

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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<p><i>Could I just ask you to tell me your name and where and when you were born?</i></p> <p>Douglas Stuckey, Carshalton, Surrey, 18th April 1924</p> <p><i>When did you join the Navy?</i></p> <p>1940 ... end of 1941 I think.</p> <p><i>And you chose to enlist did you?</i></p> <p>I, I spotted a thing called 'Y entry' in Charing Cross Road which suggested you might be considered for a commission if you went in that way and I'd been in the Home Guard and I volunteered for the Navy and I had to wear flashes on my Home Guard uniform that nobody seemed to recognise prior to my being old enough to enter the Navy.</p> <p>End: 00:01:09</p> <p>Keywords: Y entry, Navy, Home Guard</p>				

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CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

What rank were you in the Navy during the war and where were you based?

Well, I was in training, obviously I was a rating to start with and then I became a Fleet Air Arm Leading Seaman for a time and eventually when I was commissioned, I was commissioned as Temporary Acting Sub- Lieutenant Special Branch RNVR and I got a letter from the Admiralty saying, would I go down to Totton to CFMSO in Totton which turned out to be a coastal forces supply depot.

Where was that based?

This was based in Eling Mill, not the old Tide Mill, but what was the Allis-Chalmers mill on the quayside there. When I arrived I was told by the Lieutenant Commander who was in charge there to take my things over to The Anchor Inn and that's where I was to live for a time, which was rather unexpected and some of my friends said, "That's a little bit jammy isn't it, actually going to live on a pub?" [laughs] At any rate it was, it was pleasant but, but it had its slight inconveniences that it was so busy, I mean every night it heaved with customers and sometimes the beer ran out. And it was very difficult not to socialise to a greater extent than one perhaps would have desired. The pub itself was a member of what was called The People's Refreshment Houses Association which was supposed to diminish drunkenness by offering, which was unusual at that time, tea and coffee as well as alcohol. Well in my time there, I didn't see much sign of tea and coffee but I did see a lot of alcohol and of course, when it came to the end of the evening, although I was a paying guest, I, I really didn't think I could just toddle up to bed and not help them a little bit [laughs] clearing the dreadful debris of the bar. It rather put me off wanting to become a publican ever in the future. A little ironic, the people there ... the landlord was a Mr Friend and with his wife, his daughter Rene and her child ... but unfortunately, he couldn't take alcohol himself, he had some kind of stomach trouble. And at the end of the night, he sat at the bar with a bowl of Slippery Elm Food before he went to bed. Sometimes the ... sometimes the alcohol did run out, the beer ran out and great distress through the village then. I mean you'd have thought the war had been lost at times. I say I used to have to socialise because the other two officers, the two other naval officers who were at Totton at that time were

00:03:41

Lieutenant Commander **Caunter** and Lieutenant **Madams**. Lieutenant **Madams** had been a manager of a G.E.C. electrical factory prior to the war, they were older than I was by quite a bit but they used to come over and have a drink with me and any odd officers who came down tended to drift in to the pub so, you know, I was glad to escape. Eventually, eventually I was allowed to go and live for a time at Toc H in Southampton. A friend of mine, Charles Edwards, was warden there and he had been training as a pilot, he was an older fellow, in South Africa and had a sort of breakdown and there'd been terrible trouble out there because the ... all the South Africans who were pro-British were fighting in North Africa, Tobruk and places. All the South African army personnel who were, and Air Force

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personnel who were left, tended to be, to a considerable extent, almost pro-German. So they gave our trainees who went down there to train at Pretoria and places, a very hard time indeed, to the extent that there was a mutiny one day and they had to fly in an Air Force officer from England to take, take charge.

00:05:23

At any rate, reverting back ... (pause) the supply depot had almost equal numbers of naval personnel and civilians. The civilians were chiefly recruited locally and included a fairly large number of women. We also had one WREN on the premises, a tall lady called Ross but what her purpose was and what she actually did I never rightly ... I'm not being critical of the lady, and of course because it was difficult to fit in a WREN, one WREN among a whole host of ratings, she tended to toddle about with us all the time so there were three officers and this WREN bringing up the, bringing up the rear.

