

**MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee(s): Mr William Hurt and Mrs Joyce Hurt

Date of birth: Mr William Hurt: 7th July 1913
Mrs Joyce Hurt: 23rd February 1924

Place of birth:

Interviewer(s): Mr David Callister

Recorded by: Mr David Callister

Date recorded: 29th March 2005

Topic(s): *Mr William Hurt:*
Early childhood memories of WWI
Laurence of Arabia
WWII and the Royal Air Force
Police and petrol thefts
Accident and hospitalisation
Mrs Joyce Hurt:
Austin Aero and Triplex Safety Glass Factories
Being fired at by enemy aircraft
‘Music while you work’ daytime radio programme
Visiting wounded servicemen in hospital
Food and entertainment
‘Adopting’ a serviceman
Meeting husband and marriage

William Hurt - Mr H
Joyce Hurt - Mrs H
David Callister - DC

DC Okay. So this is William Hurt.

Mr H W. C. J.

DC What's the 'C' for?

Mr H Charles – William Charles James.

DC Charles – William Charles James Hurt.

Mr H Yes – named after the family.

DC Let's get that up there, that'll be safer ... that's it, yes. The lead's not very long on this thing. Is that alright on there – it's not in your way, is? Now let's start then, with your earliest memories, 'cos I'd like to hear – tell me what you *do* remember of the First World War.

Mr H Going to Emsworth with mother ...

DC Hmmm ... hmmm.

Mr H ... and Emsworth Station was close to the park, and the park, then, was used for wounded soldiers. And I remember this ever so plain, because, they wore the blue suits and the ties, and on the right-hand side from the station was a mansion, and this was taken over by the government, and they were stationed there, and the park was modified with seats and everything for all the older soldiers to come in. That was my remembrance of the First World War.

DC Yes.

Mr H Well then, mother's family were all service. Three uncles killed in the war, two on *The Invincible*, another one killed at Arras, the other one went at Scapa Flow, the other one was on the Queen's Yacht – he was a boson, and the other one – now this is – you won't believe this – the other one was a great friend, in the Tank Corps of ...

Mrs H Laurence ... Laurence of Arabia.

Mr H ... Laurence of Arabia.

DC Really?

Mr H Now Laurence of Arabia used to ride a *Bruff Superior*. Now at times they were stationed at Tidworth Camp, in Dorset. And some weekends he brought Leslie home to Westbourne on his *Bruff Superior* ...

DC Right.

Mr H ... and I was only a kid ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... but I did remember this motorbike, and I'll always remember this man. And that was some of my memories of that time.

DC Yes.

Mr H Well then, time went on, and I wanted to join up. So I thought, well, I went to try for the Navy, but, at that time, to get the Queen's shilling, you had to have consent from your parents; and she said, 'No, that's it.' She'd had enough to do with the service, and that was that.

DC She'd lost too many of the family, then?

Mr H Yea, yes, so that went on, and time and time again, and at the end I wasn't very keen on farming, so I thought I'd take up horticulture, so I went to the Channel Islands ...

DC Right.

Mr H ... and I had quite a bit there. Come back, and time went on, and the government was buildin' quite a number of Royal Air Force stations throughout Great Britain. And one of the big ones was [unclear] at Thorney Island, and that's just across the water from Portsmouth, Emsworth, and I lived quite close to Tangmere. Well now, Tangmere was the home-place of 1st and 42nd Squadron. Those were the crack squadrons of the Royal Air Force, *Hawker Furies*, and at

that time there was a very famous pilot there called Lindsey, and he was the world's 'miler.' Time went on and I played football with this lot, same as we all – in the villages.

DC Yes.

Mr H Then Thorney Island was built. And I didn't feel farm-work, so I said to myself, right, I'm going to be cheeky, I'll go down to Thorney Island, and I did, and I marched into the big store, and rapped on the door, and a voice said, 'Come in.' And I walked in and it was a smart man, and I felt – and it was Engineer Commander Farlow ...

DC Hmmm, hmmm.

Mr H ... and he was in complete charge of all the fitting of Thorney Island. So he said to me, he said, 'You know,' he said, 'we're not supposed to employ civilian,' he said, 'only service people,' he says, 'but I'm afraid at the moment I'm very pushed.' So I gave him me details and stuff. 'Oh,' he said, 'you'll do,' he said, 'I'll put you in the stores; I'll get you properly trained.' So that's how I become, to be, what they called 'a store-basher.'

DC Right. (*laughter*)

Mr H In other words, an equipment assistant.

DC Yea.

Mr H Well, time went on, and I thought to myself, well, I've got used to the service, now – that was in the '30s ...

DC Right.

Mr H ... I got used to the service, now, what I'll do, I'll join up – I'll join the Air Force.

DC You didn't have to ask your mother now.

Mr H Well I couldn't, because I was a civil servant.

DC Yea, right.

Mr H But it weren't long after that that we had two squadrons come in from Donibrissle, *Wilderbeast*, and the old *Swordfish* – torpedo squadrons, and we had SWR – that was School Within Reconnaissance. Everything jogged along, then, until the war started. And then everything was cleared out ...

DC Hmmm, hmmm.

Mr H ... our headquarters – everything and I was left to sort out this. And then we had Dunkirk, and a lot of the men from Dunkirk come into Thorney Island, and they were put into married quarters, just for a short period, given a good meal, tidied up, 'cos half of them had nothing ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... and then the next day they went away – we – according to the news, they went to Manchester. Well then, I was at Thorney Island through the bombing of Portsmouth and all that business, and then, all of a sudden I got posted to Padgate.

DC Now what – at this stage you'd come out of the stores, you were doing something else, then, were you? Or were you still dealing with stores?

