

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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<p><i>Could I ask you first of all just your name and where and when you were born?</i></p> <p>My name's Arthur Poore and I was born on the 22nd of May 1920</p> <p><i>Where were you born?</i></p> <p>In Ealing, West London</p> <p><i>Thank you. Is that where you were living at the start of the war? And what were you doing?</i></p> <p>Yes, I was a junior clerk, this was 1939, I was nineteen years of age, junior clerk in the city of London. And then of course, the war came along and I volunteered for the air force as a cadet pilot which fortunately I managed to win.</p> <p><i>Thank you</i></p> <p>[0:00:51.7]</p>				

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CHAIRMAN JULIAN JOHNSON CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

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Perhaps you could just tell me which service you joined and what rank you were at initially.

Well, I volunteered to the R.A.F. in 1939 to become a pilot, a cadet pilot and in 1940, well the Battle of Britain was going on here in the South of England, I was at Elementary Flying Training School just outside Derby doing what we call 'circuits and bumps' whilst the Battle of Britain was going on in the South. And then I went on to advanced flying training in the aerodrome of the Cotswolds about three months and then I was fortunate in being, going to a school of air navigation in Cheshire to do an extra navigation course and of course the Air Force was expanding like mad, this was in 1941 by now, and they wanted more 'staff pilots' as they're called at this Cheshire aerodrome to fly the learner navigators around. So for two years, I just, I didn't know there was, hardly knew there was a war on, I used to fly from mid Cheshire across to Llandudno, up to the Isle of Man and back or down to Cheltenham and across to Oxford and back, lovely. So I got all that extra air mileage advantage in before I went on to Bomber Operations.

[0:01:44.2]

Moving specifically to your memories of the New Forest, perhaps we could talk about the incident at Beaulieu Airfield?

Well now, I forgot the raid we were on,

Stuttgart?

Stuttgart. This is when several hundred bombers, Lancasters and Halifaxes, used to bomb the German, big German cities. We were stationed at dozens of aerodromes in Suffolk and Lincolnshire and South Yorkshire probably about two dozen to thirty aircraft per aerodrome, so that when you flew back, the flying control could cope quite easily 'cos there's probably half an hour or three quarters of an hour difference between the first one landing back and the last one landing back so there was no problems. Well, on this particular occasion, Stuttgart, the Met office had 'boobed' completely and we flew off and the whole of the East coast was blanketed in fog. And so we were half way back over the North Sea when the radio operator said "Oh, you're diverted to Beaulieu in the New Forest, together of course, with dozens of other bombers. Fortunately, I was one of the early ones and I, you announced your code "This is Charlie Able, permission to land" and the WAF in the control room says "Oh, you're number three to land downwind, it's a cross wind, downwind funnel". A simple code and so I flew in quite happily, this is about eleven o'clock at night and, but of course there were dozens of air, of aircraft following me and the poor girl in the control office, tower she started to stack them at half, at 500 feet intervals " your turn to land is 37 please circuit at twelve and a half thousand feet, well having just gone from twenty thousand feet over Stuttgart down to two thousand feet over the North Sea, there was

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some very strong language going on. Anyway, everybody switched their navigation lights on, and it's a free-for-all but everybody landed happily, no accidents at all. We went to bed in the Nissen hut, woke up about eleven o'clock in the morning and got out of... and the whole of Beaulieu aerodrome was completely full of Lancaster bombers, about from the runway. There must have been, I don't know how many but dozens of Lancasters were there and of course we had lunch then took off to our various aerodromes in Lincolnshire so the local inhabitants must have wondered what on earth's happening.

[0:04:55.1]

Do you remember what year that was?

(Silence)

1943

That's the date as well

Do you remember anything specific about the airfield? You said you stayed in Nissen huts

Not really, no. It was dark when we landed and we had lunch and just flew back to our aerodrome in Lincolnshire. That was... that was...that was the single, single incident. Later on, after I'd finished my bomber reparations, I managed to get a job in the squadron that flew from... initially, Holmsley South. I was flying an aircraft called the York which was the airliner of the day. It was, it had the Lancaster's wings and engine but a completely different, carried two dozen passengers and we flew from there to either Ceylon or Singapore and Cairo, Baghdad, Karachi, then down to Ceylon or across to Calcutta, all at eight thousand feet, which made very interesting. I've seen the Taj Mahal at eight thousand feet. So that was a very interesting and enjoyable part of the war for me because of course we weren't bombing anybody and we were, we were flying fare paying passengers 'cos BOAC had hardly started.