How many of you were there in total at the base?

At the base, I'm not sure, I would have thought it was about eighty to ninety.

Oh, quite a large number

Of a fairly large number, yes.

So, apart from the locals and yourself in the pub, where did other people go?

A lot of them were graded as stokers and had been, come in from Portsmouth Barracks, just been drafted there. Actually, supplies, although I can show you in the book, The Further Look at Southampton Quay Railways, that there was a fair rail network down there both at Eling, and there were sidings and of course at Marchwood which was a big army base further down. But a lot of our material didn't come because ours wasn't usually top priority. It was necessary and so it used to come in on lorry or sometimes be left at a railway point a long way away. I remember going over to Salisbury on one occasion to pick up stuff that had arrived by rail there.

00:07:46

It was curious too, of course that at that time, unless you took a taxi, which I did often, from Southampton out to Totton, and actually, to be honest, I was usually charged half what was charged the Americans to try and balance things up. But everybody went by bus. I mean it, it was curious. I remember one night, I, I don't know why I was doing it, I was on route to Salisbury on a bus, it was the last bus and it, the bombing was very heavy and we got to Cadnam, or somewhere, and the conductor stopped, and all this business of bombs and flares and stuff and had a word with the driver. He came back in and he said "I've spoken to

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the driver. We're going to be very late in Salisbury. How many of you would like to stop and have a drink?" We were outside a pub so they pulled the double decker in, we all went in and had a drink. [laughs] I don't know, but, it was quite good fun at times.

00:09:02

Going back to, going back to the base, we were left to our own devices a great deal, which was very nice and we were able to carry on and whilst we were ... I think we were well disciplined ... when there were only three officers of different ranks: Lieutenant Commander; Lieutenant and Sub- Lieutenant, we could hardly go on all day across the desk saluting one another and 'sir-ing' one another, so we had to work as friends. It wouldn't work any other way.

00:09:45

Based at the Tide Mill (as a supply depot)
Stayed at The Anchor Inn, personal memories
Civilians also working at the depot
Supplies came by lorry and rail
Amusing bus journey anecdote

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(continued)

As I say, because of where we were, we were left to our own devices a great deal which was [laughs] we were quite happy with that situation. There were some curiosities; it was decided by higher powers at one stage that we ought to have a civilian manger to deal with the pay for the civilians and that sort of thing. And this gentleman arrived. He was a very pleasant gentleman, well educated, had been in the oil industry in some senior position and was doing this to help the war effort and in many ways he was very good but he did have a rather cavalier attitude to money. So when he drew the money to pay the troops, if he found as he went along, that he was short at all, he just opened his wallet and put a couple of quid in. On the other hand, if in fact he found he'd got a bit over, he put it in his pocket [laughs]. Now [laughs], there was nothing fraudulent about this but over a period of time, that sort of thing leads you into a situation [laughs] where you don't know really what you're about.

On the whole, it was a very pleasant place to be, everybody was very happy to be there, I think. The ratings had a fairly easy time, oh, there was a lot of hard work, I mean, but it, it was companiable, the whole thing. I've got a tankard out there that they gave me when I left, it was all breaking up and I had a list of the people who contributed [laughs] but that's got lost in the, over time. After a while, Lieutenant Commander Caunter, who was fairly old, he had a wife and, and, although he was elderly, a new baby and a dog and I think he was

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anxious to retire, at any rate, he left and Lieutenant Madams left and a Lieutenant Commander Bussey and Lieutenant Matthews came to join us. Now, Lieutenant Commander Bussey, we regarded as a very old man. He was, in fact, I think 29 and, and he had been engineer officer with Peter Scott on his Steam Gun boat flotilla. He didn't find Peter Scott terribly agreeable. I don't think I need to quote the exact statements that he made, but he was a very agreeable chap and Matthews, I think his wife was ... which was also very convenient ... manageress of one of the big ballrooms in Bournemouth at that time. And we used to knock about together, inevitably of course, I mean, you know, at lunchtime, it would be ridiculous for us all to push off in different directions and, and it was, it was good, and we used to go out in the evenings, I mean, we must have got on pretty well otherwise it would have been intolerable after a time, I think.