Mr H I was dealing with stores; I was properly trained as an equipment assistant ...

DC Right.

Mr H ... and that went on for quite a time. And then I was called up and I went to Gloucester, and from Gloucester I went and had a medical and all that carry on. And then from Gloucester I was sent to Cardigan, there I was equipped with all the usual stuff, you know, knife, fork, spoon, mug and all that business ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... and then, from there, I was sent to Skegness. From Skegness I done a month's training, come back from Skegness to Thorney Island, on the same job as I was doing before, and, of course, with bombing and all that business going

on at that time. And then, in 1941, I was sent to Varger. Well prior to that I was sent to Padgate. I got to Padgate and they give me KD [Khaki Drill], and I thought, oh, this is the Middle East – got to be. The next day, it was all taken off – there was about two hundred of us – it was all taken off us!

DC Hmmm.

Mr H And we was given Arctic quit – all the usual stuff, you know, face masks and all that ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... and we said, what the devils going on? We didn't know what was going on. So they shoved on a train, and we finished up at Invergordon ...

DC (*laughter*) Right!

Mr H ... on the pier – blokes were saying, 'What the hell's going on here?!' And an officer said, 'Well, look,' he said, 'lads, I really don't know, but I'll find out.' So he found out. Apparently, the shipping hadn't turned up. So we said, 'What are we going to do?' And we had a march – two mile, two kit bags and all the clutter – to an old farm. And when we got to the farm, we thought well, what's going on now? So he said, the officer, 'We'll put you to the billets.' And the billets were sheep pens! (*laughter*) And (*laughter*) we were issued with pallias – straw ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... and we were given a pitch in these sheep pens, you know, we pitched in there, we were left there, and then they decided they had to give us a meal, and that was a cattle pen, with just a roof, like a Dutch barn ...

DC Right.

Mr H ... and there was all mud and rubbish, you know ...

DC Yea.

- Mr H** ... and they had six foot tables ...
- DC** Right.
- Mr H** ... and err – trestles. And then the first meal that came in was macconicky [sp ???] ... (*laughter*) ... ever heard of it?
- DC** No, what is macconicky [sp ???] ?
- Mr H** Meat and veg ...
- DC** Oh right.
- Mr H** ... in tins.
- DC** Oh yea.
- Mr H** And there was a big, round tin, and it was chopped in the tin, and you sat along this table and the tin started there, and it was moved down and shoved in your tin plate.
- DC** Right – you had mess cans, did you?
- Mr H** That's right, that was it, you see ...
- DC** Yea.
- Mr H** ... and we got over that and the usual come up – slice of bread, a bit of jam and some margarine on the corner, see?
- DC** (*laughter*) Right.
- Mr H** I can see it!
- DC** You've got a good memory for that!
- Mr H** Yea. Well that went off, and of course, there was no facilities – I mean, latrines style was earth and a board across two stakes and you done the best you could.

DC Yea.

Mr H No washing facilities, so you had to get down in the stream and have a wash and shave ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... and on the way down was all mud and muck where the cattle had been feeding.

DC Of course.

Mr H Well, next morning there was a hell of a shouting and bawling. We all got up quick, and we had to walk all the way back to the pier.

DC Really?

Mr H When we got back to the pier, everybody was looking. There was a Norwegian fishing smack hitched up to the pier.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H I'll always remember this – and she was called *The Jalderbird*. And the captain was a Norwegian with all the black suit on and the cap. And he come out and he said, 'That lads,' he said, 'I want everybody to pay attention,' he said, 'because I want you to watch – if you see anything floating in the water, I want to know, because it can be anything.' So anyway, we ... all 200 ... we all piled aboard this fishing smack ...

DC Did you know where you were heading for?

Mr H No – never knew a thing. So we all got on this thing – 'course a fishing smack – it was all back – and on the side you've got just a few bunks. There was eight crew, and they always reminded me, when I look at things on the television and I hear this *squeak, squeak, squeak, squeak* – you know, of a boat.

DC Yes.

Mr H Well, we all got aboard, and then he said. ‘Look, by the way,’ he said, ‘we’ve got two machine guns, one forward and one aft’ – he said there was a steel pole and a seat – we had to come at the steel pole and seat ... well that was alright, so that was finished, so away we went. It took us, I think, about three and a half to four days, and it was in February, and the seas – you’ve never seen anything like it. They was up there and down here, up there – well we got into Reykjavik at the finish. And of course, Iceland, at that time, you see, there was no blackout ...

DC No.

Mr H ... and it was American. And we got off, and before we got off he said, ‘We’ll be moving out at first light.’ And so we thought, ‘Oh, we’re going, anyway.’ But we had a look round the town, we couldn’t get into this American place, they wouldn’t have us. (*laughter*) So we all got aboard and we went down to Vagar. Well we didn’t know that to Vagar, but we pulled in down the field to a little sort of a pier – a place called Survag ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... all got aboard and there was a truck waiting for us that took us the top, and there was a sergeant there and he said, ‘I’ve got you accommodation.’ We said, ‘Fair enough.’ ‘Tents!’

DC Oh, Tents?!

Mr H It was enough to blimmin freeze, I’m not kidding you!

DC Really?

Mr H Yea, we had tents. No boards, just – and these were on peat – it was all peat ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... so he said, ‘Well,’ he said, ‘there are.’ He said, ‘You’ll be alright.’ We was ... in the middle of the night the gales come up in seconds. The tent was blown away and we was left there. So we had to get up and bring the tent back. And this happened lots of times. And we were under canvas then for a long, long time ...

DC Yea?

Mr H ... until the Pioneer calls there, and they were building a runway in the mountain, blasting it ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... so we was doing that for quite a time. And then they decided they were going to build *Nissans*. They decided to build *Nissans*, but they had to rope them down with big steel coils because the wind was so strong, it picked them up and took them off.

