

There was a great feeling of uncertainty and I always remember having this sort of feeling of doom hanging over one as a child, you know, that something might happen. My father died when I was three and if anything happened to my mother, what would happen to me. Used to bother me a lot.

*Yes, I can imagine.*

**00-04-23**

*You mentioned that you saw black American troops. [Yes] Can you remember how that impressed ...*

----- we were fascinated by them. But you see, they were awfully kind to us and they used to give us Hershey Bars and all sorts of sweets. 'Course, sweets were very much rationed and we thought that was absolutely wonderful to be given an American Hershey Bar or something that we would normally never see. They were always very friendly and one only saw them very briefly 'cos they were then moved on almost immediately. The back of our house, they built a camp, and they had all Irish labourers who came to build the jetties and things before D-Day, before they went off. So we had this great contingency of Irish labourers living just at the back of our house. We didn't mix with them very much. We didn't see much of them.

*So they were living in tents?*

They were living in – no - they were living in Nissan huts. Then after the war they made a film there about the war, where it was supposed to be a prisoner of war camp. We were absolutely amazed watching the filming there, of a film being made about the war.

*Did you see the jetties that they were building?*

Oh yes!

*So what was it like?*

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**00-05-53**

The Mulberry Harbours were built on the land, and they were launched broadside on, (which was quite extraordinary), down the beach into the sea. There had been a jetty at the side and one of them broke loose as they launched it and was swished out to sea on the tide and was making off towards the direction of the Isle of Wight. These little boats came from Calshot in all directions, chasing after it, and there were these Irish labourers standing on the top of it shouting and screaming (laughter) and they eventually sort of captured it and towed it – I think they went up the Beaulieu river or somewhere they were taken anyway, I don't know where, but they did build some up the Beaulieu river as well, I know. They've got spaces there where they built them.

**00-06-45**

*And did you see the build-up of ships in the Solent before D-Day?*

Oh gosh, you couldn't put a pin between them hardly. It was quite extraordinary. Enormous build-up of shipping, yeah, and one thought – and my mother doing civil defence at Fawley were alerted, and they were on full alert sort of thing, because they thought that we were all going to be bombed to bits. Which never happened! How it never happened, the Germans never bombed them, because there they were sitting ducks, all this shipping and thank God it never happened.

**00-07-25**

*I gather that the King came to HMS Mastodon at Exbury just before D-Day. You were not aware of that?*

No, no. Nobody would know. It was very secret. Very, very hush-hush. One didn't know what was going on. They never, (chuckling) nothing was broadcast. They kept it very quiet. As with the SOE people at Beaulieu who were up in the houses there that were requisitioned. They used to have to go with the game keeper and learn how to live off the land. All those brave people who were dropped in France behind the lines, they had to practice it all here in the woods at Beaulieu. The game keeper was teaching them how to live off the land. The old game keepers who weren't already called up, because the shoots all stopped. All that sort of thing stopped.

**00-08-21**

*You said that you had somebody from military living with you.*

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Oh, we had endless people because of great friends. We were always very good friends with whoever was the C&C at Calshot before the war and knew the families. One of the Cunninghams – he was Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Cunningham in the end – and he disappeared on a Star Tiger aeroplane after the war and there was never any trace of it flying to Bermuda. His family lived with us and their daughter, and they had two sons same age as my step-brothers and they were always great mates and they were always up to no good. They were frightful. I always remember them – the game keeper – they got hold of his felt hat and they threw it up in the air and they shot at it. It was all peppered with holes and he wasn't too pleased at that. They were up to no good always those boys. (laughter) Of course they all went in the war, and Howard the eldest, that boy was killed in the war and fortunately my brothers survived.

I well remember the Bettridge's. He was the butcher at Fawley and I used to – Heather was my best friend – and I used to stay there very often when my mother was on duty, and of course, being a butcher and also farmer, we always ate very well in their household. Mrs Bettridge had been a nanny before she married so we were very well looked after. But you see, there was no electricity. We had oil lamps in those days. It was a very different life. Nothing was so instant. The fridge was an oil fired thing that didn't work very well. You bottled fruit and vegetables and things, but you didn't freeze things 'cos there weren't freezers. They didn't exist or any of that.

