

## New Forest Remembers WWII Project

### Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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#### 00-00-00

... a place called Frogham, which was right on the edge of the bombing range, and from Fordingbridge it was two and a half miles out of Fordingbridge on a turn off from the Southampton road. And yes, it was quite interesting I believe because some of the time I was in the Air Force, you see, so I didn't know about the full workings of it at that time, of the bombing range, but I know my sister and young brother, they were at home.

My father, he was one of the local village people who had keys to get into the bombing range when they brought unexploded bombs from Southampton. They used the bombing range to explode some of the bombs that fell.

*Unexploded ones. I see!*

When they were testing the big bombs during the war – this is evidently after – well it would have been before D-Day – but they were dropping the big Dambusters bombs. They tried that on land out there.

(communications problem)

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Also they had some called the – experimental ones – the Tall Boy, which was made to penetrate the submarine pens in Germany. When they used to drop them, before they flew over, they used to warn people to open all their windows. Although it was about a mile away where the actual target they were going for - which they built a replica of these submarine pens - they thought the explosion might damage the windows you see.

*Yes, did you ever have any explosions going off that did damage windows? I gather there was some in Bramshaw area.*

Sorry!

*A lady spoke to me from Fritham and said that they had an accidental explosion that did damage all the windows.*

I don't know. Was it on the bombing range?

Yes, yes.

No, I don't know that part because at that time I was in the Air Force. I mean, I left school at 14, so that would have been 1939, so I was just about – I'd been sort of starting work then.

#### **00-03-57**

I do remember a place called Hyde Common, which is about a mile away from where we lived. You could see down through the valley from sort of Ringwood right through to Southampton. You stood up there and you could see a raid going on – air raid – at Southampton, which was the barrage balloons being shot down and the usual noise and kaffuffle with the aircraft. Suddenly there was a Spitfire chasing a Ju 88 through the valley from Southampton heading towards Ibsley and Bournemouth area.

*Yes, d'you know what happened after that?*

Sorry!

*Do you know what happened afterwards? Did they just fly off?*

No, I don't because there was so much going on and quite honestly you – it's seconds – it's all over. You don't sort of - and especially at that age, you sort of – you get more sense later on of course. But these things happen so quickly. It's just virtually a flash – like a flash across a picture.

#### **00-05-35**

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*Just for the sake of the recording, could I just ask you to tell me your name and where and when you were born?*

Yes, the name is Ronald Ricketts.

*And where and when were you born?*

When?

*When and where.*

Ah! I was born in Marlborough in Wiltshire but we moved to Frogham. I think it must have been about 1935. And you want date of birth do you?

*Yes please.*

It's 14-8-25.

*Thank you. So you left school and did you go straight into the RAF or did you work first?*

I worked first. I worked in Fordingbridge as an apprentice you see – engineer apprentice – and the place I was working at, suddenly there was – people arrived one morning and they built a hole – or knocked a hole in the wall, and it was gonna be used as a Pillbox during the war - this particular building.

*I see, yes. And then were you called up or did you volunteer?*

No, no. I was called up.

*And then presumably when you were on duty you were away from the New Forest?*

Sorry!

*Where were you based in the RAF?*

Several places in England and then I had the misfortune to go to the Far East ...

*Oh gosh!*

... for a while, so water under the bridge as they say.

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*Yes, yes. Do you remember any of the airfields in the New Forest at all?*

Any?

*Any of the airfields. Presumably you came home occasionally during the war did you?*

No, only once.

*Oh right.*

Yeah.

*That's a long time to be away, isn't it?*

It took a while, yes.

**00-08-03**

I remember coming home. The time I did come home on leave, and this was – the nearest train at that time was at Salisbury station, which was about 11 miles from home. We walked the distance at night. It was when I got to Fordingbridge - which was 2 miles out of Fordingbridge where I lived – somebody stopped and offered me a lift, (chuckle) which was a bit ironic after walking 10 or 11 miles.

*Very long way, isn't it?*

Yes, one of these funny incidence in life that you remember of course.

*Do you remember anything about that time when you were home on leave?*

No. That time that I came home on leave, it was - they had the victory party for VE Day.

*What did they do for that in Fordingbridge or Frogham?*

That was in Frogham. They had the usual cakes and fancy dress and all that nonsense. Like the usual village sort of – would have been a village fete usually. A celebration of that, VE. And of course, VJ Day didn't come until a bit later.