DC What, did they have galvanised roofs, did they?

Mr H Galvanised roof, and inside was what they called beaverboard, then ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... just to cover it.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H Well, I know the first one that I went in, got no windows, got no doors, got a – everybody was bed to bed.

DC How did you keep warm?

Mr H We had three blankets, and we used to wear our coats ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... because they gave us a Kapok coat. And all the equipment they give you was Kapok coats, special boots, natural grease socks, vests and the lots, and the mask, because when you got the really wind and the ice it cuts your face, you see.

DC Yes, that's right.

- Mr H** So we had all that – that was all that ...
- DC** How did you pass the time, then, day by day?
- Mr H** Well, you just had to – now this is another point. A lot of the blokes got sent back, because it was all quiet. You see, in the winter, it's all dark – bar about a half light round about three o'clock ...
- DC** Hmmm.
- Mr H** ... and in the summer, it's light all the time.
- DC** Yes.
- Mr H** Now in the summer, all the little houses down at – now there's Servagar, Midvagar and Sanderbarg. Now this was the three places on the island. The main place, the town, was Torshavn, that was the main town.
- DC** Hmmm hmmm.
- Mr H** Well, where we were at Servagar, we used to walk up and finally got things, and finally got the *Nissan* and finally got the doors and all on. We got the stove going with peat, 'cos once you've got peat going, it goes all the time ...
- DC** Yes.
- Mr H** ... and there was numerous – not exactly raids, but you know, planes overlooking round and all that business. But this went on for quite a time, I mean, washing facilities, latrines and all that thing, that was – you know, you had to make do.
- DC** Yes.
- Mr H** And I mean, the food – you couldn't go wrong, it was macconicky, and then you had a really good treat – you had bacon, which was in tins!
- DC** Oh, yes.

- Mr H** Hah – and that was all fat! (*laughter*)
- DC** (*laughter*) Right!
- Mr H** You see, when I come out of the – Jack Warner, he was a cook, and when it come out, it was chucked in these things, and when it was dibbed out it was all this horrible blimmin’ rind.
- DC** Yea.
- Mr H** Then they had a big do there, half the camp went down with dysentery ...
- DC** Oh!
- Mr H** ... including the MO – they was all sent back – only a few of us left. But the idea of the station was, RDF – Radio Direction Finding ...
- DC** Hmmm.
- Mr H** ... with the convoys.
- DC** Oh, right, yes.
- Mr H** You see, that’s what that was for.
- DC** Yes, yes.
- Mr H** Well that all went off alright. We got organised, and I got a very nice friend I got with. And he was an undertaker. Now, I can see – a big, tall bloke, a long nose, glasses on his nose – he looked it.
- DC** (*laughter*) Oh, right.
- Mr H** And he always walked with a look as though he was carrying somebody. And Ray said to me – we’d done very well, because we’d got ourselves organised. And then the WO [Warrant Officer] I was friendly with he says, ‘Look, Bill,’ he says, ‘I got a nice little job for you.’ I says, ‘Oh yes, what’s that, sir?’ ‘How’d you like to take over the bar in the mess?’ So of course, I’m going to do alright.

(laughter) So I was put in charge of the bar. Two six foot tables, and a stool ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... and they had a table and a stool. And they used to come up – I reckon I can remember this – had a bottle – no money passed over – just put the glass down and filled that up ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... ‘Have one yourself.’ And by the time the night had gone, I’d got a couple or three bottles for the take back to our lot.

DC What kind of – did you just have beer, did you have whiskies, did you ...?

Mr H Oh, VAT 69!

DC Yea?

Mr H And it was nine Kroner a bottle – that was nine times plus ten, that’s nine, seven and six pence – and there was plenty of it ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... plenty of gin.

DC Yes – so the RAF supply this, then, did they?

Mr H Come through the RAFC ...

DC Yea?

Mr H ... see, and this went on all the time, and there was a hell of a calamity one night. The Officers Mess caught fire. Well, when a chap there – he was an artist, he was a good artist, as well – he come from London, they called him Yank – I don’t know why. Well, he was on duty in the mess this night, and all of a sudden this place caught fire. Well, afterwards a lot of ‘who-ha’ and they found out that these pot-bellied stoves, if you stoke them up enough, the pipe gets red

hot ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... and they reckoned that, because there was a lot of shouting about some of the blokes hadn't a billet to go in, so he stokes up and set fire to the place.

DC Ah, right.

Mr H And then the Pioneer Corp come up. Of course, you've only got a little river down there – no water.

DC Hmm.

Mr H Pioneer Corps comes up and they were there with their wood buckets – chucking it all over the place, you know. (*laughter*) And the funny thing of all, we had a Flight Lieutenant, ex Royal Engineers, Flying Corp ...

DC Oh yes.

Mr H ... and best part of his time he was full up with booze ...

DC Really?

Mr H ... and he comes out waving this pistol – 'Man the guns!' (*laughter*) 'We're being attacked!' (*laughter*) It's true – it's God's honest truth! Anyway, they shut him up and the place burnt down.

DC Yes.

Mr H And the next day, there was a Squadron Leader Slessor. Now Squadron Leader Slessor had a family in London, in the parliament – I'm sure he was in the parliament ...

DC Hmm.

Mr H ... and he had all the chaps down on the lake by the big apron by the lake. All in best clothes – dressed up – had a proper parade, they give them a good talking

to, and after that everything went all right, because, this other geezer, he went.

DC Right.