**00-10-20**

*Shall we talk a little bit about rationing. Were you very aware of rationing with food in short supply in the Forest?*

We were very lucky in the Forest because our 'daily' (who used to bicycle up every morning or when there was an air raid to sit with me while my mother went off on duty), she kept chickens. If you kept chickens you had a certain ration of corn for the chickens. We kept all the scraps for her chickens, and then we'd get eggs from her because we did an exchange. I think anybody living in the country, we were pretty lucky compared with people in the town who couldn't keep chickens and have rabbit and pheasant and even the odd bit of venison.

*So, you were saying that people were still able to shoot occasionally or not on a big estate ...*

Yah, they didn't have shoots run as – the big estates had shoots for the game keeper. That all stopped. But I mean, my brother had gun, when he came on leave he would go out and see what he could get. But we also had a pheasant trap.

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*So you still went to keep that operation ...*

Occasionally. We kept the odd one. It's quite illegal I'm sure, but the pheasant trap was a very easy thing – I don't think anybody knows how a pheasant trap is made any more. It's a square made of wood with bars around it and you propped it up. You put some corn in it and when the pheasant went in, hopefully it dropped down on top of it. But it was totally sort of Heath Robinson. It wasn't anything that anybody would do nowadays I don't suppose. But of course all the shoots stopped, all the big shoots, but there were still quite a lot of pheasants around. They were good to have if you could get one.

**00-12-15**

*Did you say that people kept pigs?*

Well, before D-Day there were so many troops, there was so much swill from all these troops. At Stone Farm they had pigs. The Harris's were the tenants there. They had pigs. In every place you could put a pig they had a pig, because they had all this swill coming in. You had to pick things like razor blades and that out of the swill because the soldiers didn't think. They just chucked everything in. I remember we always had to look and make sure there were no razor blades in the swill. And the stench – ooh! It was dreadful. All those pigs everywhere. Every building had pigs in it at that time.

*Were people allowed to keep as many pigs as they wanted to?*

Oh no, it was all supposedly very regulated by the Ministry and inspectors came round and things, but people found ways round things obviously because, I don't know, perhaps somebody went home with a nice piece of pork and kept their mouth shut. (laughter)

*So presumably there was somebody would come to kill the pigs in secret as well?*

'Course you did. What d'you think? People always did that for generations and generations. Not very difficult and it's a ghastly business killing pigs. It makes a frightful lot of noise. I mean, I've seen it done and (chuckle) all the guts being ripped out afterwards. You string 'em up. I've even done it with venison too. Most people are so sanitized now. Haven't any idea about where their food comes from – what happens.

I have family in Africa and they kill beef and you string it up in a tree, rip it open and get the guts out, and all the dogs would come round. You see, life now is very, very sanitized and governed by rules and regulations. People don't have any idea really about where their food comes from. What - you know - the business of doing all that.

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**00-14-25**

*And how would you have preserved the fruit and vegetables that you had ...*

Bottling, 'cos we didn't have freezers. It was bottled. It was slightly different.

*In Kilner jars?*

Kilner jars, yes. Masses of Kilner jars all in the larder, on the floor, piled up. I don't know, they seemed to have been – we seemed to be able to get Kilner jars. May be the government issued Kilner jars, I don't know, but through the WI. The WI was great at promoting all these things.

*So it was very active in the war?*

Oh yes, yes.

*And what would they have been doing and organising?*

Well, I don't know, because I was too young to be a member, but I do know that my mother was a member of the WI and they issued pamphlets on how to cook, make a meal out of practically nothing and how to cook it on a candle practically if necessary. All that kind of thing. How to survive. They had very good leaflets and things. I haven't got any unfortunately. I did have some but they also disappeared with all the rubbish that went.

**00-15-39**

*And did you say that the WI arranged for extra sugar rations if you're making jam?*

Jam, yes, yes. Absolutely, and I remember it well. Everybody getting together – the WI, all getting together and making jam.