So this was taking fare paying passengers during the war?

No this is, well, it was the end of the war

Just at the end

The European war had finished and in fact the Japanese war had suddenly finished of course with the atomic bombs. So that was that, and of course that was called Transport Command we were stationed at Holmsley South in the New Forest and then Stoney Cross in the New Forest.

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That was doing the same thing?

At the end, that was nineteen...when did the war finish? 1945, round about 1945, yes.

Do you remember much of Holmsley South? How many troops there were there and the buildings?

Well, Holmsley South, I had a car and we used to go to Bournemouth, Christchurch, and find a pub and have a few drinks. But I have got an anecdote about Stoney Cross. When we flew out to the Far East and back, we used to bring back pineapples and bananas which was absolute gold dust to go by relations and friends. Now the pub The Vine at Ower was quite close to Stoney Cross aerodrome and when we went flying, instead of going, going into the officers' mess, we used to, a few of us go in my car go to The Vine at Ower and knock back a few, they close at half past ten so we used to whiz back to the officers' mess which would close at eleven o'clock and get a couple more pints in, you see. Anyway, we got to know, we were regulars at The Vine. We knew, I can still remember the landlord's name, Henry Tatner. And we knew the regulars there. And one of the regulars, was a dear old chap, he was a farm hand, simple soul but kindly. I gave him a banana once. Well now, then of course the war finished, I went back to Ealing and luckily met my dear wife and business brought me back to Hampshire, Southampton.

[0:09:16.2]

And this is, what 1950, strict rationing and Betty was pregnant with Christina, or my other, my eldest daughter and strict rationing and you get one egg a fortnight or something like that. And of course, Betty being pregnant, it'd be nice to get some extra food down her so I thought, I know, I'll go to The Vine at Ower, and see the country and I'll head and we'll probably know somebody who can sell me some eggs. Well, this is what, several years after I'd been there as a regular. So I went down there to The Vine, Eddy was still there. I said "Hello, do you remember me?" which is several years ago when I was in, not in uniform He said "No, I'm afraid not" I said, "Well never mind" and then I told him why I was here, any chance of getting, of buying any eggs. "No" he said, "no". Anyway, I sat there drinking my beer and I saw one of the old regulars there, and I thought, that's Tom, the old farm hand. And he kept looking at me and looking at me and he suddenly got a beautiful smile on his face. And he went, "Bananas!" he said. I'll always remember that. I told him why I was here, any chance of any eggs. "Don't go away!". A quarter of an hour later, he came back with two dozen eggs, fresh farm eggs and refused payment. So that one banana paid for itself. True story!

[0:11:02.1]

When you were starting off at Holmsley South, you say you had a car. Was there any problem getting fuel?

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Yes, very, we got a little, but of course it was very restricted

Do you have any memories of when you were driving across the forest, if you went out to Bournemouth or somewhere, do you remember any of the other sites or were there any other incidents?

Well, the only thing is going from ... two or three of the other pilots I used to take to The Vine at Ower and driving back from The Vine, you go to the Cadnam roundabout and, and you have to go three quarters of the way round the roundabout for the road to Stoney Cross and, course we were all a bit mad in those days. One of my friends timed me, you see, and he said, "You took four minutes, thirty seven seconds to get to the Officers' Mess, you can beat that." So the next night, I went along to save two seconds instead of going round, I..I.. that way, which is almost a straight line, see to Cadnam roundabout. Of course there were no other cars about and not many New Forest ponies, mad!

Were there many buildings at Holmsley South? You were based in Nissen huts were you?

No, I'll tell you another, I've just thought of. On the way back from the Far East, of course we had, we had a navigator, a flight engineer and a radio operator in a York. And my radio operator went sick in Cairo and I, fortunately there was a qualified radio operator who had been in Cairo for all of the war, about three or four years in the desert. And so we, I had him as a spare replacement radio operator. We flew in across the New Forest to Holmsley South, late Springtime, beautiful. He said "I don't believe it, I've nearly spent four years in the desert and this gorgeous green New Forest."