Mr H But following that, there was another episode. Ray and me was up the top where my place was where I kept all the grub, and he says, 'Bill,' he said, 'I don't know what the devil's going on down there,' he said, 'but there's quite a few blokes down there shouting and waving their arms.' So I said, 'Let's go and have a look.' And we got down there, and on the island there was a great big white bull. It was a great big 'un [one] – I tell you. And they'd only got a few cows there ...

DC Hmm.

Mr H ... and this bull has got his head tangled up on the hessian on the latrines' dry earth.

DC (*laughter*) Oh, right!

Mr H And he – I can see he was there – great big horns, his eyes was all red, and this bloke comes out with a gun, he says, 'I'm going to shoot it.' So the other blokes said, 'Get the hell out of it!' like.

DC Yes.

Mr H So Jack Warner comes out from the kitchen, and he'd got a big butcher's knife in his hand.

DC Yes. (*laughter*)

Mr H So old Ray said to me, 'Hey Bill,' he said, 'look at him, what's he going to do with that?!' I said, 'Damned if I know.' So I said, 'Tell you what I'll do.' So I said, 'Hey, Jack, give us that!' So I took off him and I walked – he said, 'You're not going across there?!' I said, 'Why not?' It didn't scare me because I'd been used to animals. So I walked straight across, all deep mud and that, just walked up to this thing, and he looked at me with his great big eyes, and he almost ... and I just cut all the stuff off, let him go and he just stood there and looked at me like that!

DC Yes?

Mr H That was the other episode, but following that there was nothing much happened. I was posted back to Sutton Coldfield and from Sutton Coldfield I was posted to West Kirby, from West Kirby I was on a draft – Middle East, and they was all lined all up and the officer come out and he said – he called the names out of the people, and he called them all out and he never called mine out. So I said to the WIF, ‘What’s going on?’ ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘You’re being posted.’ I thought – cor, not again!

DC Hmmm.

Mr H And I was posted to Holme-on-Spalding-Moor.

DC To where?

Mr H Holme-on-Spalding-Moor.

DC Oh right.

Mr H That’s Yorkshire.

DC Yes.

Mr H And following that, it was a big bomber squadron, 236. So I thought, well, I don’t know, it looks alright here. So I got talking to one of the sergeants there, and he said, ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘heavy bombing won’t go on much longer – it’s going to stop.’ So it stopped. And we changed over to *Dakotas*, and *Dakotas* – the whole squadron come back to Broadwell, in Oxon, and they come back there to do glider towing and supply dropping.

DC Oh, really?

Mr H But what we didn’t know, what it was, the start of Arnhem.

DC Oh yes, yes.

Mr H See?

DC Yes.

Mr H So they did that, and we come back. And then the whole squadron was split. One half went to Shiddergorm [sp ???], the other half stopped at Broadwell ...

DC Hmm.

Mr H ... and that's where they operated from. And that's when, that's when I come out – just after that.

DC Right.

Mr H Well, I come out and I joined the Canteen Works, Fighter Squadron – that was 605, Royal Auxiliary Air Force. And I was in that and we went – we had *Vampires*, it stopped with the *Vampires* and we was called up just in the middle of the Berlin airlift.

DC Oh, were you? Right.

Mr H And we went to Silte ...

DC Hmm.

Mr H ... and we stopped there for about a month, come back and then, shortly after that all these auxiliary squadrons were all finished ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... and that's when I finished with the Air Force. (*laughter*)

DC What?

Mrs H You're forgetting to tell him that you had three embarkation leaves. And just at the end of the leave, warning came in the paper that your number wasn't being sent, and the next one, they said that you weren't being sent because you'd been a civil servant.

DC Well, they would do that, then.

Mr H That's what they said.

DC Right. What – when – did you get any leave when you were serving during the war years?

Mr H Well, I can't remember that. I know – oh, I'll tell you one thing that I don't think people realise. Before the war, a serviceman in the Royal Air Force had what they called a 'credit'. Now this was done to make people look after their gear. Now, if you look after your gear, you got a certain amount of credits, and you could draw those credits when you went on leave ...

DC Hmmm, hmmm.

Mr H ... and that was all depended on, you see. And when the war started, that all finished. Everything was – you exchanged it for another one. It was exchanged – only you couldn't do that with shoes, because those were in pairs. Pants and tunics and socks and all – you just had a clothing parade, and it went in and it was just sold in rags ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... reduced to produce, sort of thing.

DC What sort of commanding officers did you have in these various places? Were there any that you disliked?

Mr H Well, as a matter of fact, I found them very good because the officer at Broadwell was a farmer's son, and he used to take me out to all sorts. And he had a little of *Austin* ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... and he was a smashing bloke, he was. And all the way through, I'll tell you, we had a warrant officer at Thorney Island, his number was 136 and he was a man that had joined the Flying Corp ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... and he was in the Engineers and he joined the Flying Corp.

DC Is that the one that came out with the pistol?

Mr H No, that was the other one – he was no good, no good at all. (*laughter*) The Aero Club started in Great Britain, and one part – when they – it didn't really start until 1916, and it was formed in Great Britain and it went to France.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H And they had no – they couldn't cope with the *Baron*, with the *Fokker*.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H But the French brought out one called the *SPAD*. And then we brought out one called the *Sopwith Pup* – which was a bomber, and this was used for bombing. But the worse time in the '16 was when we was 33 aircraft, the German lost 27 and the French lost about 13.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H That was the worse time of the war. But through that time there was all these new 'uns [ones] coming out and everything. That's a few at that time that was.

DC That's right, yes.

Mr H But in that book there, right from the start of aircraft – 1906 ...

DC I'll have a look at that in a minute, right. Now, in your war service, then, what was the most enjoyable thing you did?

Mr H Most?

DC Being the barman, perhaps, was it?

Mr H Well, no, wait a minute, let's think. I had some good times.