00:03:52

Then the Admiralty decided we needed far more storage space than we had at Totton and it was decided that two houses at Lymington, Blakes House and Bywater House which still place the pier, I think, and half the pier would come under our, come under us for our purposes. Well, looking back, I do not really understand why Bywater House and Blakes House were chosen. They seemed to me highly unsuitable, I'm quite sure something more appropriate could have been found. And so the lady who was resident, I presume the owner of Bywater House thought and when we were due to actually take it over, she locked it up, took the keys and ran away with them, I think to Salisbury again, Salisbury keeps ... Now my understanding is, and this happened actually before, before Bussey arrived, Caunter went down and saw her and suggested to her, informally, that if she presented him with the key, because he certainly didn't want to get in touch with the Admiralty and say 'I can't get into Bywater House', she would find that petrol might be accessible for her little car for the rest of the war. But the, the, it was a lovely house and the gardens. I remember wandering in the gardens, particularly soft fruit, and more soft fruit. I mean my father was a quite a gardener but there were masses of stuff that I'd not come across. I mean there were redcurrants and blackcurrants and white currants and so on and what was most worrying for this lady, she had a very special green glass bath that she valued. She was afraid it was going to get damaged, 'cause it had to be taken out, I mean this was the most amazingly peculiar performance and (pause) it was taken out but I cannot remember honestly whether the bath actually survived all this or not. At any rate, that all calmed down and then in addition, there was an airfield which I called Pylewell Airfield but I think it was officially known as Lymington Advanced Landing Ground was free. It had been used as a normal airfield by American aircraft as well as our own, we were to be given that for storage purposes. It was quite extensive and incorporated the Pylewell House which again was lovely and I remember the walled gardens there, in fact it was like a sort of National Trust tour really. A lot of the things that were brought there, you must remember at this time, by the time I'd become commissioned, it looked as if we might actually win the war and there was a different attitude prevalent amongst people. And already Southampton was choked with material for D-Day and also some of the things that were being made were no longer

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going to be used or needed because the character of the war was changing. I remember we had large numbers of V8 Ford engines that arrived at the, at the airfield. There were a few problems because ... I'm not sure, would they be Commoners around the airfield on the edges? I think they had resented not being able to graze their animals on this big stretch of land and when the fighting aircraft had gone, they thought that they ought to be able to go back in and in fact, they started cutting the fence and driving animals there and we had to get, I know, some German Shepherd dogs to patrol the fences. I don't know how all that ended.

00:08:44

Also there was a certain amount of shenanigans, there's always a certain amount of shenanigans in everything. A gentleman called Rossington of a firm called Nash Concession Airst became involved in dealing. I presume, the Admiralty was selling off some of these engines and different things. And, well I've got to be careful but I don't think I'm speaking out of turn. The arrangements that were made were rather odd and every so often, I used to sit at the desk opposite the CO who handed me a large number of papers to sign. Well why he didn't sign them I don't know, but I signed them and what was written on them didn't always seem to correspond exactly with what was in progress on, on the ground. And one day I was taken by Mr Rossington to The Angel at Lymington, I think it is, for lunch and he said "Now wouldn't it be nice for some of your chaps who are holed up in Portsmouth Barracks, stokers, to come down and work on Pylewell Airfield?" He didn't add 'and that would save needing so many civilian people to work there' and I said he was over rating my powers of command [laughs] as a young Sub-Lieutenant. I didn't move stokers about or anything like that. At any rate, that all settled down. I was trying to think, can we have a pause for a moment?

00:10:40

Civilian manager at the depot (rather shady dealings!)
 Friendly place to be based, left to own devices
 Extra storage space provided at Lymington Blakes House and Bywater House
 Owner of the house not pleased, ran away with the keys but persuaded to relinquish keys in return for petrol for the rest of the war!
 Lymington Advanced Landing Ground
 Commoners wanting land back for grazing, needed dog patrol
 Rossington asks for papers to be signed (dubious?)