*Oh right, as a joint ...*

As a joint enterprise, yes.

*And would that jam have been for your own consumption?*

Yes, I think so. D'you know, I can't remember exactly how it worked. May be some went to hospitals or something, I don't know. I wasn't old enough to know the ins and outs of that. I'm sure the WI have a very good booklet on it all if you were to ask.

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**00-16-20**

*And you said that your mother was involved with the civil defence.*

Yes, she ran the ARP headquarters which was in the golf club at Blackfield, which had newly been built - that golf club building - and it was taken over. She used to be there three nights a week always, and when she was on night duty, if we didn't have other families staying in the house, our 'daily' would cycle up in the dark and sit with me under the stairs when there were air raids.

*And did you have many air raids?*

Oh God, yes, 'cos Southampton was flattened. Absolutely flattened 'cos of the shipping - the port - and they very often because of the tremendous ack-ack - I mean, Ipley crossroads there was a big ack-ack gun. They were everywhere, and the planes would drop their bombs very often and get home as quickly as possible because they were being shot at from every direction. So they didn't hang about, and very often they just chucked their bombs out. A lot of them went in the Solent because they'd just chuck 'em out and get home quick. (chuckle) They pretended they'd dropped them on some target but we knew. (chuckle)

*And were you aware of any bombs dropping in the Lepe area?*

Oh yes, certainly were, yes.

**00-17-39**

One of the greatest excitements was this plane, and we saw it fly over very, very low. It landed in a field at Lepe. We jumped on our bikes and we went down and it was these people escaping out of Germany. They were Poles I think. We went down on our bikes and already the police were there and had set up a cordon and stopped us from getting near to the plane. There it was in this field at Exbury. It was all very secretive and we were all very excited. They were people trying to escape from Germany. They were refugees really, trying to escape, and they'd got this plane, I don't know how quite, and landed there in a field. It was extraordinary.

**00-18-39**

*Did your mother have a uniform? What did that consist of?*

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Yes, of course. (Sigh) Navy blue – I've got pictures of her, I don't know where they are any more. Navy blue with ARP badge and trousers, yes. What you call a battle top buttoned up, and a tin hat. She had a white tin hat with ARP on. They wore white ones so they could be seen in the dark. That was why. I had her tin hat. It was in the cellar at Beaulieu. I don't know whether it is still there, it probably is.

*Were you aware of any specific incidents that she was called out to?*

Oh yes, one was. I remember a big bomb landed at the crossroads and someone was killed. I don't know the whole thing, but I do remember that very well. I remember being in bed – 'cos we left our house at one point and I was at Boarn Hill at Cadland, the Drummond's house. They all went to America in the war, the children, all that lot, and I remember saying to them "I think you're cowards, all running away". I was standing on the beach there and they were jumping up and down and saying "We're going to America" and I was saying "I think you're all cowards". We were all about seven - six. (chuckles) Yeah, they went.

#### **00-20-13**

*It was a very fluid childhood you had, wasn't it? Your closest friends went off to America and then you had other people starting ...*

Yes, coming and going. We had the Cunningham family, came and lived with us. Sometimes we were staying with my grandfather who was on his own because they'd all gone to America with my mother's father at Cadland, and then sometimes we'd be at home. We'd bicycle between, up the green lanes and through between the houses and things. When the Air Marshal, who had been at Calshot - that's how we got to know, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Cunningham he eventually became – he was C&C Tactical Airforce, he was a New Zealander by birth and he treated war as 'you had the spoils of war'. We had these jerry cans of cheap wine from North Africa. They were flown into Beaulieu aerodrome, which was a military aerodrome in those days. My mother had a little two seater car, and we went to pick him up, and in the back we had all (chuckle) these jerry cans full of wine (laughter) from North Africa, and a whole parmesan cheese from Italy. I remember, because we gave a lot away to different people, but parmesan is a cheese you don't eat very much, it's more for cooking. We had some white mice at that time and they escaped and they lived in the cheese. (laughter) We thought that was hilarious.