DC Hmmm. What was the worse time?

Mr H That Norwegian smack.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H That was terrifying, that was ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... because, 1941 – it was in the height of all these submarines, U-boats sinking – that’s the sort of thing – that was the worse time because you were just stuck there, there was nothing you could do ... you just sat there and hoped for the best. And the other thing was, two hours and [unclear] sat on this seat – we couldn’t fire it, we was too busy being seasick, anyway! (*laughter*)

DC How close were you ever to a bomb, then?

Mr H Oh, yes, oh yes, yes, yes – I forgot this. Battle of Britain – everything on the station, petrol-wise, was surface. The two aircraft use different petrol. Now the *Wildebeest* used a non-leaded petrol called a DTD224, which was ideal for motorcars, because it didn’t contain lead. Now the 230 was used for the *Swordfish*, and that was lead, and that was not much good because that burnt the piston tops out ...

DC (*laughter*) Right.

Mr H ... so nobody bothered about that. But, anyway, I had another friend there, ex Royal Air Force, Act Worthy Corporal, he was. One morning we went to see our little pump, the MC, one of the old ‘uns, [ones] and it looks as if somebody had messed with it. When we got it back, you see, in them days you made a petrol count every day.

DC Yes.

Mr H Now this pump had been tampered with. So when we come to check we found we were ex number of gallons short. So we thought there was something funny going on. So we left it for a day and the next day we reported it. Well, following

this, the Flight Mech in the *Swordfish* aircraft had force-landed down in Dorset.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H Now, the Flight Mech's job then was – whenever an aircraft come in, it was always filled up – tanks were filled up and put away in the hanger.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H Well, he got done, because he hadn't done his job.

DC Oh!

Mr H So, we're over the war front in twelve days – Aldershot pass-outs.

DC Really?

Mr H Anyway, a couple of months after this, all keys were kept in the guardroom – everywhere – and to get them you had to go and draw them. So he drewed the keys, he goes up to do his job, and there was petrol all over the floor, underneath one of these *Wildebeests* ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... so he goes back, reports it to the police, and following that, we had the SIB come in from London – you know, the big bugs. And they went all through it. Somebody had milked this aircraft and hadn't got the turn caps underneath ...

DC Oh yea.

Mr H ... put back, and she'd leaked out.

DC Oh right, yea.

Mr H Well, to cut a long story short – it was the police!

DC (*laughter*) Really?!

Mr H They'd got the ideal access to the keys!

DC *(laughter)* Was it proved?

Mr H So ...

DC Was it proved?

Mr H Yes, oh yes.

DC Yes?

Mr H Nobody could get in there only if the – the kid hadn't done it ...

DC Yea?

Mr H ... so it was only them who had access to the keys. So, anyway, there was a corporal in Station Headquarters, he was in it, he's been taking it in his car to Hemsworth, to a garage and flogging it ...

DC Flogging it, right, yes.

Mr H ... flogging it. The police got done – it was only the sergeant that wasn't in it. And outside of Thorney Island on a field, that was where you used to park all the cars. They went through all these cars and every car was containing 230. *(laughter)* The CO got reprimanded, he had a sports car, and all the rest got copped – they all got done for that.

DC It must have taken an awful lot of petrol, then?

Mr H Well these – I mean, I don't know what these tank – you see, I used to ...

DC A car would hold about three or four gallons, or five gallons, would it, maybe?

Mr H Must have been – used to take it in five gallon tins.

DC Yes.

- Mr H** Well, what was I saying?
- DC** So they could, so they could draw it from all – any of these aircraft and just siphon it away and just hide it somewhere would they?
- Mr H** That's what they were doing – in five gallon drums ...
- DC** Yea.
- Mr H** ... and he was taking it up in his car ...
- DC** Yea.
- Mr H** ... but err – it was something else – what else? Oh, another funny thing! Chichester – all the meat and stuff comes from Chichester via the RAFC.
- DC** Hmm.
- Mr H** Well – what was his name? – Billy Price was the corporal in charge of that, over in the headquarters, and he said to me one day, he said, 'Hey Bill,' he said, 'I can't make out,' he said, 'this meat,' he said, 'is so blimmin' short,' he said, 'I know I've got to cut up allowances, but it just won't cope! So I'll report it.' So he did. And it come to pass that the people that was collecting the meat from the RAFC at Chichester, had got their own meat round. (*laughter*) This is right, and they was having their joints was made up and they were delivering on the way back to Thorney.
- DC** (*laughter*) Oh dear!
- Mr H** That's where his ...
- DC** So you were all on short rations then!
- Mr H** Yea. And then, now, the other thing was, I did unstuck, because we had a raid, and as I say, all petrol was surface. We had 224 was in 45 gallon drums ...
- DC** Hmm.

Mr H ... they couldn't put 50 gallons – had to be 45 – every drum was charged £2. Now this was surface and it come on a truck from Mac Carriers with 40 gallon – 40 drums on. And that was stacked in the compound. Now the 230 was brought on a big tanker and they carry 2,000 gallons, and that was pumped through a tanker into another tanker, see.

DC Right, so it was in a tank, not in drums, yes, yea.

Mr H Yes, pumped one to another.

DC Yes, right.

Mr H So what happened? This particular day we had a 'purple' warning, and I was pumping – you see – oh, I'm sorry – all we had was a little *Lister* engine, and after about 200 gallons, they boiled over, of course, that was that.

DC (*laughter*) Yes.

Mr H So what we had to do, we had a tank there and a tank here, and we used to have cold water in there – toss the boiler in there.

DC Yea.

Mr H So we had this 'purple' warning and I said ... 'Today Bill,' he says, 'get out of it quick!' (*laughter*) Of course, if hit this bloody lot! I didn't – I came off the bar and went into the boiling water and I got burnt, all the way up, you see?

