

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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[00-00-00]

So John, if you'd give your name and your age, and where you lived at the start of the war.

Okay, my names Charles John Arnold. They all call me John. I was born in 36, 1936 at Thorney Hill in the council houses.

Tell me what memories you have of meeting troops, Canadians and others at Holmsley Airfield because I think it was fairly close to Holmsley that you lived?

Yes, it was only about a quarter of a mile where my home was, to the Holmsley Aerodrome and the times we used to speak to them is when we used to see them and they would stop you because they would stop you not going too close because now you got to bear in mind that there war was on and aircraft was, if aircraft was coming in they used to stop you not quite a distance way from the aerodrome to prevent any accidents or anything like that. But the only time that we did speak to them was when they were at Avon Tyrell and we used to all meet us lads and go up there and "any chewing gum mate" and they used to give you the chewing gum and the words that used to come out of their mouths a lot once they got talking to you was: "have you got any sisters" and we used to say: "yes". They never prompt theirselves into saying: "can we come and see them" but when we went home my sisters used to say: "did you speak to some then John". Say "Yeah". "What are they like", I

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don't know; they were must older than me. So in the end we used to have dances, which was in Burley, which was in Bransgore, which was in Brockenhurst, and when they had the time off they used to congregate and this is when the girls used to meet them. I don't think anything was taken serious about this; it was just a good night out, as they say today.

[00-02-03]

And which nationalities was it that they met particularly?

There was Americans and Canadians but 75% of them was Canadians.

You must have seen quite a lot of aircraft coming and going?

A lot of aircraft came in and out because you could hear them coming a mile away, because the height of a war plane coming in was very low, and when it did come through and land, you actually, if you're near it, you could hear those tyres hit the tarmac and it was a nice sound, but there was also a nice smell from the tyres that was burning as soon as they hit.

What particular aircraft came over, can you remember?

I can't remember you know. They was some, there was English planes there as well. Lancaster's and this and that but I can't actually remember what the American and Canadian planes were, but they were very big.

And I think you remember some of the bombing raids on Holmsley?

Absolutely. It didn't actually hit the aerodrome but as I say they went into the off land there which was boggy. Loads of bombs went down there, I would say about seven went down there, massive things. Used to hear them coming through the air. The other frightening thing was you could hear all the planes that used to switch off, and we used to all go into the air raid shelters frightened of course, at our age and it would go quiet and then you would hear 'voom' or whatever, and mainly at night time and you could see the sky light up where it was either in Southampton or Bournemouth.

I think your father had an experience with a bomb, being blown off his feet?

Absolutely. That was when mum and dad used to have me in their bedroom because we were all kept together because it was case of if the bomb hit us we all went together, it's very sad to say this but it's nice to think you were altogether and there wasn't a straggler left on their own. He stood basically up on the windowsill and he said to mum, they're coming over again and he knew because he was in the First world war and he knew what the sounds where like, for bombs, and he raised himself up on the windowsill and the next

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minute we saw him lying the back of the bed because the power these things coming down through. The actual tonnage of them, I wouldn't like to say but they must have been ginormous.

And what did your father do in the war?

He was in the Home Guard, mainly he was at Southampton because Southampton was one of the worst places down in southern England which got bombed over and over again.

Did he tell you much about what he had to do?

He said few things but he kept it away from us kids. He spoke to mum, and I think he spoke to my eldest sister because he saw things that he didn't want to repeat. But in those days they used to collect the old shells they used to see and I can see my mum polishing them up now in the front room.

[00-05-34]

And tell me about the German bomber which crashed?

Oh yes, yes. That was when we were at Thorney Hill School, a very nice little school, which is now private property, but the actual air raid shelter is still there. I don't know what they use it as now but we were in class and we heard the siren going, because you could hear these sirens from miles away and we all had to get into the air raid shelter got in there we heard the thump but didn't realise it was so close and when we came out of course we were all being sent home, and of course us kids being brave went up to where my Uncle Bill's house was, which was 100 yards up the road where this plane landed and buried it's nose straight into the ground which part of it is still there today. The pilot, he came down by parachute of course, ALK and landed about 2 miles away at Wootton pond near Burley and they captured him there and that's the last we heard of him.

Do you know what sort of plane it was?

No I don't, I don't.

And were there any crash landings at Holmsley that you remember?

There was one when we used to take my sister out which, she was born disabled and my big sisters, we used to push her in this wheelchair thing which we had in those days and as we were entering the aerodrome, this plane came over and just came behind us and it landed, crash landed in the actual field, right next to the aerodrome and it belly flopped. How it stopped before it hit the end of the massive row of trees, we don't know to this day. I think it was the soft ground and everybody was safe and that was an English plane, not a

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German plane.

Obviously you were all young boys then, what other things did you used to get up to around the airfield?

Oh well, a lot of it we were not allowed to go in but after the war, we were just stubborn. Mum and Dad used to say: "don't go up there, you'll get yourselves into trouble". Because it was still being basically guarded but it was such a small village in those days that they didn't take a lot of notice. So we used to see if one, maybe see 50 smoke grenades left actually floating about which today, well we used to kick them about in those days because mentally we didn't know what it was and also we used to go round and we'd pick up shells, empty shells which we used to take home. Mother used to go mad: "you shouldn't have done that. You shouldn't have done this". But one of the best things was to get a load of perspex that was left there from the actual cockpits and Dad told us how to make rings so we used to cut it out and we used to burn it with the pokers, we had open fires in those days, put the poker in, red hot, to make the hole and we used to polish them and even the girls in those days used to wear them.

[00-09-17]

So John, was what school life like for you in those days?

School in those days was actually great because a small community, which we were, we were all very close knit, irrespacted of what we were. Because there in the Forest we used to have a lot of travellers but we were all close knit we'd looked after each other. I have still got a photograph somewhere of us all having our photograph taken outside of the school in the road by a big building which was painted white because that was the thing that threw the photograph out nicely because they were black and white. I can't find that now but I'd love to find it again because they're all my friends and I think the majority of them are still alive which is very very nice. And that school was very nice, we got up to all the naughty things that kids do. In fact I think we might have got up to a lot of things, which they wouldn't think of doing today.

Were you affected by rationing very much?

Mum and dad always managed to get through. She used to do her shopping in Burley but I didn't understand in those days what ration books were until I found some a long time ago, now what you could only get for this and that and whatever. And I often wonder how mum and dad made it go around.

I understand that the end of the war when the Americans left, they buried a quite lot of equipment, so just tell us about that.

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Yes, they did they did they did. I mean This is when the farmers started getting back bits and pieces, well they were notified that they were going to get back fields again but there was, I didn't actually see them digging these holes but the stuff that went in there was tremendous, right down to lorries, motorbikes, jeeps, guns, anything to do with war, it was all buried. And the actual tracks that they used to put down when it was so wet that the tanks had to go on. You can often go out there now and often find bits and pieces of this actual article and it's frightening really because you look at it and you say to yourself: "how did I get through this, but I did".

Key Words

Canadian soldiers; US servicemen. Holmsley Airfield; German planes; bombs; Thorney Hill; German bomber crash; air raid; burying US equipment.

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