

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

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00-00-00

(pre-amble)

00-00-09

Actually, you just start. Can you – full name, where you were born, and which year please?

Yes, it's Gordon Thomas Edward Forsey, born the 23rd of the 10th '24 (23 Oct 1924) in Poole, Dorset.

Thank you, right. Now tell me how you got to the camp.

Got to the camp because I was on draft to go to Malaya to fight what they called the Bandits, which was the beginning of the communist uprising, and on my embarkation leave, I was taking 31 troops of the Suffolk Regiment out to Singapore and joining my regiment at Johor. We were at Shoreham, waiting to move to Liverpool, and I got the corporal who was in charge of the troops to make a list of all the troops that I was taking out to Singapore because I would have been responsible for the trip out there and if anything happened, would have had to contact their relatives. Well, we were there for about a week, and the corporal came to me and he said "One of the young chaps" he said "seems very subdued". He said "Would you have a word with him". I said "Well, OK" because we're stood on 24

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hours' notice to move to Liverpool. This young chap came in and showed me a letter that he had and (chuckle) this letter read "This is from your wife who wishes she wasn't and if you think you're going out in the East and enjoying yourself for two years and I'm going to stay at home, you're much mistaken. Goodbye." So I said, "Having read all the details of the people I'm responsible for, I understand you only got married on your embarkation leave". He said "Yes, that's right". (laughter) So I granted him compassionate leave to go and sort it out. A week later the corporal came to me, he said "Can I have a word with you sir?" I said "Yeah, what's the matter corporal?" "Well" he said "I've had a letter from my wife, sir, and she's threatening to commit suicide". (chuckle) So I said "Well, once again having read through the details of whomever I'm taking" I said, "You're the only person on this draft volunteered for it, the rest of us were all conscripted". So I said "Would I be right in assuming you wanted to get away from the old lady for a while?" "Yeah, you're dead right sir" he said. (laughter) So I granted him compassionate leave to go and sort it out. Two days later I had a telegram from my wife to say that she was seriously ill and had been taken to Bournemouth Hospital for an emergency operation. So in turn I had to go and see the colonel and (chuckles) show him the telegram, so I got taken off the draft. How many people eventually went out to Singapore I never knew, but anyhow, as a result of that, 'course I was taken off the draft and well, what were they going to do with me so I could be near at home.

00-03-37

They said they would send me to the prisoner of war camp on Utley Plain, (Setley?), 64 Prisoner of War Camp. So I arrived there as a Motor Transport Officer, not being able to drive of course - typical army - and consequently the Germans taught me to drive. What used to happen at the camp, I used to go by train from Parkstone station up to Brockenhurst, and we used to walk from Brockenhurst. I used to meet another Captain on the way, by the way, at Boscombe station and the two of us used to walk up to the camp in the morning to have our breakfast because of course, things were rationed, and of course at the camp, well, we lived really well. The drivers used to have to go into Southampton to - used to organize and go into Southampton to collect provisions for the Germans. And daily, the Germans themselves were sent out on the lorries to work at the normal farms. Some of the prisoners were actually billeted on the farms, but we used to have to rotate them every so often. They were only allowed to stay on the farm for so long. I went to one farm one time to change over one of the prisoners and the farmer's wife said to me "Oh" she said "we want to keep him. He's a very good worker. We want to keep him". And I said, "Well, sorry but I can't do that". "Well" she said "you won't ill treat him when you take him back to the camp, will you". I said "Well, what d'you mean, we won't ill treat him". (chuckling) I said "We don't ill treat people". I said "We're preparing them to be sent back to Germany". So that was the run of things.

00-05-29

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The prisoners that we had were all well behaved prisoners. The real Nazis, they were in a separate camp. The only Nazi that we had was the camp dentist. The camp dentist was an SS Major and when we sent him back in '47, he had to go back to stand trial for war crimes. I couldn't find out what he was accused of and the only other German officer was the doctor. He was a Captain in the German army and the Bürgermeister who was the liaison between the Germans and our camp Commandant – can't remember his name – they called him the "Burglemaster", and he was a Major in the German army, and he fought with his men all through the war, and when he was captured by the Americans, in order to stay with his men he reverted to the rank of Private. And consequently that's how he ended up on the Setley Plain, and he was in liaison, I say, between our colonel and the rest of the troops.

00-06-36

The only trouble that we ever had with any of the Germans while I was stationed there was we had a letter – we was sending them back gradually – and we had a letter come back from Germany, from one of the repatriated prisoners, to say that the troops that were billeted in Osborne House on the Isle of Wight were making illicit hooch down in the cellars. So of course, this was the only time that we had to draw rifles and bayonets, and go over to Osborne House mob handed and arrest these eight or nine German prisoners that were (chuckles) at Osborne House, and smash up all this illicit booze that they'd made out of whatever you know, but it smelt dreadful. I don't know what it taste like, didn't taste it. And one couldn't understand – you could only come to the conclusion that possibly this man that was repatriated wasn't getting his ration, so he decided to shop all of his mates. (laughter) But that was the only trouble. We brought them back and lined them all up and the CO said "Well" he said "I'm sentencing you all to 14 days in the clink". So they were locked away in special cell, and anyhow, then they decided that they were going to go on hunger strike. So for a week they went on hunger strike. They would take liquid but they wouldn't eat anything. So at the end of the week, the CO paraded them out again and "Now" he said "I've thought about this and providing you're prepared to break this hunger strike, you're free to go back to your units". And so all of them except one decided that yes, they would not continue. But one who was the ringleader, he decided he would continue. So for the next week, again, we used to have to visit him every 4 hours. He would sip water but he wouldn't eat anything, and then after the fortnight, I mean, from quite a strapping chap he looked as almost as if he'd came out of Belsen, you know, but he stuck to it, and then he got sent away to a special camp.

00-08-54

So that was the only spot of bother we had with the Germans themselves, but otherwise, I mean, they were very efficient and very workmen like, and matter of fact, my chief driver, I had to warn him, I said "Look, don't do anything before I give you any orders, otherwise you're going to make me redundant". And 'course, we used to – in the Brockenhurst area

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there was loads of old retired generals and admirals, and they used to all come to our camp at night, 'cos of course, I mean, you know, we had chunks of lamb and chunks of pork and all cooked and loads of drink, and they used to come in. And so one night, one of the old generals went to go home and he had a puncture in his car. So the CO said to me, "Well take my car and take the general home" he said. "Get his puncture repaired and take it back, he's sure to invite you in for a drink". So anyhow, the next morning I went over to the company lines and I saw my chief driver. I said "Schon, there's a car in the company, in the officer's lines" I said "with a flat tyre". "Yes sir" he said "I know" he said "we've already repaired it". I said "Now look here Schonrich (chuckling)" I said, "you should have waited until I give you the orders". This is what they were like. Anyhow, I drove the car back to the old general. "Come in lad, have a drink". (laughter) So, and that was what the life was like in the camp.