*Yes, yes. So you were home for VE Day and then did you have to go off again to the Far East then?*

Sorry!

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*You were home for VE Day but then you had to go off again did you?*

What, for VJ?

*You went off with the RAF again after that did you?*

Yes, which was why I was only home for two weeks.

*Gosh! What did you do during those two weeks?*

Well, there was so much celebration going on and all that nonsense that you tried to forget that you still had to go back before VJ Day came of course. Anyway, that's all in the past.

**00-10-30**

*Yes. D'you remember anything about the prisoner-of-war camps?*

The?

*Prisoner-of-war camps?*

No. I know what, um, awful, Pam's friend Josie who married a prisoner-of-war and her father and mother, why she told you all about them. But apart from that, no, because when I came back in – other than that came back, there was no animosity between the service people and the war, so it was just sort of – well, you can't explain it really. There was – you'd expect them to be sort of squaring up to each other but no, there wasn't any of that at all.

**00-11-29**

*You mentioned Ashley Walk where they had the bombing ranges. Did you know anything about Millersford, where they tested explosives?*

Anything about what?

*Millersford, which was the other side of the road.*

Millersford, yeah? No, not exactly. I know the area because we used to walk that quite often, across to a place called Fritham, which was near Stoney Cross, but right the way across there. But that was all closed in during the war of course, the bombing range.

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*And you said that your father helped to teach unexploded bombs ...*

No, no. They had the keys to be able open the gates because there's nine square miles that was fenced in to stop people getting in there because of the bombs and what have you that they might be testing or armaments and the aircraft. They had him and another gentleman from the village. They had the keys to be able to open the gates. I think the fence was about nearly 9ft tall. It was for the animals getting in and people getting in.

*So he had the key, did he do anything else connected with the range?*

No, no. They only had local people to begin with (unintelligible) ... that particular spot, you know. I don't know how many gates there were round the 9 square miles, but there must have been an awful lot, and he used just one like everybody else. Mr So-&-so will have a key, but they had two people in case one was sick or something. A funny sort of thing – setup really. That's it.

*I gather that there were a couple of houses on the range that had to be evacuated.*

The what?

*There were a couple of houses within ...*

Oh, yes, yes. The old cottages and that, yeah. That's a small group on Fritham side. They called it Millersford. But I don't know if you've ever been to Fordingbridge [yes] or on the Southampton road to Godshill [yes] You know from Southampton to Godshill, [yes] if you're coming from Southampton, on the left hand side along Godshill was all bombing range. [Right, yes] If you looked over to your left, that was all the bombing range. What is now evidently the cricket pitch at Godshill originally was made from a small landing strip. It was made to accommodate just light aircraft.

*Oh I see, I didn't know that.*

Yeah, it was laid out, not a very long little runway, but it normally takes a small like the Piper ??? or the Austers or whatever at that time.

*Yes, I gather they made a simulated railway line to practice their bombing skills for attacking railway lines.*

Yeah. Yeah, I believe there was quite a bit on that – my brother-in-law, or ex-brother-in-law now, he was in the – he knew all about this, the bombing range, because him and his friends went into it after the war. They were sort of raking up the past. He was something to do with the Observer Corps. I don't know how they went off, but they had all the sort of

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history as well of a lot of this stuff.

*Yes. Well, thank you very much for you time. I don't know whether you can think of any other memories that you have of the New Forest during the war. Obviously you were not around for that much of it, were you?*

Not really, no. No, unfortunately.

*But I've been very interesting hearing you talk about the bombing range.*

Yes.

*So, before you went to – before you were called up, did you go to any of the dances in the local halls?*

No, I wasn't into that. That time was sort of more interested in sort of joining the ATC and bits and pieces. But when I came back they still had these dances. That was a different matter of course. (chuckle) You were older and wiser. You knew what the young ladies were all about. (laughter)

**00-17-40**

*Did you join the ATC or the Home Guard or anything before you went off?*

Sorry!

*Did you join the ATC?*

Yes, yeah. One of those blaring down the street waking everybody up on a Sunday morning. (laughter)

*What did it involve doing?*

Well, everybody just – they told you about the RAF, which you sort of knew a lot about anyway, being interested, you know. That was it, sort of marching, all the usual funny little things. When you see it now you think could I have been such an idiot. (laughter) That's it!

*Well, thank you very much for your time and do thank Mrs Ricketts as well please. We have a form for signing to give permission ...*

**End: 00-18-48**

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