#### **00-22-00**

*You mentioned 'Leave Houses' you were talking about. Could you explain?*

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Yes, we had a great friend in London and she organized 'leave houses' for what was called the colonial troops who when they got leave, they had nowhere to go. We used to have them come and stay with us. Different houses volunteered to put them up for their leave. We had a charming Indian called Kirpal Singh, and he used to come. We practically kept up with him for years after the war and so on, and one or two others, I can't even remember their names and things, but they used to come and spend two or three days or nights when they had leave and they had nowhere to go. Yes, it was the Victoria League who ran all that from London.

*And was is Kirpal Singh who you said only had his uniform?*

Yes, and there he was out (chuckling) in the Forest with the ponies in his uniform and wonderful white turban. We were always fascinated because he was a Sikh and he had long hair and we would go and say can we watch you do your hair or even put your turban on. As children, we thought it was very exciting to see that. He was a very nice man, charming, yes.

*So he had the turban with the regimental badge on ...*

Yes, with his Naval Crown on the front. Yes, white turban with Naval Crown on the front.

**00-23-40**

*What was carried out at Calshot during the war?*

Air-sea rescue, because of the flying boats, because when planes crashes they could go and pick up people, survivors who were in rafts, inflatable things or whatever they had. So it was all air-sea rescue and they had all the pigeons they could send back. It was just an ordinary sort of pigeon loft, but they would take the pigeons on the flights and then if they crashed, the pigeon could escape and come home and say where they were. It was brilliant. I thought so romantic and fascinating to go and see these wonderful brave pigeons. Some of them got decorated, I know, for their brave flights.

We used to get racing pigeons sometimes here, collapsed in the yard. I never see them anymore. I don't know whether it's still such a big sport as it used to be – pigeon racing, pigeon fancying. [*No, possibly not*] You never hear about it, do you?

**00-24-54**

*Did you go down to Calshot? I wonder what buildings there were there.*

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Before the war it was wonderful because they had a little steam railway running from the top down to the bottom. I remember when the King and Queen were going on, I don't know, the Empress of Britain or one of those ships out to Canada, and the band were on the steam train and they were a bit late and the boat was a bit early, and they were rushing down to get there to play on the jetty by Calshot Castle. A boat was going by, so they thought the royal family was on board. That was after the war though, wasn't during the war. I think they were doing the trip to Canada but I do remember that. It was hilarious, and that little train and the band, it was like Toy Town.

*So was the train there during the war as well?*

Yes, yes.

**00-26-00**

*And apart from the Castle, what buildings were there?*

Oh, there were huge hangars, yes, and the flying boats were brought in to be maintained. Then there was the sergeants mess and the officers mess. I used to have my birthday party in the sergeants mess and it was always great excitement. You could rent it. Anybody, for a party, you could rent it. Used to go to dances there. It was all great fun. Wonderful dances. Of course, they had a lot of dances in the Domus at Beaulieu.

*During the war?*

Oh yes, yeah. We've got to keep the morale up! So you do all these things, you see.

*So the dances at Beaulieu and Calshot, they would invite locals and the ...*

Yes, but the locals that were left were all old people because all their children, or all the younger ones, were away fighting or doing something else somewhere, or prisoners of war or whatever, so it was a different world really.

*So it would be mostly military, the men at the dances?*

Yes, yah. Oh, it was fantastic and a sixteen year old who'd go to a dance at Calshot. My mother made a dress because clothes were all rationed, and she had some old materials she'd kept from before the war and she made me a wonderful dress and I went in that wonderful dress. So thrilled, it was such a big deal in those days. Now, everybody has everything, can go anywhere, do everything, travel the world. We just went as far as our bikes took us.

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*And would you have live music at those dances, presumably?*

Yes. Well, Calshot had a band and when the King and Queen went by in the yacht at the end of the war, and the band went on the train, rushed down because they were nearly late, nearly missed them because they wanted to play the National Anthem as the ship went past (laughing) the end of the jetty there. I don't suppose they heard it, but then it was all considered the right thing. Well, maybe they did. Maybe they rushed on deck and were standing there, I don't know.