00-10-28

But as I say, the CO was a Colonel Utley. He was a colonel before the war in some obscure Irish regiment, and he had the drums of the regiment, and he had a lot of the silver that belonged to the company. The other thing with him was, he put me on the spot one day in as much as I'd been about a month and he called me into his office and he said "What do you think of the state of the troops in the camp, our troops in the camp". I said "Well, (chuckle) you want me to tell you the truth sir or do you want the sort of, d'you want me to say everything's OK". "No" he said "I want you to tell me the truth". So I said "Well sir, they're an utter shamble". "Yes" he said "that's what I expected you to say". So he said "So I'm going to give you an order now" he said "you've got to tidy the camp up". And so I said "Well sir, you've now made me the most unpopular officer in this camp, you're going to get a lot of complaints about me," and so I said "unless you're prepared to back me up" I said "I don't want the job". "Yeah" he said "I shall back you up". So, OK, so (chuckle) there was a sergeant there, and through the other troops, I said to the sergeant "Get them on parade at 8 o'clock in the morning and I'll inspect them". Well, 8 o'clock came, the troops all assembled, and I went out, my cane under my arm, and as I approached 'em, I'd never seen – it reminded me of Dad's Army – they were literally scrappy, they hadn't had their hats on right, their ties wasn't straight and so much so I nearly burst out laughing, but I had the presence of mind to say to the sergeant, I said "Look, march them up and down a bit sergeant to warm them up" I said "I forgot something, I have to go back to my room". So I went back to my room and I sat on my bed and I absolutely cried with laughter. (chuckles) I had to go wash my face and put on the sternest face I possibly could, and walked out and I told them then they were the scruffiest, the dirtiest lot I've ever seen, and I said "Instead of now you knocking off at 6 o'clock tonight, you're going to be on parade at 6 o'clock for me to re-inspect you" and I said "unless it's a lot tidier than it was this morning, that's what's going to happen every night". So (chuckle) anyhow, come the 6 o'clock that night, they were a lot tidier and so gradually I got to know them and took them in to drill.

00-13-17

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Showed them how to re-drill, 'cos they hadn't done any drill for ages and ages. And I was trying to get them to – like in the army says – hup, one, two, three – hup, one, two, three. And I couldn't get them any coordination. Anyway, one night I was walking through the other lines and I heard in one of the camps, I heard "Hup, one, two, three". Someone was taking the Michael out of me, wasn't they. So, of course, I opened the door up and this bloke was in there "Hup, two, three". I said "Well" - I can't remember his name – I said "Well, thank you very much, now that's just the sort of information I wanted". "Now, in the morning now you're going to take up your position in the rear rank of the platoon, and you're going to give those instructions just like you've been practising tonight". "Now" I said "unless you do, you're gonna get put on a charge. D'you understand?" He said "Yes, sir". (laughter) From then on (laughter again) we got them that, but the trouble with them was, they had nothing to do. They were fed up. They used to leave the bed as they got out of it. They never tidied the bed, the place actually was an absolute tip. And what I realised, you know, you had to sort of get things organized, and 'course I was unpopular to the extent the sergeant said to me, he said "I like to warn you sir, don't walk through the company lines after dark" he said "because there's talks of waylaying and beating you up". And I said "Well, I think I can handle that".

00-14-58

And then I got in touch with the army education branch, and I organized magazines for them, and also at that time we could make mats. The army would supply the hessian and all the short pieces of wool and the hooks for doing it, and I got them all together at nights after dark. There was about ten or more of us all making rugs and mats and things like that. And then I organized a football matches for them between us and people in Brockenhurst and Lymington, and cricket matches, and I brought them down to Christchurch to do some field firing, which they hadn't done since they joined up. And in the end, obviously, they wouldn't do for me, the situation changed. That was because they had no one to lead them, no one to tell them what to do. So, we had quite a happy camp there and I was sorry that it ended.

00-16-09

It ended in '47 when they decided finally to close the camp and then typical army regulation was that there was 3 three ton wagons that had to be handed in, but these had to be handed in right up at Bardney in Lincoln. So we used to get our fuel from the nearest aerodrome, and so we went up with these wagons, and the tanks would hold 30 gallons each and petrol was rationed then, and we had worked out how many gallons we need to get up there and I thought well, we need somewhere round about 150 gallons of petrol. So we filled all the tanks up, and we had jerry cans there and we wanted all them filled up and the man in charge of the pump "Oh" he said "I can't let you have .." "Well" I said "that's my orders. I gotta take these vehicles". So, filled up all these jerry cans.

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So we set off up country, the three of us. There was 3 German drivers and myself. The first night we made Nottingham and went into a prisoner of war camp at Nottingham, spent the night there, and then the following day we headed off to Bardney in Lincoln. I had one of the Germans reading the map for me, but when we got fairly near to Bardney he led us off the wrong way. We had to turn right. Instead of that, he took us left. We got right out in the country. I thought, I don't know, this is - I said to him "obviously, we've gone wrong somewhere, let me have a look at the map", and I saw what he'd done. So anyhow, I said "OK, turn round. We'll have to back track". So one of the Germans came up to me, he said "I'm afraid" he said "I don't know whether I'm going to be able to drive my lorry anymore sir" he said. I said "Why's that?" He said "Well, it's making a lot of noises". I said "Well fire it up". Bang, crash and that and I looked down and there was a conrod coming out through the gear box and spreading oil all over the road. Oh blimey! (laughter) Well, we didn't have any ropes 'cos everything was - we didn't have any towing gear at all, so I went looking for - around various places - and went into a house, and it had a big field at the back of it. Strange house, I went in there, they had a sink and a pump in there for water. I looked round, how the hell do they get up stairs? There was no stairs, I could see upstairs. Anyhow, apparently they had a ladder round the back and to go to bed they had to get a ladder out and climb up the ladder. (laughter) Asked them if they had any ropes. Oh no, they got nothing like that. Anyhow, I had a look around and I found a wire guard that people used to put in front of their houses. I said "Well, OK, we'll stretch that out and you can tow him" and I said "What I'll do, I'll take the other German driver and we'll dash off into the camp, get some proper towing gear, and come back". Anyhow, so we dashed off and gradually the other one came on towing with this (chuckles) this fender he had on the back. Anyhow, when we got back about 5 miles and we met them, still coming along and the thing was still holding up. Anyhow we put the proper gear in, and handed them in. Then we had railway warrants to come back. So we caught a train at Bardney and we got down to London. We had to change there and my chief driver, Schonrich, he said - I'd not long been married, so I wanted to go home for the night - but my chief driver said "Well" he said "we've heard a lot about the Houses of Parliament, we'd like to go and have a look at the Houses of Parliament". I said "Well, I tell you what, I'll take you onto Waterloo Bridge, I'll show you where they are and you can go down there, and you can have a look at it, but "I said "now look, the thing is, you must give me your word of honour that you will return to the camp, on your own, because I'm gonna go on home". I said "Now if you don't turn up in the camp in the morning, I'm going to get cashiered and thrown out the army. I'll be court marshalled". "Oh, that's alright sir" he said. So I left 'em on Waterloo Bridge. (laughter) Sure enough, when I went back to camp next morning, they were back there. Apparently they went to see the Houses of Parliament and quite happy about things.