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Yes, the materials that we held at Totton, were everything really except the main hull that were used on motor torpedo boats, motor launches and the various craft that came under the heading of 'coastal forces' and they were distributed to depots at different places, at Lowestoft, at Portsmouth, Portland and so on as required. The, the Eling Mill obviously ... we occupied the whole of the Mill and a Tide Mill opposite at that time, was obviously not working as far as I can remember and approaching D-Day, it was thought that the Germans would try a counter-attack of aircraft to disrupt us and may well be bombing and I know that the owners of the Tide Mill were told that if this happens, we had been told to blow up his Tide Mill and block the causeway which didn't make for, you know, [laughs] a very friendly exchange but in any case, nothing like that, nothing like that happened. Most of, most of our materials seemed to go away by lorry, I think, it may have been, it may have been then transferred to a train but most of it went by lorry. Various officers used to come down and talk about it and their requirements and how we were serving them and from time to time, I went to sea on Motor Torpedo Boats but only as an observer.

And was there any transport by water at all to Eling or was it all by land?

No, the only thing still there, I think were really pleasure boats, yes Eling was not used. One interesting, I suppose, anecdote. I said that I went to live for a time at Toc H at the top of Southampton, and Charles Edwards (my friend there) was warden. His fiancée's brother was Captain of a Motor Torpedo Boat and one evening, they said, "Well, would you like to go on board for the evening?" you know, so we all settled down in the ward room and it went on for hours and hours, and although we drank a lot, we were still talking well into the night and the ... the Captain said to me, "You know, I've just been to Palestine". Now we were all sorry for the Jews but we didn't regard them as a fighting people. And he said, I think he said, "I've been in to Haifa" and he said "the Jews have got an underground army called the Haganah " and he said "that will wipe the Arabs off the face" he said "they are extremely good and extremely ferocious because of the background." It's the first time I'd ever seen or heard anything like this and at that time I suppose it washed over me a bit.

00:03:57

We obviously had relations with the village, I mean sometimes good, we used to have parties occasionally in the village which were [laughs] were pretty convivial, I know. But on one occasion, we had an unfortunate incident. One of our lorries knocked over a child in the village. I think it was a child of one of the women who worked for us which made it very sad. I know it was one of the worst things that I ever had to do and I was a bit young for it I suppose. I had to go and attend the funeral to represent the Navy. Diverting for a moment, if I may, at some stage in my career, I found myself at Exbury. Now, I can't tell you why I was at Exbury but there were a group of us and of course it was used as a, a base for planning D-Day. It was known as HMS Masterdon and if you want to learn more about what it was like in that area, a very sad book which is worth reading is "Requiem for a Wren" by Nevil Shute. At any rate we wandered in the garden at Exbury and met this young man and

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we chatted to him and he was in civilians and he said "I'm going in the Navy" and we said "Oh yes", and we said "I suppose you get an instant commission, being who you are." He said "I'm, you know, Rothschild" and so we said "Yes". He said "but they, the family tried that on and were told they would have to go through the normal service procedures." Well, years afterwards, I didn't know whether I dreamt all this up, it seemed a bit remarkable. But I've got a letter here from Edmund De Rothschild. "Thank you for your letter" this was some time afterwards, "the young man you saw was my brother, Leopald, who is years younger than me. He did do his National Service as an ordinary seaman on HMS Kenya. I'm glad you came to Exbury for a short time. It was probably then called HMS Masterdon and had a very unusual role, being the centre point for the planning of D-Day and **Walkeron** as some 15 miles to the East, Eisenhower had his headquarters. 15 miles to the West, Patton has his headquarters and 15 miles to the North was Montgomery. If you want any further information, I suggest you write to Mrs Marian Loveland, Hedge Cottage, Wallace Lane, East Boldre, Beaulieu, Hampshire, who is the secretary of the Exbury Veterans Association which you may care to join, Yours Sincerely, Edmund De Rothschild."

End: 00:07:39

Keywords:

Materials held at Totton

Instructed to blow up Tide Mill in the event of a counter attack

A friend recollects the activity of the Jews in Palestine

Child knocked down in the village

Experiences at Exbury (known as HMS Masterdon)

*Letter from **Edmund De Rothschild***

Fascinating explanation of why Exbury was a central point in D-Day proceedings.