**00-28-25**

*The men based at Calshot, would they have been living in huts?*

Oh, there was a whole series of quarters there. The big lighthouse where the C&C, the commanding officer lived, well I used to go for parties and things sometimes because we always knew whoever was the commanding officer there. We always made a point of getting to know them because when they arrived, they didn't know anyone in the area, and so my mother always felt that she could sort of be friendly to them and help them with anything.

Yes, there were married quarters there and then afterwards the Tristan da Cunha's all went to Calshot when Tristan da Cunha had this great eruption.

*So they used the quarters there.*

Yes, and they all came pouring in. It was so funny. They were like people from the middle ages almost 'cos they sort of never seen civilization. They were so nice.

**00-29-33**

*You mentioned the searchlight at Ipsley crossroads, were there any others?*

Oh all round, everywhere. I can't tell you where they all were now. Yes, there were a lot of searchlights around, quite a few. In fact, at one moment we did have one on our lawn for a bit. That was because we had the Air Marshal and (laughing) he organized it. His family were living with us through the war, and he used to come. He used to fly into Beaulieu. He was a New Zealander and he had his own private Dakota all through the North African campaign and all up Italy. He painted it duck egg blue because he said "If my men can't defend it, I'll paint it any colour I like". He wouldn't have it camouflaged, so this beautiful plane, which was all furnished with wonderful furniture so that he could live on it wherever

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he had to be. I don't think Monty approved of it at all because Monty had very different ideas. He was very sparse about things, minimalist, and I think he thought this was terrible opulence. You see, the Air Marshal confiscated this house, (belonged to an Italian), in the south of France and we all went there for two years after the war. Beautiful villa in a quiet town, and then the Windsors came to lunch and dinner. They were in Bermuda all through the war. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor. I remember having to curtsy to her. As I was brought up, whenever you shook hands with a grown up, you curtsied. You always did. At school we used to have to go and say goodnight to the staff in a row, and we curtsied to each one of them, always. (chuckle) A different world, you see! Children were seen and not heard. A different world really.

**00-31-50**

*As children, what did you do in your leisure time? You mentioned cycling.*

We had ponies. We were farm children. (laughter) Yeah, we cycled and we rode our ponies. Yes, we had ponies.

*And that wasn't **accepted** by the one, you were able to keep as many ponies as you ...*

No, one only had the old pony. Didn't keep many ponies, you just kept the – we had old Pixie, then she got in foal, then she had a foal – that was Ladybird – but one was in that network of Forest people – ponies and things. Albert Nicholas, sadly was a tragedy, but one knew all the pony people. We used to have pony racing at Langley before the war with bookies and everything. It was very exciting, yes.

*And presumably things like that, those events stopped during the war ...*

Yes, but they started quite quickly again in a very amateurish sort of way. I remember driving with Albert Nicholas in this little pony cart from way down Mopley to Burley for the Burley Show and things. I remember a little pony called Nester in a little tub cart and he got out to help the pony up the hill outside Brockenhurst and our bottle of lemonade fell out and broke on the road - we didn't have plastic bottles in those days - and that was our drink for the day. (chuckles) It was a disaster.

**00-33-31**

*You mentioned Fawley, the fuel depot there.*

Yeah, well it was all buried underground on the Forest up there.

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*And that was for the military?*

Well, because it would be bombed. The refinery was bombed, so you had to hide it, put it underground. That was for the military, everything. Fuel was so precious 'cos it all had to be imported.

*Did you say there was an incident when it was flowing down the road?*

Oh that was before D-Day and they were filling up all the military vehicles. Yeah, it was.

*Can you describe what happened?*

The garage at Fawley was Mr Haywood. I suppose they were filling up all his pumps endlessly and they were just filling all these military vehicles, and every sort of jerry can with fuel for them to take with them. They had to take fuel with them because if you got to France and you ran out, you're up the creek. There wouldn't be fuel there, you wouldn't know where you get it so they had to take all these jerry cans of petrol. As I say, they were filling them up and petrol was running down the road. It would have been highly dangerous.