[0:13:25.6]

Do you know, the passengers that you took on the York, do you know what they were going out to the Far East for?

Oh, usually on business but I'll tell you this, we carried two dozen passengers and on one occasion, the passengers filed in and they're all stern, thick neck, crew cut, all exactly the same. Before the war, of course, it was the Dutch East Indies colonies at Holland and this was the police force going out after the war to make sure that everything was alright for the Dutch. And they're all crew cut, bullet head fearsomely men but otherwise there was a complete mixture of passengers. I don't know what they were doing. Meeting people I expect.

So you were working for a commercial company?

No, no

That was still with the R.A.F. was it? Taking paying passengers.

Mm, mm.

Very interesting, do you remember the, what was at Holmsley South airfield? Many buildings?

Oh, very few, very few. Course, there was the Sergeants' and Officers' messes and our hanger, but otherwise, very little.

And how many of you were based there at that time?

Well, the squadron, probably a dozen, pilots and their crew. Seven officers, seven sergeants.

And you were fairly free at that stage to go out and in the New Forest?

Well, if we weren't flying, we could do whatever you like.

Did you go exploring the New Forest at all?

Exploring?

Yes.

No

Just the pubs?

Twenty two, twenty three year olds, they go exploring in the New Forest. No, we used to go to the pub.

[0:15:33.7]

And did you, were there any road blocks? You were just free to drive to Bournemouth?

Completely free, yes, mm

And Stoney Cross, was that a same size airfield?

Well, that was of course another large runway and we used to go to, as I say, The Vine at Ower or the Sir Walter Tyrell, near the Rufus Stone for a drink. I sound awful, sounds as if I'm doing nothing but drinking! Wasn't quite right though

No, well you had plenty of other things to do as well, didn't you?

They, you talked about The Vine, so that was just a pub at that stage, not a hotel as well?

Well actually, it was, because it had a land mine hit it, a German land mine which of course they go down by parachute. Right in the heart of the country and, and, and it blew a quarter of The Vine away. In those days there was a corrugated iron roof there, temporary repairs.

Did you see any other military action while you were out in the Forest?

No, but talking of military action, I didn't know this until several years after the war, evidently, North East of Fordingbridge, there was an aerodrome and they were experimenting with the big bomb for the, for the Dambusters. Now we, I, you probably heard, I was, I joined the Dambusters Squadron after the Dam raid and we dropped a twelve thousand pound bombs, well on U-boat pens and things like that. But it, for the Dambuster raid, they had to experiment and they, (I lost my train of thought) oh yes, they, no not for the Dambuster raid, for the, for the bombs on, twelve thousand pound bombs on the U-boat pens. It was known that the U-boat pens, huge, the size of three air... three football pitches at Brest and St Nazaire, the French ports. They had twelve feet of concrete on top so that if you had a score with a direct hit with a four thousand pound bomb, it would just bounce off. But to experiment, they built a small building in this aerodrome, North East of Ringwood, of Fordingbridge, like I say; I didn't know this at the time, with a building with ten feet of concrete on top. And 647 Squadron bombers came along and dropped their bombs to see what happened, just as an experiment. And that was another, I've forgotten, is it the Ibsley Aerodrome?

Yes, that would be the one

That was used as an experiment for the twelve thousand pound bombs.

[0:19:12.0]

So which squadron were you in, first of all when you landed at Beaulieu, which squadron were you in?

I was in Squadron 106 Squadron. I did twenty four bomber raids, what they call 'Main Force' that's hundreds of bombers going to drop a German city and then, of course, what happened was, 617 Squadron lost about a third of their crews on, on the Dam raid and then a few months later, they did another low level attack, attack on the ...Dortmund Ems Canal, which was a complete disaster, 'cos it was low level, it was foggy and they missed it and they again lost over a third of their crews, well, you can't carry on like that, especially as 617 Squadron were, they were very elite crews, you see, very experienced. So they recruit by going round the other squadrons, 106 Squadron, and I was the most experienced pilot in

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that squadron, simply because of those two years in flying learner navigators around Cheshire and so I was selected to go to 106 to 617 Squadron and I did twenty three trips with 617. Luckily missed by various bits of flak.