00-20-30

That was more or less the sum total of things, other than the fact that in the daily run of things there, the Colonel, he had a small staff car and all he was interested in was hunting

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and shooting. He said to me "Look" – I was allowed to spend, I think it was about £20 a month on each of my lorries and £10 on his car – he said "damn them lorries, you spend all that money on my – you keep my car on the road" he said. (laughter) And every day, all he used to do was go off down on the Lymington marshes, shooting widgeon and teal and rabbits and hare, and all this sort of carry on, and 'course outside our cookhouse there was all these things all hung up for people to cook. And that was what his job was. So I mean that was the way the company was run.

But as I say, everything was laid out quite nice and tidy, and when I went back years afterwards, of course, it had all got vandalised. But the officer's lines were all enclosed and they had about 2ft high double brick sort of walls, and in between, of course, they put dirt and had all beautiful plants. And they had a little pond that they made as well. The Germans had done all this, and over the top a wooden pagoda (pergola?) over the top of it. It looked quite pretty in actual fact. But of course the German lines were all these Nissan huts that they had and the British were not supposed to go into their part, but I was shown round by one of my German drivers and what was quite pretty to see was, outside of a lot of these barracks, if they'd come from Bavaria, they literally out of dirt and moss and stones, they'd created their little alpine villages. Literally copies of them, of where they lived. All quite pretty and quite good the way they'd done it, and of course, there were lots of wood carvings they used to do as well. That was basically my time there.

00-23-01

And finally I was demobbed from there, and this Captain Bowditch that was there. Now he was a – he joined as a boy soldier when he was 14. He'd been in the army for 40 odd years and just two weeks before - he'd managed to work his way up, obviously, to a Captain – two weeks before he was due to retire, they made him a Major so that he retired on a better pension and so that was my time at the prisoner of war camp.

00-23-36

Interesting. So your basic job was to transport them out to the farms, was it?

Yeah. Transport them out to the farms and make sure that the vehicles were all in good working order. If we had any major problems with the vehicles, we used to have to take them into Portsmouth. Into a big workshop there, at Hillsea they had, and if it had a'needed an engine overhaul or something like that, but ordinary wear and tear I was allowed to go to the local garage and get them repaired there. No, but as I say, otherwise it was simply indenting for supplies for the vehicles and also, of course, organizing the transport to go, which was usually at least two or three of the lorries had to go every day into Portsmouth to pick up supplies you see, because there was no supplies anywhere near Setley Plain.

00-24-36

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What sort of supplies were they?

That was all the food for the prisoners and everything, you see, that they needed. The second in command there, he was a – his name was (long pause thinking about it)

Utle?

No. Utle, he was the commandant.

Max, d'you remember a Max Muller? Was the German camp ...

No, the name, I've heard the name, yeah, I've heard the name, but only – I'm trying to remember the name of the Burglemaster. He was the only chap that I ever had much talk with, but I used to have to liaise with him to see as and when the prisoners were going to be sent out and had to be exchanged. All the British troops had to do, you see, was if any of the Germans had to go anywhere for any particular treatment, or hospital treatment or anything like that, they simply had to provide an escort. And that was all they had to do, so they were virtually nothing, and they simply didn't know what to do with their selves at all. No, it was a, as I say, a very pleasant camp there.

00-26-00

We used to come into Brockenhurst station in the morning, and the two of us would just set off. There was a kindly lady that used to work at Wellworthy's, and sometimes in the car, if we timed it right, she would give us a lift up to the camp. (laughter) But otherwise every night I used to catch the train and come home, and then I used to catch the train at Parkstone station about 7 o'clock in the morning and get back to the camp. Then unfortunately, I had to – well, I was due for demob – but I had the chance to sign on, and I could have signed on for 5 on the active and 4 on the reserve or 4 on the active and 4 on the reserve or 3 on the active and 4 on the reserve, but unfortunately my wife was sufficiently ill that I couldn't continue in it and I had to come out of the army and I was within one month of becoming a Captain. In which case, had I signed on, by the time I was about 34 I could have come out the army as a Captain with a good pension.

00-27-22

It's strange the way things worked out because I didn't want to go in the army. When I was 18, working in munitions, I volunteered for the navy and I got accepted, but the ministry found out and decided that I was more useful helping in munitions rather than like they said, sailing around in a boat, because during the war I was in a company, and we were making parts for the Spitfire, and we were also making parts for 6 pounder tank and anti-tank gun. The interesting thing there was of course, when we went to war, we only had 2 pounders

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against the German tanks, which was hopeless. So they quickly made the 6 pounder. We were making the buffer cylinder and it didn't get properly tested, so it got sent out to the desert. And we had a Major come back shortly after we sent them out. "Oh yes" he said "this is a marvellous gun". "Now we can take on the German tanks" he said. "The only thing is, you've made it too good, you haven't allowed for the sand" he said. "The trouble is, we fire about five rounds and the damn thing seizes up. We got to run away and leave it". So, we had to make everything sloppy to allow for the sand. And then of course, towards the end of the war we had another message come back from the desert, "Oh, Hitler's sent his Tigers out there now and the 6 pounder's no good against the Tigers". So then we upped the buffer cylinder to a 17 pounder that was capable of knocking the Tigers out. I saw that, and of course, during the war I was here in munitions.

00-29-05

One day I saw at least four German bombers shot down, two of them going over in flames and two of them blowing up in the sky. Also the bombing that took place in Poole. Of course I was reserve then and I wasn't called up until December '45.

Where were you working at this time ...?

A company called Humphries and Sons. We were a small company working near the municipal buildings here in Poole. The boss of my company, he was a very skilled engineer, and he was a consulting engineer and during the '14-'18 war, he speeded up the rate of fire of the machine guns. Of course, when the war broke out, then everything went over to munitions and when the Supermarine works at Southampton was blown up, what they decided was that the manufacture of the Spitfire would take place at small factories all over the country. It was like my company, we were making bits for it, but there would be another company maybe a hundred miles away making the same bits, so that anyone of us got blown up it didn't matter because someone else was making the same part. And the Spitfire bits didn't come together until they all went somewhere up north away from the bombers and were assembled. And then, as I say, we took on making this – we had a tank turret there which we could put this buffer cylinder in. The buffer cylinder was such that when the gun fired, this hydraulic cylinder pushed the gun back in the firing position you see. And so we could put it in the turret, we had a hydraulic where we could wind it back as if it had been fired, and then we had a trip lever with a hammer and someone was there with a stop watch, and it had to go back in the firing position in so many seconds. But of course, when it went to the desert, the fact that it was so good when it went back like that it wouldn't go forward because all the sand got in the mechanism, you see. So everything had to be a rattle fit to allow for it, and then they were quite happy with it. Yeah, I made parts for the Spitfire, made parts for the Horsa Glider, made parts for the Sea Fire, we made the hooks that literally captured the Sea Fire when they put it on the carriers, and other bits.

