

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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<p>00-00-00</p> <p><i>First of all, could you just tell me your name and where and when you were born?</i></p> <p>I'm Barbara Brown. I was born at Purlieu on 23rd August 1927.</p> <p>End: 00-00-15</p> <p>Keywords:</p>				

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CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

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<p>00-00-00</p> <p><i>What were you doing in the New Forest during the war?</i></p> <p>Well, I was too young actually; I was only 13, so I've just got memories of what happened in the local area where I lived. I must have been at school and being the siren going, we all had to rush off to the air raid shelter, which was right at the bottom far end of the field and being machine gunned. They swooped down so low that we could even see the pilot's face. I can remember seeing the pilot's face. That was at Hardley School. So that was quite an experience you wouldn't forget.</p> <p><i>Was anybody injured?</i></p> <p>No, I don't think they were. A lot of the parents complained afterwards that why was the air raid shelter such a distance from the school. Apparently that's how it had to be. It had to be quite a way from the actual building for it to be safe for the children to run to.</p> <p>00-01-05</p> <p>And I remember seeing a dogfight. One plane was hit, and black smoke was pouring from it falling to the ground. That was in Holbury. A bomb fell in Springfield Grove where I lived, about seven bungalows away from me. Fortunately nobody was killed, but the blast blew the back door off of our house and my dad was (chuckling) rather shaken because he was in the garden at the time. Luckily no one was hurt.</p> <p>00-01-47</p> <p>I remember they had some big guns at Hardley and apparently the bombers were trying to hit these big guns, ack-ack guns, and two people were killed at that particular point.</p> <p><i>Do you remember what that gun emplacement was called? Was it something-farm?</i></p> <p>I can't remember. I don't know. It was at Hardley, I'm sure it was at Hardley. So that's about it really.</p> <p>00-02-22</p> <p><i>Was there a story about you being due to evacuate?</i></p> <p>Yes, I was going to Canada. My sisters and I were going to go to Canada. Apparently in</p>				

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those days, if you had a relation in Canada or a friend, or in America, you could go and stay with them for the duration of the war. So we all packed, we had our labels on our cases and everything was ready to go. Unfortunately one of the boats prior to this had got sunk and all the children were killed. They all drowned. So Mum decided that if we were going to die we'd all go together. (chuckles) So they didn't go. The funny thing is, that my other two sisters eventually ended up living in Canada. One married a Canadian soldier and my twin sister went out, and they've been out there for a good sixty years. So they were destined to go and I wasn't, (chuckles) obviously.

How did you feel when it was cancelled?

Well, we were all disappointed, my sisters and I, because we were quite excited. We hadn't really thought about the separation there would be for four years. A lot of the children that went, I've read in the paper since that they had an awful job settling back into their normal lives because America and Canada were so more advanced with all their gadgets and that they had, that a lot of the children when they came back found it very hard to settle into English life. Probably a poorer standard to what they'd been having in these countries.

00-04-12

I was going to tell you about this. Don't know if you knew anything about Marchwood Park, did you?

Is that where the convalescence ...

Yes, that's right; the burnt airmen were, yes.

Can you tell me what you knew about it?

Well, yes, they used to send them up to the local club and the dance hall where we were at Esso at Fawley. The Esso Refinery had a club and us girls used to go up there. They used to send them up there to dance, for recreation I suppose for the poor fellas. I can remember dancing with one of them. He was very badly disfigured. He just had sort of stumps instead of a hand. But I don't think at that time it had really sunk in. We were just over there and they wanted to dance and we danced with them. Which was rather nice when you look back now and think that we were able to do that.

So was the dance hall where the Esso club is now?

Yes, it was.

Did the injured soldiers have a particular uniform? Somebody told me they wore coloured

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jacket or trousers.

I don't think so, no, I don't remember them. I thought they had their Air Force uniform on when they came to the dances.

So you were at school throughout the war, were you?

Yes, yes. Well, I was thirteen when the war – when all this happened, sort of thing. About seventeen when we started to enjoy ourselves more.

00-05-57

What did you do then? Did you go to dances?

(chuckles) Oh yes, there were loads of dances. We had lots of fun. In fact we were too young to appreciate it all really, but it was a good time really, with lots of fun. All along the roads there were tanks and trucks. The soldiers were in them. They always spoke to us. It was quite a happy time really.

Which troops came to the dances? Were there English and ...

Well there were Canadians and Americans, and black Americans.

What did you think of black Americans, had you ever seen them before?

No, we hadn't seen them before but I think we didn't take any notice of them really. It didn't bother us. We didn't go out with them, but we didn't see any reason not to say hello to them. I don't think the white Americans were allowed to be seen to speak to the English girls. Several English girls went out with black Americans. Didn't see anything wrong with it at all. Which there wasn't, but of course the American soldiers used to think it wasn't very nice.

Well, we've covered a bit. Anything else in particular that you think you wish to say?

I don't know whether I better leave some things for Ede and them to say as well, hadn't I Ede? Otherwise you won't have much left. (chuckles)

(Third voice in the background)

I've got a few other questions up my sleeve. Can you tell me anything else you've thought of?

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00-07-34

There were barrage balloons all around at the time.

All round the Forest?

Oh yeah, they were all around. Yes, they were all around.

There were prisoners of war at Exbury Farm where my sister used to work. They had prisoners of war there that had to work on the farm. I remember that. One of the local girls got married to one of them.

Were they Germans?

Yes I think they were. I'm not sure about that, but I think they were.

Did they go out to work in the farm from a prisoner of war camp, or did they stay there?

No, I think they went from the prisoner of war camp.

D'you know which camp that was?

No, I don't. Around Exbury way.

Yes, I think there were quite a few around this area. Anything else on your list?

00-08-36

Well, you had to get a pass to go to Lepe if you wanted to go to the beach, 'cos my brother was engaged then to the girl that lived at Lepe and every time he went down there - he didn't have a pass, they only gave passes to the people that actually lived there and had to have access to their homes - but because they knew that they were engaged they used to wave and let him go in. (chuckle) Yes, so that was something that they had to have.

I think that's about it.

End: 00-09-23

Keywords: Hardley School, air raid shelter, machine gunned, dogfight, bomb, bombers, ack-ack guns, Marchwood Park, airmen, Esso Refinery club, dances, Canadians, Americans, barrage balloons, prisoners of war, Exbury Farm, Germans, Lepe, security pass.

Summary

Barbara Brown was a young teenager during the first years of the war and was still at school. She remembers the air raids and seeing a dogfight and plane shot down. A bomb also fell close to their home. She goes on to relate some of the things that she remembers about life during those war years.

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