*Did you say there was an oil refinery at Fawley before?*

Yes, before the war. It started yes, the AGWI. The AGWI came and bought the land at Cadland and they wanted to have a refinery there. If they hadn't sold it, it would have been a compulsory purchase. The family knew that, so they sold it and dealt with the whole thing. Cadland House was still there, but the family had stopped living there and it had been run as a country club and that folded up when the war started. Then that was the military headquarters and General Eisenhower was there for a bit. We discovered that. Then eventually the house was pulled down, sadly. The whole thing just fell down. Beautiful home farmland. It was lovely, all that before the war.

*Did you see the Beaulieu river at all during the war?*

Not very much, no. We only went as far as your bike went or your Mum was on duty driving up and down to her headquarters and things, so one didn't get around very much. You didn't have the social life. Never went to Beaulieu, unless she had to go to a meeting. Mrs P-B, Mrs Playdell-Bouverie, ran the Red Cross at Beaulieu and she had meetings in Palace House.

**00-36-30**

Then of course, there were all the secret people in the houses in the woods which were all

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requisitioned. It was all very hush-hush, but we sort of knew about it, 'cos you do when you're a local, find out about things. They were being trained by the local keepers to live off the land and survive. Odette Churchill was there, who was famous. She died in a concentration camp I think.

A lot of interesting people went and worked with the SOE because they had knowledge of France and languages and all that, radio and so on. So there were all sorts of very interesting people working with the SOE at that time.

*So as a local, you were not ...*

Well, I was a child. One knew a bit about it, but not really. You didn't ask. When my mother kept very quiet, she knew quite a lot because she was head of the civil defence in the Fawley area, but she wouldn't have said to anybody. She had to go to meetings with the Beaulieu lot because they had to coincide and things about borders and what happened now and so on.

No, we didn't go anywhere much except on your bike.

*So presumably you didn't see any of the airfields in the Forest during the war?*

#### **00-38-12**

No, no. All those trenches were dug everywhere to stop enemy aircraft landing in the Forest on the open ground. Any open ground, they had trenches dug to stop planes landing. They were highly dangerous if you were riding (laughing) you could do a summersault. They filled with water always, those pits, very quickly.

*So they dug those even on the open heath, not just round the airfields?*

No, no. Right across the Forest, on the open heath, yeah. Anywhere where you thought a plane could land.

#### **00-38-42**

But then of course, they had areas which they ploughed up in order to grow food. Wheat, I mean, that green area if you go from Beaulieu towards the top, up towards Fawley, on the left there's a big green area. Well that was just land turned up, but the Forest land was so poor for growing crops on that it wasn't terribly successful, 'cos it's very stony rubbishy land. Very poor land. That's why it became the Forest because it wasn't good agricultural land on the whole. There were big areas where they ploughed up the Forest in order to

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grow food.

*Do you know what sort of crops they tried?*

Wheat and potatoes or barley, I don't know. Staples, yeah.

*But the landscape must have changed significantly during the war mustn't it, with the trenches and the crops, even when the troops were not passing through.*

Yes. Yeah, it did change.

### **00-39-48**

And you see, they built concrete road down to Stone Point and they built a cinder path for men to march three abreast to be landed before D-Day, to get on the boats to be sent across to France. Before D-Day it was absolutely heaving. The whole Forest was heaving with troops and vehicles, all hidden away waiting to go across D-Day. I was at boarding school D-Day so I didn't actually see it, but we saw it all beforehand and then after.

*Must have been amazing transformation when you think about it.*

It was sealed off. The whole coastline was sealed off, completely sealed off, nobody was allowed in or out unless you had a special pass and you happened to leave your house just the other side. It's completely sealed.

*So you had to show a pass every time you went ...*

If we went to my grandfather's house, yeah. We got to know the people on the gate, they knew who we were and they knew the car.

*And could you get down to the beach at all?*

No, not really. It was sealed off and they even put sacking and screening up along so you couldn't see what was going on behind it supposedly, but you could because you could sort of see through it practically. (chuckles) Six foot high sacking screen at places.