DC Oh, yea?

Mr H And I was in hospital – it took six weeks – they done me whole legs with Tanofax [sp ???], actually.

DC And what happened after the 'purple' warning, did they drop a bomb on it?

Mr H Yea, they did. They dropped over – they dropped three across the – I went in the water.

DC Right.

Mr H I was trying to get out of it, you see ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... dropped one near this stuff ...

DC Oh, yea.

Mr H ... but I think that's about all that happened to me, at that time.

DC Did you get paid when you were serving in the forces?

Mr H Yes.

DC How much did you get paid?

Mr H I got paid until me rank went above me wages; I was paid me ordinary wages.

DC Oh were you?

Mr H Yea.

DC Really?

Mr H And when your rank went above what you was getting ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... then it just went normal.

DC Oh right, right. How much would you be earning in 1942, then?

Mr H Well, the average wage, over all, was round about 31/3d. And now, you got – it was 32/- but you got 9d National Health, see?

DC Oh right – they still took that off, then, yes?

Mr H You see, and if a chap was working on a farm, up to the age of 18, he'd be

getting about twelve bob [12/-] – if he was lucky.

DC Hmmm. Would the regulars get paid a lot more?

Mr H What – at the Air Force?

DC Yea.

Mr H No, not a lot, not as much as I was getting.

DC Oh, really?

Mr H You see it all balanced on what your rank was and so on.

DC Yes, yes.

Mr H That's how it all worked.

DC That's – you see, fellers like you, they don't say much about you, do they, I mean it's always 'the few' they are talking about, isn't it? They are the heroes, aren't they, 'the few.'

Mr H Yea, yea.

Mrs H The *Spitfires* ...

DC The *Spitfires* and 'the few'.

Mr H Do you know, as a kid, I can remember ever so much Tangmere ...

DC What?

Mr H Tangmere Aerodrome.

DC Ah!

Mr H One and Forty Three ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... *Hawker Furies* ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... and then the City of Manchester Squadron used to come to Thorney Island. They had Hawker Ardaks [sp ???] ...

DC Right.

Mr H ... and other ones as well. You see, now 605 Squadron, they were on fighter bombers, but you see, these auxiliary squadrons, they paid the price. 605 went to Java – that was the end of them – only a few come back ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... and re-started again, you see.

DC Hmmm.

Mr H The Manchester Squadron was the same – they came straight to Thorney Island and they went abroad. The – what was the other one? You see, coming out of Dunkirk, we got a big squadron – 59 Squadron – long nosed *Blenheims*. Now they managed to get down to Brest. And that was a full squadron, they'd got everything, they carried everything. But they got down to Brest just in time to get out and they come to Thorney Island.

DC Right.

Mr H Long nosed *Blenheims* ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... Fighter bombers ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H You see, before that, Thorney Island was used as a – it was a Coastal Command station. And then we was ferrying long nosed – short nosed *Blenheims* to Middle East – a sort of ferrying port, you know ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... and then we got all sorts come in there. We had short *Stirlings* come in there – been over Germany, dropping leaflets ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... then the old *Handley Page Hampden* come in – all those sort of things. And you see, when the war started, and he started bombing with *Stokers* [sp ???], Eastchurch, that's on the East coast, that was completely flattened, and they had the squadrons there was called CACU for coastal command. But those were *Anderson*, and they all come to Thorney Island ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... so Thorney Island was quite a place ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... you know, where all the stuff was.

DC Yea.

Mr H And they, also they formed two Noble Squadrons – 616 and 818 – they were formed at Thorney Island.

DC Right. How well were you informed about how the war was going? Did you ever know?

Mr H No, never.

DC You never knew when it was getting near the end?

Mr H No, we never knew a thing.

DC No?

Mr H No. I tell you what we did – one of the first things that we did hear was when *The Courageous* was sunk. And the other thing was – what was it? – 59 – yea – ehh ... that's right – 59 changed over from – the other ones to *Baters* [sp ???], and that was when the *Shire Horse* was covered up and they sent a squadron and we also sent some of the old rag-bags, you know, they went. But there wasn't many come back ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr H ... because the fire power of the *Shire Horse*, I mean, you get old *Swordfish*, it tipped along, really, about 160 mile an hour, see ...

DC Yea.

Mr H ... and the only thing they was – they could get low enough to get under the fire power of the *Shire Horse*.

DC No, no, no.

Mr H But we had nothing.

DC No, no.

Mr H There was no defence at Thorney Island, none at all.

DC No defences?

Mr H No, nothing! I remember there was a bit of a scare on – Dunkirk and they said, 'Look,' they sent the works and bricks out – that was the people that maintained the station. They were always civilians – you know, proper people.

DC Yea.

Mr H They sent them out and they had to go all around the Island and dig trenches – four feet long and three feet deep.

DC Really?

Mr H And we were told that should there be a 'purple' warning or an invasion we were to pick up an [unclear] and fifty rounds each and go to that position.

DC So there was no anti-aircraft weapons there at all?

Mr H No, nothing, only a Portsmouth and Gosport.

DC Yea?

Mr H Oh, Gosport was the mess. I went to Gosport because we had nothing – we had no coke for the burners, nothing. So I went with the old three ton *Crossly* and a couple of blokes to Gosport. But Gosport was completely finished – all the aircraft outside was all flat.

DC Yea?

Mr H Oh, it was a right mess that was.

DC Yea.

Mr H And the other time we went to Tangmere to get coke, and the blimmin' place were all bombed!

DC Hmm.

Mr H A right mess it was all round there.

DC Hmm.

Mr H But the only interesting part of the war was when the 'Battle of Britain' really got going. All along the South coast there was litters – they made a right mess of that lot, not half they didn't.