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<i>What period were you at the Lymington base?</i>				
<p>The Eling ... my time there was 1943/44 altogether. I can't give you dates for this though, but it was most of 1943 and '44. When I left, I went for a short time to another base at Havant, where they needed staff, they thought. There were one or two things amusing and peculiar that happened. We had an invitation one evening, the three of us, to go to Marchwood because a deer had been accidentally killed by a lorry. Now, I hope this is true but certainly there was a big evening of venison feasting that we had at Marchwood. Also, of course, as always some people have slippery fingers and little bits of metal at that time, which were an awful lot in the stores did go missing but not to any great extent but sometimes there was a certain foolishness. I was 'phoned from a station at Christchurch one night to say the stoker was passing through the gates. They stopped him because he had a large stove strapped to his back and he had told them this was surplus and he was</p>				

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told he could take it. [laughs] The poor chap must have been an idiot, I think, because it certainly wasn't surplus. I don't know what happened to him, I don't think anything, anything very dreadful. And of course people now forget the peculiarities of the Navy at that time. For instance, you weren't allowed to dress according to how you saw the weather where you were. It was broadcast from the C&C's office, Portsmouth, according to what they judged. Well this could be ridiculous because men would be told to remove their jerseys on a day when it was suddenly starting to rain, or whatever. And this extraordinary business with the tobacco, which we were entitled to have 200 cigarettes for half a crown or half a, half pound tin of tobacco.

Why this had been maintained, I'm not sure but there was a desperation about all this. You were told that if you took this ashore more than for your immediate needs, you would pay the penalty. Well, one gentleman, a very unassuming, pleasant, well educated man, didn't take this too seriously and he ended up with a week in the most dreadful conditions. He had hard lime with a butcher's block for his head and a, and a single blanket [laughs] the whole thing was, was extraordinary. I seem to remember (and I'm diverging a little bit) that we tried to take him scraps of food or something, tried to push it through [laughs] I mean, he was very close to us. I will mention one other thing, it's not strictly relevant to the New Forest, but it might be worth just saying, that when I first joined up, I got fed up with Portsmouth, you know, it was full of drunken sailors and ladies of the night and, you know, it was, it was dreadful. Anyway, we weren't supposed to go more than ten miles from the base 'cause some chaps had come down and found that they didn't really think they wanted to continue with their service and had gone home! At any rate, my friend and I decided that we'd like to go to Winchester which was over ten miles. So we went to Winchester and when it came time to set off back, there was no bus available at that time, so we walked out towards the downs and we scumped some apples from an apple tree beside the road and we saw a car coming, a lone car, so we thumbed it. Unfortunately, we didn't see 'till it got close to us, it was flying a penant and inside was Commander in Chief Portsmouth. So [laughs] he stopped and he said "Where are you going?" and we said "Collingwood" and he said "I can't go to Collingwood now," he said, "you'll have to come with me," he said, "we'll go over to my sister's." So we went to Bishops Waltham and went into a big Mill house by a river there and had the most enormous tea. At any rate, then we set off back. Well, I don't think the Commander in Chief had ever been to Collingwood, which you probably know was at Fareham, and we arrived at the gate and the Petty Officer in charge suddenly [laughs] saw what was happening. "Call out the guards" he said, and the car just turned round. [laughs] The two of us got out and [laughs] went in. He never, he never blooming well queried it, he was so astounded by this apparition and so were we. Unfortunately my friend was killed soon afterwards, they were ramming the boom at Algiers in the North African Campaign.

But, no, one thing I would like to say, on a more serious note, since I had a pretty easy time, one often talks about the Spitfire pilots and so on, quite rightly, but you don't hear much about the young men who actually worked the Motor Torpedo Boats. And they were

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young most of them and it required not only skills and courage but because they were in such close proximity to their small crew, unless they knew their stuff, and were respected, it was hopeless, I mean, you know, they really would be finished and they were soon found out. So they not only had to deal with the actual fighting bit but they also had to be able to man-manage in a very special way. All this can be found in the book 'Battle of the Narrow Seas' by Peter Scott.