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00-31-54

The very first thing I ever was involved in – well, I left school I suppose – I went in the munitions when I was 15, I made bomb stays for the Bristol bomber – what was the Wellesley bomber in actual fact, and that was the first thing I ever made. A lot of the bits for the Spitfire - it's no wonder it caught fire – a lot of the bits that went into the Spitfire were made of magnesium. The brackets and parts, a lot of it was made of magnesium, and of course, magnesium, we had several fires in the workshop making it because it was very, very volatile. That was my sort of experience of there.

00-32-34

As regards training to be an officer, but I mean, there again, whether one would be interested, that was another story because I was training with generals and admirals and all the intelligentsia. I was training with Major General Gubbings' son, Major General Rawlings' son, and I knew very well if you watch it, at Sandhurst, the best all round recruit gets allotted a Sam Brown. Well, I knew that I had no chance of that whatsoever and as it turned out, we did 16 weeks in the Trentham Deer Park up at Stoke-on-Trent. And we had Major General Rawlings, he took our passing out parade and he presented Major General Gubbings' son, he was the best all round recruit and he had his Sam Brown and then he presented the second Sam Brown to his son. He was the second all best round recruit, wasn't he? (laughter) So I came down to Bulford with Major General Rawlings' son and although I got put out on training, Major General Rawlings' son got put in the Orderly Room with the CO. And he hadn't been down there about 3 months and he was given a second pip – he was an acting Lieutenant, wasn't he? I had to wait a 12 month before I could get my second one, and I think the Colonel wanted to be a General. (laughter) And that is unfortunately the way the army worked and also I was quite surprised to see the influence of the Masons was quite great as well. If I'd stayed in, I would have become a Captain, probably never have made a Major, because to be a Major it was by appointment, so you either had to marry the Colonel's daughter or the General's daughter or your uncle had to be – to become in what they called the officers' ranks, you see, and I knew very well I didn't come from any background so I didn't have a hope. But I could have been a Captain, which as I say, if I'd stayed in, I could have retired at 35 on a Captain's pay. But unfortunately I had to come out. So I went back to engineering again. And that's where I'm still working today at the age of 89. (chuckles)

00-35-09

That's it. Lots of stories I could tell. People say that know me, they say you ought to write a book because I can relate any goodness amount of stories of my service in the army, and I was nearly blown up 3 times, it was pure luck that I wasn't killed. One experience we had. We were throwing grenades. We had four bays and it had a chap up in a box up here above us that was telling us prepare to throw. We were teaching some recruits how to

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throw these grenades and the last one we threw, the damn thing didn't go off. There was a Captain there that was superior to me and he said "What are we going to do?" and I said "Well, standing orders sir, are that we should stay under cover for at least half an hour, and then we should go and find it and blow it up" "Oh damn that" he said "we'll miss our dinner". And he'd been through the war; he had a wound stripe as it was. So I said "Well". "No, no" he said "what I'll do, I'll go and locate it and you can come out and blow it up, so get the charge ready". So I had a pound of guncotton in one hand, which was enough to blow my arm off, I had a detonator in the other hand which would have blown my hand off. I just got out the trench and was walking forward, suddenly he said "For God's sake, get down". So I threw the guncotton one way and the other the other way and did a swallow dive down in the trench, and there was one hell of an explosion. I thought "Oh hell, I'm going to find bits of him up there now because, well, he had no hope of getting back because once they become live you've got four seconds to live. So as quick as I could, I jumped out of the trench and he was just getting up and brushing his clothes off. I said "What the hell happened?" "Well" he said "I was very lucky. As I got out there I saw it was in a little depression and I happened to see a little bit of wisp of smoke coming out between the horns and I thought damn me it's got live." And he said "I knew I couldn't get back, so I put my feet towards, threw myself flat, put me hands over the back of my hat" he said "but I just had time to shout to you because I knew you would have copt it straight in the face" he said. And fortunately when it exploded it went over the top of him. So I said "The man that wrote that instruction about staying under cover for half an hour, he wasn't an idiot, was he?" (laughter) We nearly didn't get any lunch at all. So, that was bad.

00-38-03

Another day we were out and I was training some troops how to fire a Sten gun. Well, we were on a range that had been used during the war and they'd been firing a lot of 80 3 inch mortars and there were a lot of things sticking out the ground. So I warned them before we started, and I said "Look, you see all these fins, whatever you do, don't kick them, don't touch them, don't step on them at all, they may be live". So I said "Give them a wide berth". Anyhow, we were in a group and I was instructing them how to use these submachine guns and one of the troops come in. He said "there's one of those" – he did say his name, I forget his name – "he's kicking one of those bombs you told us about". I looked across and oh blimey! This chap - so I went across and I did a rugby tackle and I knocked him absolutely flying. And of course I looked at the thing he was kicking and I said to one of the troops "let me have your bayonet" and got the rest of them away out of harm's way and stayed there with the sergeant and carefully went round this thing with the bayonet. And I saw three red crosses. I thought "Blimey" he was kicking a 3 inch live, 3 inch mortar bomb. If it had gone off, I mean, it would have killed us all. So we had to retire. I retired 'em to about 100 yards away and there was a bit of a slope. I said "All lay down, we've got to blow it up". So the sergeant and I, we put one of these guncotton slabs by the side of this bomb, cut the fuse and worked out how long it would take for us to walk to get under cover, and then we lit the fuse. Orders are you mustn't run, you gotta walk. So you're walking along

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and you're thinking "I wonder if I cut that fuse correct length" and then the hair begins to stand up on the back of your neck. You think to yourself "I don't know" and you feel like breaking into a run. (chuckles) Finally threw ourselves down and there was an explosion. The sergeant and I looked at one another and I said "You know, that wasn't a 3 inch mortar bomb sergeant, was it?" "No" he said "I don't think it was sir". So I said "Well, OK, we'll stay under cover for a while". So we stayed under cover and then I said "Well, you'd better stay under cover sergeant, it's my responsibility, I'll go and see what's happened". So I warily approached this thing. We'd blown it out the ground and there it was, laying out on the ground. So I signalled the sergeant. I said "Well, obviously we can blow it up now 'cos we can put the bomb right beside it. So we did that again and cut the fuse and again we walked again and we had the same thing – cold water running down your back and everything (laughter) – threw ourselves flat and 'course there was one hell of an explosion and this thing blew up. But again that was pure luck that we didn't get blown up.

00-41-19

Various exercises and things that we went on and some of it was serious and some of it was quite funny. We had an instructor here, Captain that was instructing us at the OPTU and whenever he used to say "Well, get down now, we're going to have all round defence". So he would stand in the middle and he'd come round and he'd tap your boot. He say "you want them resoled" (laughter) So it was inevitable to get our boots checked, but we were and all round defence.