DC Hmm.

Mr H And another thing that they did along the South coast ... they had what they

called 'K' sites. Now a 'K' site was a dummy perimeter. They had an aircraft put there, all done up in cardboard and stuffed away.

DC Yes.

Mr H That was to entice those up there to come and do that, and that was all along the South coast.

DC Right. And that had anti-aircraft weapons along there, though, presumably?

Mr H A lot of anti-aircraft on Gosport.

DC Yes.

Mr H They had the crack batteries there. But err ...

DC So you saw a few Gerry's [Germans] shot down then, did you?

Mr H Well, all along the South coast they were all over the place.

DC Yea.

Mr H Where they were knocked down ...

DC Yes.

Mr H ... and of course – they had to put a warden up because people used to go and pinch the *Iron Crosses*, and all that (*laughter*) you know.

DC Yes. (*laughter*)

Mr H Anything that could be pinched!

DC Right! (*laughter*) And just going back to the food, then, was it all pretty grim or were some places better than others?

Mr H No, it was – to start with, the feeling was that nothing was going to happen – nothing. Nothing is going – until the first bombing, nobody bothered with going

anywhere because there weren't no shelters ...

DC Oh right.

Mr H ... and they built the shelters. You'd get under the stairs, you see. Now there was a pub at Portsmouth called *The Unicorn*, and that was the first pub to get it and they was in for a right old jog-up and of course, that was it, and that was the end of that.

DC Yes.

Mr H Then people started to look around and go in shelters. But in 1941 when Pompy was bombed, when I went down to Gosport, there was all the people coming out with prams and carts and stuff, digging on Portsdown Hill, out the way.

DC Hmmm, right, yes.

Mr H It was pretty grim, there's no doubt about it, because, you know, there was so much going on at that time.

DC And this is Joyce Hurt ...

Mrs H Yes.

DC ... but not Joyce Hurt, of course, when you were 17 years old.

Mrs H No, Joyce Penrey.

DC And 17 years old, or thereabouts. You'd left school, obviously.

Mrs H I didn't leave school until I was sixteen.

DC You left at sixteen?

Mrs H Yes.

DC What happened at sixteen, then, did you have a job?

Mrs H Oh yes, I just had a job, you know, I went – and office job, you see, and that went on until I was seventeen.

DC Right.

Mrs H And then we were – what we called ‘called up.’ You could go on the buses, or you could work in a factory, and sometimes you went in the forces.

DC Hmm. You had a choice did you?

Mrs H Err – well, I suppose, really, in a funny sort of way, probably, yes.

DC Yes.

Mrs H And I was – my father worked at the Austin Aero, on nights, so I went with him.

DC So this was making – he was partly making aircraft, or parts of aircraft?

Mrs H Oh yes, he was.

DC Yes.

Mrs H Yes he was.

DC So what did you find yourself doing, then?

Mrs H Astonished, you know – I’d always worked in offices – I was a bit shy, and, well, I did – I was on a press and then they put me onto viewing parts, so I was viewing parts.

DC Right.

Mrs H And it was rather amusing, really, because girls who had previously worked in factories were put in the offices, and us that were in the offices were put in the factory, you know. (*laughter*)

DC That’s the way it worked, wasn’t it? (*laughter*)

Mrs H Yea, yea, yea. But previous to that, I worked at the Triplex Safety Glass, and they, of course, made glass for aircraft.

DC Hmm.

Mrs H And one memory of mine – of course we were getting air raids, and err ...

DC Yea.

Mrs H ... we came out, and went into the air raid shelter, and I remember I was sort of the last one in, and I looked up and I saw this plane – oh, so close, diving down, you see, and we felt for sure that we would be bombed.

DC Right.

Mrs H But it didn't happen. But the next week, we all came out of work, and the girls that worked in the factory had all got white overalls, and there was – oh, there was a long drive, and it was full, and you can hardly believe this, but he came back again ...

DC Hmm.

Mrs H ... and he machine-gunned us.

DC Really?

Mrs H Yes, yes – I can hear the bullets now, going *pop, pop, pop* ...

DC Right.

Mrs H ... and do you know, he never hit one.

DC No. Were you in the shelter at this time or not?

Mrs H No, no, I was down the drive walking home.

DC Right, yes.

Mrs H But, what he did do, he swerved round and he bombed two houses – just – I suppose really, he was aiming for the factory.

DC Yes.

Mrs H But it went on the houses and killed people.

DC Yes.

Mrs H But not one of us, not one of us – and I should say, coming out of there about – well, I should think about two hundred people. And it never hit one of us, and yet we could hear *pop, pop, pop*.

DC Yea – that’s a miracle really, isn’t it?

Mrs H It was a miracle ... it really, really was, but unfortunate for the people in the houses.

DC Yes of course, yes.

Mrs H Yes, and then I went up to the Austin Aero, which was the Austin motor factory, you see, all turned over to aircraft.

DC Oh, that’s right.

Mrs H And women worked there, you know, on that.

DC Did they make a particular aircraft there, or several types?

Mrs H I can’t remember.

DC No, you wouldn’t know anyway, because you’d just be part of a factory set-up, wouldn’t you?

Mrs H Yes, I didn’t know. My father knew, I suppose. I think they were fighters. They weren’t great big aircraft – I think they were fighters.

DC Yes.