*Screening off the beach from the ...*

Yeah, from the mainland so that you supposedly couldn't see what was behind it.

*There must have been a tremendous number of vehicles coming and going.*

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Heaving! The Forest was – because they were all stashed away waiting to go across and they were all along the side of ??? they were. The road was divided into squares and they were all numbered and I suppose they were given a square and that was where they were parked. It was just extraordinary. But the actual D-Day I was at boarding school so I didn't actually see that, but I saw the build-up for it and then one saw afterwards all the stuff going across.

*I think we've covered most of the things you mentioned. Thank you very much. You've got some amazing memories of all that was going on.*

#### **00-42-17**

Well it was a very exciting time.

*But that was your memory as a child.*

I can remember lots of things about being a child, but one did remember all those things because it was all quite dramatic. Then I was evacuated to Devon to this huge house – my cousin's – and then a landmine dropped in the field behind the house and the whole cornfield caught fire and there was this blazing thing, looking and seeing this red – because they were bombing Exeter at that time which wasn't so far away. So it was considered it wasn't really particularly safe, so I came home. (chuckles)

#### **00-42-57**

*I gather that all along the south coast, before D-Day, they had practice landings.*

Oh yes, it used to be hilarious watching them do it, because they didn't understand about the tides in the Solent 'cos you get a double tide in the Solent in certain areas. So these landing craft would come roaring in and then they'd be beached (chuckling) and couldn't get them off again. They'd have to wait until the tide turned. (chuckles) We used to shriek with laughter at them. We'd be sitting on the beach having our picnic and that was always good sport watching them do the practice runs and things with the landing craft.

#### **00-43-38**

After the war, we had a very good American friend and he'd been in the Normandy landings and he'd been all through that. He came back after the war and we did a trip with him and his wife, and my mother and I, to France. He wanted to go back and see all the landing beaches where he'd been in the war. When we went, Caen was flat still, they had hardly

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started to rebuild. Everywhere was flattened. They had a terrible time in the north of France, Normandy, because they suffered in the First World War, but they suffered again. Everything, pathetic, awful for those poor people. You forget that all the civilians, how they had to survive with nothing practically.

**00-44-49**

*You mentioned how close you were to Southampton, were you aware of the raids going on?*

Of course you were! Gosh, you could see the flames going up into the sky, red glow, you couldn't not. When all the ack-ack guns were going, a lot of them just chucked their bombs out 'cos they didn't always drop them all in Southampton, they chucked them out and get home quick. They dropped a lot in the Solent. Awful lot went in the Solent because they just wanted to get the hell out and get home. I mean, these poor things, they weren't enjoying it, those pilots.

I remember that plane coming into Exbury and it flew so low over ??? I was standing outside the house and I could see the face of the pilot, it was so low. It landed at Exbury in the field and we jumped on our bikes and went down there. It was those people trying to escape.

*They were lucky that they were able to land safely, weren't they?*

They were. It didn't catch fire or anything, and there it was in the field there, and then the policeman sent us home. (laughter)

*Thank you very much. Shall I stop for a moment?*

**End: 00-46-04**

**Keywords:** D-Day, troops, concrete roads, jetties, Cadland, ARP, Civil Defence, Fawley, evacuees, Lepe, Americans, Patton, Cunningham, Calshot, Hershey Bars, Irish labourers, Nissan huts, war film, Mulberry Harbours, Beaulieu, SOE, training, Bettridge, rationing, food, pheasant trap, pigs, swill, preserving food, WI, jam making, air raids, bombs, ack-ack guns, refugees, jerry cans, wine, parmesan cheese, leave houses, Victoria League, Kirpal Singh, air-sea rescue, pigeons, Calshot band, hangars, dances, searchlight, Ipsley, cycling, ponies, fuel depot, refinery, Red Cross, Playdell-Bouverie, Palace House, anti-landing trenches, growing crops, screens on beaches, practice landings, tides, landing craft, Southampton, black Americans.

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