00-41-53

And the other peculiar, well I say sad thing, well, bad thing that happened. When we finished our 16 weeks core training, we had to do 100 miles in 5 days – route march – with pretend action on the way. So one night we had to dig in a slit trench, and one of us would have to sleep each end of it, and the other night we'd had to bivouac in the woods, sew our groundsheets together and sleep together like that. Anyhow, on the third day it poured with rain all day. So anyhow, the CO said "They're expecting attack tonight, we got to dig in". So in the mud we had to dig in and happened while the mud made it easier for digging, and we dug in. We had to make a little sheet at each end of the slit trench so that we could sit in there with our tin hat on just below the ground level. You sit facing one another. So we sat there, tin hats on and our gas capes on, pouring with rain, and went off to sleep. In the night, I thought "Cor, damn me, I'm half cold" and I moved me hands. I thought, "Hell, I'm going to sleep". I had water up to me waist, the slit trench was gradually filling up. The chap down the other end, he was still fast asleep, so I kicked him and he said "What's wrong, what's wrong". I said "We got to get out of here. We're gonna get drowned". So I said "Look, you roll out that side, I'll roll out that side, if they blow the whistle and say there's an attack, we'll have to drop back in the water again". So anyhow (chuckling) we each rolled out and slept there. It was still pouring with rain. Anyhow, we couldn't get any wetter and about 6 o'clock in the morning they blew the whistle and called the whole thing off. And it

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was the only time in the army about 12 of the blokes – they had to send for rum – and about 12 of the blokes - we were all issued a rum ration - and about 12 of ‘em had to go back to camp. They had to pick ‘em up and take them back, and they were suffering from hypothermia, which was stupid to make us stay in trenches like that. But anyhow, then the rest of us had to continue and do the hundred miles in the 5 days. That’s why they called it the PBI, the Poor Bloody Infantry. (laughter)

It teaches you to steal, to cheat, and as I say, my first introduction into stealing things was the first week I was there we got sent out and we got wet through. So the sergeant said “You can’t keep the wet stuff in the barracks, you’ll have to put it in a hut”. A proper drying hut. So put all the stuff in there. Then he sent me off on fatigues. Well when I came back I said to the sergeant “I’ll go and get my...” He said “Here’s the key, go over and get it”. So I went over there and found nearly all my gear had all been stolen. So I went to see the sergeant. I said “Here, look, what do I do about this, my stuff’s been stolen”. He said “Well, you’ll have to pay for a new lot”. I said “Well, that’s not right”. He said “Well, that’s the army. I’m not telling you what to do, but was there anything over there that, you know”. I said “there’s stuff there that wouldn’t fit me”. He said “I can’t tell you what, but here’s the key”. So I went over there. Found some shirts that were too small for me and trousers too small and shoes and things, all too small. Took ‘em back to the barracks and there was an old soldier there and he said to me “Look lad, you know what you want to do now.” I said “What’s that? I can’t wear ..” He said “You want to go and get yourself a brick. At nights when you’re in the barracks, you want to work on your shirt and trousers with a brick, make it threadbare, because once it’s threadbare you can take it to the colour sergeant and he’ll exchange it for you, ‘cos you can tell him it’s worn out, you see, and he’ll exchange it for you”. (chuckles) So at night I used to sit there like that and wear me trousers out and me socks out and me shirt out, then go to the colour sergeant and say “this is wore out sergeant” and he would issue me with one that fit me. (laughter) So this is how you had to learn to survive in the army. You know.

End: 00-46-21

Keywords: On draft for Malaya, embarkation leave, compassionate leave, Setley, Motor Transport Officer, German POW Camp, work on farms, Nazi, dentist, doctor, German officer, Osborne House, illicit booze, hunger strike, camp food, Colonel Utley, scruffy appearance, parades, army drill, entertainment, wagons to Bardney, breakdown, visit Houses of Parliament, Lymington Marshes, shooting for the pot, vehicle repairs at Hillsea, Portsmouth, food supplies for the camp, Spitfire, German tanks, guns, Tiger tanks, bombers, shot down, Humphries & Sons, machine guns, buffer cylinder, parts made of magnesium, fire hazard, army training, dangerous incidents, route march, hypothermia, rum, steal and cheat.

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00-00-00

(discussing painting of Setley Plain camp)

There was all these round huts like that. That's what they had, yeah. These were more like these, where they had been blocks really, because all the prisoners were in these. And that was the entrance into their part, yeah. And the officers' lines, I don't suppose would be shown, would be up here 'cos as you came up from the station, you entered in the main road where the lorries went in and then the first place you came to was the main camp where that went in, and then you went on past that to the officer's lines which was towards the Lymington end.

Yeah, Galpin, that was the bloke I was trying to tell you about, the 2nd in command. His name was Galpin. Now again, they talk about post war syndrome, don't they, this bloke – he was a nice bloke, but he always seemed a bit nervous. Soon after I met him, I moved here, which now would be about 40 odd years ago, he opened up a pram shop right on the corner here, and we met up again. But he wasn't there very long. He lived down at Lytchett, and he blew his brains out with a shotgun. I think it was because he was captured at Tobruk. He was in the siege of Tobruk and he was telling me how they had hardly any sleep because the Germans used to fire shells all day and all night to make sure they couldn't sleep and of course that siege went on for a long time and like he said, "We slept in the caves and we used to come out in the morning, oh blimey, we're still alive". I think it um – I don't think he ever recovered from it.

00-01-54

(Shown pictures of Setley Camp)

At 14, recognize anybody?

And where's this?

Setley.

And these are the Germans, are they?

Yes, at Setley.

I don't recognize any of 'em. That Schonrich was a big bloke like this one in actual fact. No I don't, no.

1946.

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They don't tell you who the Burglemaster was there.

No, I've not seen it written.

You haven't discovered his name. 'Cos apparently, the other thing, I don't know whether you've heard of that one, but it's a fact that the Germans at the camp, most of them were a transport battalion and they were going into Stalingrad on the night that Stalingrad got cut off. So they were very lucky; they got cut off outside. So they retreated all the way back and gave themselves up to the Americans. The Americans gave them up to the British, and then they were telling me how they realised themselves – we were not supposed to discuss the war with them – but they were saying, obviously they realised that initially they all thought Hitler was a good chap. He really pulled them up by their shoe straps. But then, of course, he obviously did it for his own ends and went too far. They agreed he went too far. They reckoned he was responsible for the debacle they suffered in Russia because like they said, they were transport battalion and they said many was the time when they got up to the front lines – 'cos they had many thousands of miles to go, hundreds of miles – and we'd get up to the front line and our troops up there, they had nothing to eat, nothing to drink or anything like that and they had no ammunition. So if the Russians attacked, they used to have to run away, because Hitler went so fast instead of – the Russians destroyed the railway lines – so instead of building up the railway lines so they could really take the stuff forward, they had to drive these lorries. And they didn't have enough lorries – not the proper lorries – some of the lorries that these blokes were driving were what they called "wood alcohol" lorries, and these wood alcohol lorries, two blokes had to drive them, in boiler suits, and they were issued with a saw and axes. With decent wood, they used to have to light the fire up in these things and they could drive for 50 miles. Now they had to make sure that at the end of the 50 miles that they ended up in a wood because they then had to get out, draw the fire out, go into the wood with their saws and their axes, chop up all the wood, come back, light the fire in this thing and we can go another 50 miles. So you can imagine what that was like. Wood alcohol, I'd never heard of it. But that's what these blokes ...