- Mrs H** And err ... I can remember 'Music While You Work,' you know. *(laughter)*
- DC** Did you get 'Workers' Playtime,' too?
- Mrs H** Yes, we did.
- DC** Oh yea.
- Mrs H** And I'll tell you what we did have – we had a lot of wounded that were, sort of, in the hospitals all the way round ...
- DC** Hmmm.
- Mrs H** ... and we used to entertain them.
- DC** Oh yes?
- Mrs H** And used to put on a show, and they used to give us cigarettes and all that to give to them, and that.
- DC** Right, yes.
- Mrs H** I used to do that quite regularly actually.
- DC** What did you do – sing or entertain them or something?
- Mrs H** Well, I've always liked to sing. *(laughter)*
- DC** Yes.
- Mrs H** It was – don't you say anything, *(laughter)* but we were there to make them feel at home.
- DC** Yes.
- Mrs H** All young girls, you know, we all made them feel at home, really. Some of them were very badly wounded.

DC Of course, yes.

Mrs H You know.

DC Did you get better jobs as time went on – more responsible jobs, did you?

Mrs H I didn't – me father did – I didn't.

DC No?

Mrs H No, no. And we – there were a lot of girls from Ireland, Scotland – and they working on very heavy presses.

DC Yea.

Mrs H You know, pressing out the parts. And they were, you know, in digs and that down there.

DC How many hours a day would you be doing there, then?

Mrs H I done nights.

DC Oh, just – all night long?

Mrs H All nights, all nights.

DC Was it tedious work?

Mrs H Umm, about four o'clock in the morning you were very tired.

DC Yes.

Mrs H I was on heavy work to start with and then I was on – what you call – viewing.

DC Yes.

Mrs H And that wasn't so bad, but it was a long night.

- DC** Yes. Did they play music over though the night?
- Mrs H** ‘Music While You Work,’ – aye – which sends you to sleep half the time. *(laughter)* But you had about an hour’s break and you went to the canteen, you know.
- DC** Hmm. What sort of food did you get at the canteen, then?
- Mrs H** What you took yourself.
- DC** Oh, really, yes?
- Mrs H** There used to be – I’ll always remember – there used to be hot water in the factory, and you took your own tea.
- DC** Right.
- Mrs H** You could make your own tea, you see.
- DC** Yes, yes.
- Mrs H** I suppose it was shortage, wasn’t it?
- DC** Yes, that’s right.
- Mrs H** You know, and, I mean, you took your own sandwiches. I don’t think there was much food on display in the canteen – I don’t remember, anyway.
- DC** Well, you would be quite young – you’re talking about 17, 18, 19, I suppose, aren’t we?
- Mrs H** Yes, that’s right, yes.
- DC** You wouldn’t be thinking about getting married, then, would you?
- Mrs H** No, no, no.
- DC** So that came later.

Mrs H No, playing the field, then. *(laughter)* We used to like *The Brylcreem Boys!* *(laughter)* No.

DC So there'd be boys in this factory as well, or was there?

Mrs H There were men, of course. But of course they were on occupied – you know – they weren't in the forces, you see, they were ...

DC Hmm, yea.

Mrs H ... very important workers.

DC So no boys to go chasing round the factory, then?

Mrs H No really, not as I remember, no, no – you had to wait till you went to *The Casino* and went dancing at the weekend.

DC What was this, then, that you were saying about putting your name and address in a box, because that came later, did it?

Mrs H Ha – that's when I was in the Triplex Safety Glass, and this was a thing that everybody did – you 'adopted' a soldier, sailor, whatever ...

DC Hmm.

Mrs H ... and so we used to put names and addresses in wherever we worked, you know, and it happened that I worked in the Triplex Safety Glass in the offices and somebody put my name in and I got this letter from this Air Force man from the Faro Islands, and you know, my mum says, 'Oh, we'll adopt him,' you know. 'We'll send him – I'll knit him some socks and somebody will send him warm stuff.' I mean, you couldn't send – you wouldn't send food and that.

DC No.

Mrs H You just couldn't do that. And that went on for a long time, didn't it, Bill?

Mr H Yea.

Mrs H Oh, yea. And then he wrote to say he was coming home and he'd be stationed at Sutton Coldfield, which isn't far from us ...

DC Right.

Mrs H ... and he'd like to come and see us.

DC So then he did, did he?

Mrs H So he came to see us.

DC Yes.

Mrs H Rather handsome in those days, may I add.

DC Ah, yes?

Mrs H Rather handsome, he was.

DC Yes.

Mrs H (*laughter*) Look at him!!

Mr H Talking about me, are you?!

DC Love at first sight, was it?

Mrs H No!

DC No, no. (*laughter*)

Mrs H No, no – he was older than me, you see.

DC Oh right.

Mrs H And at that time ...

DC Well, it would seem a lot, in those days, really, wouldn't it?

- Mrs H** It was – it was a lot – he was a lot older than me.
- DC** Yea.
- Mrs H** He was good fun, mind. But sometimes I went out with somebody else, and he went out with mum and dad ...
- DC** Oh yes.
- Mrs H** ... and it went on like that for quite a long time.
- DC** Did he have a motorbike?
- Mrs H** No.
- DC** No? Did he have a motorcar?
- Mrs H** No, it was – you'd got to come on the bus then. *(laughter)* No, he didn't have a car. He had err ... no, you see you couldn't get that – job to get a car in those days.
- DC** Yes, yea, that's true.
- Mrs H** No, we didn't have a car at all – oh, a long time.
- DC** No. So then this sort of on-off courtship went on for a while, then, did it?
- Mrs H** Oh yes. Yes, and he came out in 1946, didn't you?
- Mr H** Yes.
- DC** Yes, '46.
- Mrs H** And, you know, we sort of more or less thought that he'd go home, you see? His dad wanted a bit of help, you know. But, after a week he was back, knocking on my door.
- DC** Oh right. *(laughter)*

Mr H And I've been unhappy ever since! (*laughter*)

Mrs H (*laughter*) Been unhappy ever since!

END OF INTERVIEW