[0:20:40.8]

But then, were you in the same squadron when you flew from Holmsley South?

No, no, so I, having finished my two tours of ops, I then became Acting Squadron Leader actually at a Lancaster Finishing School up in Nottinghamshire, where all I had to do was make out the leave roster, I did very little flying, so I applied to go to, well, it's called Transport Command and fly to the Far East and back as I say, on the airline of the time called the York.

[0:21:22.3]

Key words:

Elementary Flying Training School

'Staff Pilots'

Stuttgart

Lancasters

Halifaxes

Beaulieu Airfield

The York airliner

Transport Command

Holmsley South

Stoney Cross

The Vine at Ower

Cadnam roundabout

Dutch East Indies Police Force

Big Bomb

Dambuster raids

U-Boat pens

12,000lb bomb experiment

106 Squadron

617 Squadron

Lancaster Finishing School

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Could you tell me about the incident when you brought back a high level visitor from Singapore?

Lieutenant General, what was his name? Percival, I've forgotten call it..... The war ended suddenly of course, with the atom bombs, and there were dozens and dozens of British prisoners of war in the camps in Singapore particularly and The York aircraft either carried two dozen passenger seats or had no seats at all and was just like a big railway carriage. We used anything from small ...aero engines or lavatory buckets or anything that needed flying back and forth. So it was just a big empty shell, so that when the war ended and all these prisoners of war were due to fly back or get back to England however they could, they used to get straw palliasses, about that deep, cover the floor of the aircraft and get, oh, three or four dozen privates and corporals, they didn't mind now, they were flying back to England. And we were waiting to take off from Singapore, there were all these privates and corporals and this general, very gentlemanly man he was, it was the commanding officer when Singapore fell and he was put in with the barracks, because he wasn't very popular, 'cos he was the commanding officer when Singapore fell. So I had him up on the flight deck for my flight to, from, from, from Singapore to, to, actually, another, I'm boasting now, we were flying on the way out to Karachi, Calcutta and then down to refuel at Bangkok and down the Lower Peninsula to Singapore. But on this occasion, we were instructed from Singapore, instead of going up the Peninsula, fly across the bottom of the Bay of Bengal to Ceylon, fifteen hundred miles. Course, this is the first time it had ever been flown, course this is, this is 1945, there weren't many aircraft about before the war doing that. So, we flew from Singapore to Ceylon, Ratmalana's the aerodrome in Ceylon with, with General (what's his name?) Percival? And of course we stayed the night and he went on with another crew back to England.

[0:03:04.4]

And then you'd bring these passengers back to Stoney Cross and then they'd be taken from there?

Yes, I delivered them to Stoney Cross and then they'd be taken away again.

So how many more years did you fly the Yorks from Stoney Cross after the war?

Oh, I, I, I was de-mobbed, the, the wars had finished, so people were de-mobbed, so I was de-mobbed, de-mobilised.

I know some people had to continue for quite a while after the war

No, no, no, no, there were thousands and thousands who were de-mobilised. Then I, as I say, I lived in Ealing, West London and by a friend, my next door neighbour, worked at the Gillette razor blade company, on the Great West Road, about a couple of miles away where

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he said there were, I know they want to have some representatives, so I wrote them a letter and I go the job, where I met my dear wife, she was sitting over a typewriter as the secretary to the export manager. We smiled at one another and that was that!

[0:04:35.6]

Keywords:

Lieutenant General Percival

Prisoners of war

Straw Palliasses

Demobilisation

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<p>Start missed....</p> <p>Geoffrey Cheshire, and he flew a Mosquito which is sort of a fighter bomber and with a, it was called a red spot fire, if at night times, supposing there was an aircraft factory at Lyon in the South of France, he would drop a huge flair to light up so he could see the aircraft factory and he would dive bomb it, there was this red spot fire, so us Lancasters coming along at twenty thousand feet could see that precise target, you see. In fact there's that... can I? [shuffling of papers]</p> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Mosquito</p>				

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