End: 00-05-12

Keywords: Setley Plain camp, 2nd in command Galpin, post war syndrome, siege of Tobruk, German transport battalion, Stalingrad, Hitler, lack of food and ammunition, wood alcohol lorries.

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00-00-00

(talking about war experiences)

... and they won't surrender, so they said "If you kill any of these insurgents, what we want you to do" – I know it sounds not very good, but they said "you won't be able to bring them back, so what we want you to do is chop the heads off and bring them back so we can recognize 'em". "Well, we know who they are because they fought with us against the Japanese". Once they turned the Japanese out, they wanted to chuck us out. So they said "We want you to bring the heads back so we can recognize who they are and write them off, finished".

Yes ...

Yeah, I thought "Cor blimey", I was glad to get out of that little lot, you know. Oh dear! (chuckle) So, in the end, and I sort of look back over it and think, well, this old medium I met on the train, she wasn't far from it. I went through a few hairy experiences, but I did come through them all. (chuckling)

00-00-58

And then of course, my other lucky escape was the fact that I broke my collar bone, here, and I've got a lump in my shoulder, here, the army playing football. I was up at Stoke-on-Trent, and I was on the reserve and the Korean War started, so I got called back, didn't I. So I went for a medical and they said "Yes, you'll be called up within a week to go to Korea". Anyhow, a week later I had another message come from the War Office to say that "No, I wasn't fit due to the disability of my right shoulder". I put them both together in a letter, sent them back to the War Office and I said "Would they make up their mind whether I'm fit or not fit. I was discharged from the army as A1, now they're telling me I'm not. If I'm not, I want a pension". So, they wrote back to say that they'd assessed me at 2.5% disabled and as such you had to be 22% disabled to get a pension, but as an army officer, I would be granted a gratuity of £149-50s-0d. (chuckles) So they granted me £149 for this disability to my shoulder. So I wrote back and said "OK, I'll accept that with a reservation that if this played me up in the future, I reserved the right to review" (chuckle) It's never played me up, so I got out of going to Korea. So that was another. So though I spent two and half years in the army, fortunately for me, I never had to kill anybody.

Yeah, ... (muttering in the background, looking at photos)

00-02-37

I might remember the name of that bloke. I think there's a Major in the German army and that Schonrich told me he fought with him all through the war so he didn't – he wanted to go

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in the activity and the only way he could do it was to revert back to the rank of a Private.

Oh, I see.

00-03-00

Sergeant O'Grady - that was the bloke. The big flat footed bloke that had to have – Sergeant O'Grady, that was it, that's his name, just come to me. He was the one that was – the wooden one that was on the post outside the camp.

I've got a photo of him (pause looking for photo)

Yeah, believe it or not, I'm making little bits and pieces for the atomic submarines now.

Really!

(laughter) and since the war I worked on – I worked it out the other day – 32 different aeroplanes and cars, making parts for the Concorde and the VC10, the BAC111 and – yes, 32 different 'planes I've made bits for.

That O'Grady?

Ah yeah, yeah. That looks like him, yeah. (chuckle)

Was that actually displayed somewhere?

Yeah, yeah. Just outside the officers' lines, this was on. O'Grady, yeah.

That's made by a German prisoner?

Oh yeah, they were damned good at anything like that and as I say, my little batman used to come into me at 6 o'clock in the morning and bring me in a cup of tea and he'd say "Shall I go and draw your bath for you sir?" and I say "Yeah, OK". So he'd go and draw the bath. "Now what clothes are you going to wear today, sir?" And then while I was having a bath, he'd lay it all out on the bed for me and (laughter), you know. I used to tease my wife. I used to say "I'm going to stop in the army because I'm looked after better in the army than you look after me". (laughter)

00-04-48

(another photo) *I think this is Max Mueller, Grady and Utley is it?*

Yes, that's O'Grady alright, yeah. Don't recognize either of them. You know they were

allowed to go anywhere within 10 miles of the camp after 6 o'clock at night up there providing they returned back again. As I say, they weren't locked in at all.

Were there ever occasions when they didn't come back?

No, no. Well, they had nowhere to go. They knew they were only waiting their turn to go back, so there was no point in it really. As I say, they were all screened when they come here. These were all supposed to be, well, like us, the ordinary – we had no option, we had to go and that was it. I mean, if they didn't go they'd have been shot and I mean, we would have been (nervous chuckle) obviously court marshalled and whatever if we didn't go.

There's a computer generated model that's been made of the camp. Is that roughly how you remember, like that?

Well, it don't show the officers' lines, that's sure, no.

Where about's were the officers' lines?

Well, if you look at this from the road, the officer's lines would have been up here, possibly

There?

Yeah, yeah.

So they were just off to one side. A small area off to one side.

I don't recognize that at all, no I can't believe that's accurate. These are accurate, but they had an enclosure like that, which is fair enough, they've one fence round it.

Round the barracks.

Yeah.

So the barracks were all at the back, is that right, the Germans here?

Yeah, yeah.

And what's this down here?

Well, this is what I can't understand, what this is.

Is it like ablutions, and kitchen and ..

Would be – I wonder if we'd be looking at – would the main road be here?

Think the main road's here, at the front.

Where would you say the main road was here, from Lymington?

Along here, along the front. Based on a water colour that's been shown to us.

Who did this then?

Gareth. He's on the project.

One of the prisoners?

No, no. Gareth who runs the New Forest Remembers Project.

No, this is nothing like the camp I remember, no. As I say, we came up from Brockenhurst and then we went in a little bit of an angle and there was a gate where we went in and the lorries were – I mean, if we're coming up from Lymington station, we come up here, go in here and the lorries would go round here and park in round there. And then a bit further along here, like here would be, this would be the main gate into the camp. And then our troops would be here – that could be reminiscent of where our troops would be. I don't remember those type of buildings in there at all, they were this type of building. And here, again, we had a similar thing to this where we were. And as I say, we had this little wall – garden, you know, this double red brick it was with all the dirt in it and all the flowers round it and a wooden pagoda over the top of it. That, as I say, I could go with that, and that's where they were, all at the back there. I don't know what he's showing there.

The running tracks. D'you remember the running tracks right at the very back, a big oval.

No, I don't remember that because I used to go out here and across here. I used to do a cross-country run up the side of the camp here, across to a railway bridge up the top, because that was the other thing that I installed there, that the troops, after Saturday morning, they were allowed to go home on leave. And so I decreed that we would all go on a cross-country run at 8 o'clock in the morning. We set off across here and I sent the sergeant up to sit on the bridge up here to make sure nobody short circuited it. I say you take the names when they get there. (chuckles) So they run up there, they got to run back, and I used to run with them and then come back and as soon as they got back they could wash and dress and go off home on leave. But we used to run up the side of the camp and run up across there, but I don't remember a track. Whether there was – I mean, how long that camp had been there I don't know.

I think it was built in '41. I think you came in '43.