0:07:44.3

Its ... another interesting matter concerning us was that we had some Dutch boats near at hand that had escaped from Holland when it was overrun.

Where were they located?

They were at Portsmouth I think, for a time. Certainly, I think it was partly to keep their own morale up, they always said our boats were scruffy and dirty and that theirs were clean.

End: 00:08:20

Keywords:

Funny anecdote about a stove and surplus materials

Tabacco rationing

Trip to Winchester (outside 10 mile restriction)

Motor Torpedo Boats

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Right so, perhaps if you could just tell me the dates when you were travelling down to Lymington each day.

Yes, the time at which we were using the Lymington depots was, I think it must have been largely in 1944, when the war obviously was going to be won and the provision for D-Day was quite unbelievable. One couldn't move for vehicles, armour, troops, Americans and so on. In fact there were some accidents because everything was so crowded. On one occasion, a big transporter, American transporter carrying tanks I think, took a corner near to Totton, and unfortunately misjudged it. He was so powerful ... there were a number of private cars parked down in a line, it took, sliced the side off each of these in turn. But no, the crowding there was something else again, and of course, there were all sorts of odd items around. The tramways in Southampton of course were still going in war time and so they still had some trams. They built lots of little lines all over the Common and at night they used to shunt off into the Common. So you could be walking home from The Traveller's Rest in the Common, across the Common and suddenly find a little tram bouncing along behind you.

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As I'd said earlier, we expected the Germans to react more to the D-Day landings and make some kind of counter attack but which never happened and there was a great anti-climax after D-Day. I mean, I think people sometimes forget how awful the carnage was on the beaches first of all before we established ourselves. Particularly I think, it was thought some of the black troops of the Americans, were given a pretty hard task on places like Omaha beach. Certainly, I don't think, a lot of people realise that although we were fighting for freedom, we had segregated canteens for black soldiers around because my wife actually went to work in one. I mean she was a rebel and wasn't going to have it. And although she had friends with the 9th Division, and used to dine in Mess, she still went there and she said, it really was a hiding to nothing because you, you know, you weren't favourite with anybody. The black troops were suspicious of you, which was understandable and other people wondered what your motive was so... Anyway, I think that's, that's it as far as I'm concerned for now.

When did you leave the Forest?

Towards the end of 1944. And then I had a short time elsewhere but that was really, really killing time. I mean, I won't talk about pre-Totton because that's not really germane to all this.

So when you were faced with living in Totton, what sort of goods were you handling at the Totton base and the Pylewell base?

It was all the same, it was all the things, a multitude of things that a Motor Torpedo would need. We didn't deal with, we didn't deal with (pause) ammunition and that sort of thing. We certainly dealt with large fuel tanks because we had to be careful because one or two lads, those days, everybody smoked and we found one or two of them actually cleaning out the fuel tanks while smoking which was liable to be disastrous. A lot of it was small stuff, difficult to describe; cables and round wipers for the windows to clear vision and bits of radar and all sorts of different things.

00:05:16

And how many people were working at the Lymington base when you were there?

There was hardly anybody permanently at Lymington, or at Pylewell. At times they went down on a shift, when there was a delivery of V8 engines for instance, there'd be a group of men drafted down but they would only stay for the day and then go back.

And so when you were driving across the Forest just before D-Day, presumably you were aware of the build- up. Any particular anecdotes about that?

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Not really. Don't forget, it's becoming now a long time ago. My memory is, well you're the judge, isn't too bad but there are large gaps in it that I wish I could recall and because there was no photography and I'm afraid things like 'The Ditty Box' which was a magazine issued to Naval personnel all the time, which now would be tremendously interesting, we tended to throw away. When one had finished with the Navy, one really, I wanted to get married and, you know, I really wanted to finish with it, it wasn't of any concern. And also, at that time, it wasn't of much interest to people either.

End: 00:06:49

Keywords:

Lymington depot, busy preparing for D-Day
Trams across the Common
Segregation of black troops
'The Ditty Box'

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