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Yeah, well of course, it might have been in those days you see, 'cos as I say, I didn't go there until '46 you see. May have altered and even like the company lines, it certainly doesn't show. Our company officers' lines was quite pretty. Well laid out. And I'll say this was all lorries in here 'cos we went in here. I well remember there, the first time I'd been taught to drive one of these lorries, they had a gateway here at the beginning of the camp, and I turned in and of course being used to driving a smaller car, I turned too soon and took the gatepost out, (chuckle) and Schonrich who I was with, "that's alright sir" he said "we'll put that back". (laughter) So they had replant the gatepost. Because I'd not took a big enough sweep, you see. It was funny with him 'cos I would drive these things, these lorries, up to Southampton but I was always a bit worried about getting it through the High Street. We used to have to go right through the flipping town. I would drive them up there and then I'd say to Schonrich "You'd better take it the rest of the way". Anyhow, went up there one day. "Now sir" he said "you've gotta take it otherwise you're never going to take it". (laughter) He was giving me orders. "Alright" I said "well if I get into trouble I'll jump out and you take over". But anyhow, I managed to drive through, so I got the confidence to drive through the traffic. (laughter)

00-11-41

Which farms do you remember dropping people off at?

I don't remember the names of them.

What sort of areas, whereabouts was your route?

Well, in the main, from the railway station there was a road going away to the right and we used to go out round in that area particularly. There was several farms out round on that trip before we came back. Well, we had to come back out that same road.

Brockenhurst?

Yeah, from Brockenhurst we used to come up towards the camp and then there was a road going away to the right. We used to go out round there to the farms where we used to drop them off. Then some of them – the troops didn't go with them – the Germans took their selves to the farms once they knew where they were. And of course then we had a Foreign Office liaison man that because over on the Isle of Wight there was about six drop offs over there and this Foreign Office bloke who was in civilian clothes, he had a small car which he used to have to go over to the Isle of Wight once a week. Once I went with him. He'd go all round the island and visit all the different sites where these troops were billeted on the farms over there. I only ever went over there with him once, but it was his job to go over every week to see that they were – that everything was functioning alright and then arrange whether they come back. And as I say, I forget how long they were allowed on the farm, but

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CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

so long and then they had to come back again. Why they did that I don't know, but there again, that was the rules that they laid down.

00-13-18

Was Setley the only prisoner of war camp in the Forest?

Was that the only one?

Yes.

The only one I knew in actual fact, yeah, it was the only one I knew in the Forest. The only other accolade I had there was – we had these – I can't think of his name – but the officer, the General commanding all the prisoner of war camps in the south, he was visiting all the camps. The Colonel said to me "Lay on a parade for him" and of course the troops were, you know, I'd been in these military establishments and training all the time in the army. I laid on an inspection for him, gave him the salute and everything like that and the Colonel called me in after that he went and he said "The General said that this was the smartest camp in the south that he's visited". So he said "Thank you very much". That was the only thanks I got from the colonel for making the camp tidy and (chuckles) up together.

We've actually got copies of the report from the archives and it does actually say that "this is the smartest camp in Southern Command".

Did it?

Yes. *I've seen it written.*

0014-36

Well I'm damned! Yeah, 'cos the Colonel called – well, of course, what it was, in a way it sounds very big headed, but I did six weeks primary training, sixteen weeks core training, two weeks demonstration training and then on top of that they sent me up to Wrotham (Kent - Pre O.C.T.U (Officers, Cadet Training Unit)) for two weeks driving and maintenance, six weeks intensive infantry training and from there I went up to (Officer training Infantry O.C.T.U, Trentham Park, Staffs) for sixteen weeks. Instead of that I was there 20 weeks for more intensive training, so I'd done nothing but training. I could tell you all about when you say "quick march" and all that, you gotta - when the right foot is in the air, you gotta say "right turn". You gotta get it right otherwise they get it wrong. I was training all that sort of, you know, what was called "bull" now. So I smartened our camp up. Got 'em up to a really good standard and like I say, the CO said to me "You laid on a special treat for the General". That was the only thing - he didn't thank me for straightening the camp up, but that was the only thing he said to me was the officer said this was the smartest camp he

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visited. So he said thank you very much.

00-15-59

*D'you have any other memories of anything else about the New Forest in the war time?
D'you remember the planes going over or tanks on the road?*

No, I can't say I remember anything else in the Forest, but of course I was here in Poole you see. I was based in Poole. You weren't supposed to travel. Well the only other thing, strangely enough – yes, this comes back to me. Another story.

Yeah, before the war I was friendly with two girls that belonged to the same church where I went and then they joined up in the WAAFs. I was very keen on one of the WAAFs and I would have liked to marry her actually, but anyhow, that was another story. Anyhow, they got stationed at Tangmere. So one mad day I thought, during the war, I thought I'd like to visit. So I got on me bike and I cycled 75 miles from Poole down to Tangmere. I didn't know where she was billeted. Went into Tangmere village and I saw a house there. I saw a lot of airmen going in and out of there. So I went in there and as soon as I got in there I was surrounded with a couple of blokes with rifle and a bayonet. "Who are you? Where've you come from? What are you doing here?" I said "Well, I've come to see a girlfriend, Susan Matcham". And he said "Oh, well we'll see what we can do". So they went and got a WAAF officer. And the WAAF officer came out and I told her who I'd come to see and I said "what's all the .." "Well, you've only stumbled upon the headquarters of the fighter aircraft (chuckling) of the Tangmere airfield". Anyhow, she said "I've got good news and bad news". I said "Well, what's happening?" "Well the bad news is she's not here". So I said "What's the good news?" "She left this morning to go on leave to Poole, so you've had a wasted journey". So I did 150 miles round trip, came back, going up through the Forest – what's the name of that place up there, it's still – when you go up through the Forest, on the left hand side, there was an aerodrome there and I think some of the tarmac is still there.

Stoney Cross?

Yeah, it could - all along the side of the road there was these Hamden Bombers there. They're what was called the flying pencils and when they landed them a bit heavy they were broke in half. The tails broke off. All along the side of the road, I mean, I could 'ave got over the fence there and got in. There was, I dunno, must be 20 or 50 odd bombers all laid along the road there and it was a big drome – was it Wilverley or ...

Holmsley?

Holmsley, that's it, yeah, Holmsley. Yeah, and I went all along the side of that and I was surprised that they hadn't shut that road off really. But that was the only thing I saw during the war. And the thing was - funny thing about that was, I came back and went and had a

bath, and when I was in the bath the bloody sirens went. Oh dear, I'm on fire watch down at the St James Church in Poole. So of course I had to quickly dress, went down Market Street, and this WAAF, she used to live in the pub down in Market Street and as I walked down the road, she was outside the pub. I said "bloody hell, I've done 150 miles to see you". (laughter) She was there. Yeah, the Angel Inn, she was there.

00-20-02

Of course, that was the other funny thing, 'cos as I say, we used to fire watch on that. In West Street, of course that's been pulled down now, there was a cellar there and the walls in there was about 4 or 5 feet thick, and you could see archways there and in days of yore, there was a tunnel there leading down to the quay at Poole when the water was much lower and where they used to smuggle all the hooch and that back up into this cellar. During the war, the Haven Hotel down at Sandbanks, they had all their wines and spirits stored down in this cellar, you see. And of course we used to go down in this cellar at night and wait until the sirens went off if there was any bombing, in which case we had to go down and put the incendiaries out down at St James Church. Well, we were down there one night and fast asleep and suddenly there was one hell of a crash. I thought "bloody hell, the sirens ain't gone, that was a near bomb". Anyhow, (sniffing noises) can smell something, and we put the light on. "Bloody hell, there's smell of spirits somewhere or other". And what it was, all this stuff – there was wooden racks all the way round with all this stuff on and the woodworms had eaten through one of the shelves and God knows how many bottles had crashed down on the floor and smashed. There was all this stuff running all over the floor. So we said, well there's one thing about it, if we get bombed in down here, if they finally get us out, we should be singing that's for sure, we won't suffer from a lack of drink. (laughter) The woodworms had eaten through the shelves.

00-21-45

I was again fortunate there, because one night of course they did drop some incendiaries and the two people that were on there, they went down and again, you might say the guardian angel – I mean, if you've ever been to Malta, you go in one of the cathedrals out there. There's a bloody great bomb and they call it the Angel of Mosta, 'cos out there there was several hundred people in a hotel – a mosque or church out there and a damn great, I don't know, thousand pounder came through the ceiling, hit the floor, skidded across the floor and went out through the wall, and didn't go off. So they called it the Angel of Mosta.

But anyhow, they went down there and on the other side of the road – just the width of the road – there was St James's School, and several incendiary bombs went through there. They went in to try and tackle – they managed chuck some of 'em out through the window, but it was no good, they had to evacuate it, and it burnt down. Well, the next day we went down, and of course we went up the ladder inside, up to the tower and there was 3 or 4 incendiary bombs along the roof of the church that hadn't gone off. You think to yourself,

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“Well, no, they went through the other and set that fire”, but they could have burnt – I mean, if they’d gone off that would have burnt St James’s Church down, but they didn’t go off. So again, no, just luck. But of course, I don’t know what you know about ‘em, but initially when they sent them down, they didn’t explode, they simply set fire, but then they found that people were dumping sandbags on ‘em and putting ‘em out very quickly, so what they did, they and explosive device in the head of ‘em so that when they came down again, you had to count to about 10 – you were supposed to lay down, not too far from ‘em, count to 10 and then get up and chuck your sandbag on ‘em, because if you went there, you’d go to put your sandbag on, you’d get blown up, you see.

One night when there was one hell of a fire storm all round here, down in the Branksome Woods there, there was – well I was by the Branksome station – they dropped one at the back of us over the other side of the railway line, and so I grabbed the people I was lodging with, grabbed a spade, went across the railway line and beat that one out. And then I saw a fire down over in the Branksome Woods, down there. Went down and this was a big house on fire and a man and a woman had got out of it, and the whole top was ablaze, and it was like mushrooms. All around, everywhere, was all these bombs, all sticking out the shrubbery, and all out the garden and everything like that. We said was there anything we can do. Well, the only thing they wanted they said “could we possibly save their writing bureau”. So three of us went in round the back, we managed to get in through the back door, watching the stuff up above. We got in the kitchen, then we got in the dining room and we got this bureau and grabbed it and as we were in there the fire had just come through the corner of the room. So we managed to get it out in the kitchen and shut the door, and as we shut the door, part of the kitchen fell in and then we got out in the kitchen and we had to get ready “one, two, three”, run out the back, and had we not sooner got up, the whole lot collapsed in. But we managed to save his writing bureau with all his papers in. But the Fire Brigade didn’t turn up for another half-hour because there was fires wherever you looked, and they were all too busy, and he thanked us for saving his bureau, but otherwise that was quite a posh house and burnt down altogether. Yeah, we saw lots of that.

End: 00-25-35

Keywords: Korean War, medical fitness, disability, Sergeant O’Grady, German prisoner, batman, model of camp, barracks, running track, Saturday morning run, driving lorry through Southampton, Foreign Office liaison man, visit Isle of Wight, parade for General, training courses, Poole, WAAF Tangmere, Holmsley, Hamden bombers, air raid siren, incendiary bombs, secret cellar, St James Church, the school, fire watch, sandbags, fire storm, house on fire, rescue bureau.

File name	G-F	018	_0004M0.WAV	Interview date: 01/11/13
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00-00-00

(bombing of Poole)

Went up in the air and hit a man two streets away walking down and hit him in the head and killed him. Another one went in behind what was Marks & Spencer's, went into a bit of ground and just blew dirt up. Next one hit 57 Tailors, right in the High Street. It was Wednesday afternoon. There was nobody working there, and it blew all the dummies – it literally blocked Poole High Street – and all the dummies. 'Course when I knocked off work I cycled down to see it, and quite real looked at it, cor, all these dummies looked like a load of bodies all down there where they're blown out. And so there was no one there. And then the next one went across to some public baths there, and a woman in the Market Street, she heard some planes about – 'cos no sirens had gone – so she went out the back to see what it was and a bomb unfortunately killed her. If she'd stayed in the front with her husband, she'd have been alright. Then the other one went over into the – another place that was filled up with all these building laths, what they used to plaster ceilings with, and it blew that all to pieces and all these black – you could look all the way round, and these laths were all up on everybody's roof, all the way round. And the last one went up in the back water. Now a plane went right from one side of Poole to the other and just killed two people. You think, you know, absolutely terrific.

00-01-18

And I was in Poole when they bombed Brownsea Island because they had a big – there was a Canadian Major in charge of Brownsea Island – and they lit a big decoy fire on the end of the island. And one night, from history I know now, 143 German bombers set out to wipe out Poole. And they come in the back of Poole and then they dived down – and I was in Poole - and over Poole they released the bombs. You could hear the bombs whistling over. We were in one of these steel air raid shelter things and you could hear them. And they lit this bonfire on the end of Brownsea Island and of course they thought they had Poole, so they plastered the end of the Island with God knows how many bombs. There's probably any goodness amount of bombs over there on the Island now and all they did was killed was a few rabbits. Yeah, well if they'd hit Poole, Poole would have, well I wouldn't have been here and of course Poole wouldn't have existed. So that was a lucky escape there. So as I say, you know, the interest I had.

00-02-18

The only thing with the Forest, I say I saw was that, you know, that airfield up through there. And then I think I went out to Badbury Rings one time and on Cobham's – Cobham had an airfield, didn't he, because before the war old Alan Cobham, he used to go round what they call barn storming. Before the war for five bob they'd bring these biplanes round and they'd set up at the side of a village, and five bob and they'd take you up for a ride around. So he

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had a place and over there I'm pretty sure they had – they stored a load of the gliders that took off to go there. Because from Badbury Rings you can look across and see all these mass of gliders all over there – on the airfield over there. But other than that, as I say, no. Knew more of course about what happened all round here in Poole.

End: 00-03-20

Keywords: Bombing of Poole, dummies in road looked like bodies, woman killed, Canadians, Brownsea Island, decoy fire, Alan Cobham, Gliders.

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