

# Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 1

OK, so this is Sarah Browning at the Their Finest Hour digital collection day in Todmorden on the 24th of November 2023 and I'm interviewing June Turner. OK, so so we've got a lot of things to look at. First, there's a photograph album. So do you want to just tell us about who's in the album, how you got these pictures?

00:00:35 Speaker 2

So this is an album that my mother made. She was born in 1921, and was living in Manchester. Her father had been a soldier in the First World War and was gassed and he died when she was quite young, as a result of the gas. And she got a scholarship to go to Manchester Grammar School, she was very bright, but she had to leave early because my mother remarried and her stepfather, I don't think they had a particularly good relationship and he wanted her to be working and bringing in money. So I think when the war came, she enlisted quite.

[?]

00:01:34 Speaker 1

Yeah, so, so she she had to leave school early, which I think was a big disappointment to her. And then when the war came, she enlisted and she was in the anti-aircraft brigade, 435, which was the first mixed unit. Because, at the time it was set up in 1941, there was a huge demand for the male soldiers and they were looking at how they could utilise women more. And women weren't allowed to use guns but they could, so in terms of the anti-aircraft brigade, they they could they could get involved in that. So that's what my my mum was doing and she never talked about it, so I I didn't really know until, after she died was the first time that I saw this album. And it's a shame because I didn't I didn't know that that's what she was doing. But what you get from the album is that that it was a really she made lots of strong friendships and it was an experience that that she really got a lot from, in terms of that whole the teamwork. And and their regiment was in Belgium from 1944, at the point when Belgium had been retaken by the Allies, but Germany started sending the V bombs over there. So their regiment was in Belgium so there's a lot of photographs in the book that date, in the album, that are from Belgium. And when the regiment was, at the end of the war, called back to England, she chose to join the British Army of the Rhine, and she so she went straight from Belgium to Germany. And this is all I have from then, but it's the [?] British Army of the Rhine [?] of Germany, and it's signed by different people, and inside is the menu with the Christmas meal they had.

00:04:08 Speaker 2

That's yeah, this is amazing. It's a nice meal. It's probably nicer than a lot of people were having in England at that time. And there's cigarettes for dessert as well. Wow. Oh and the drawings on the back! Do you know who any of these people were? I mean none of them were from Tod, were they.

00:04:34 Speaker 1

I I don't, no, no. And of course she didn't live in Tod at the time. She lived in Manchester.

00:04:42 Speaker 2

Oh of course, yeah, yeah.

00:04:43 Speaker 1

And in the this was in amongst in the album, which is a cutting of Nora Caveney. And when I saw it, I thought, oh perhaps she knew her. But then I thought she can't have done because she was living in

my mum was living in Manchester and and Nora lived in Walsden. So unless they'd actually met up, but I think it's more likely that it was because she was the first female working in anti-aircraft brigade that was killed. There was something like over 700 that died in the end but but she was the first one, so there was a lot of publicity about it, that that's why she kept the cutting. So that was quite something

00:05:34 Speaker 1

So in in here, there's there's a mixture of her family. So this is my mum here. And then a lot of them are taken from when they were out in Belgium.

00:05:59 Speaker 2

I'm just writing down which one was her in that first photo for when they look at the when they when they go to look at the pictures that link in with this story ID, so can put the right name on. Was it Eileen Edwards? Was that her second name [?]?

00:06:11 Speaker 1

Eileen Edwards. And she subsequently, when she married, she became Eileen Nichol [?].

00:06:28 Speaker 1

Yeah, that's fine. Just make sure that's all written down.

00:06:30 Speaker 1

So you can see in here these are all the well they're a mixture because that's that's her mother in 1940. And then it's the general hospital in [?] in Belgium in 1945. And then there's, you can see, she was at the wedding of her friends from the 435 battery. And then these are these are all on the site. And then yeah, different different friends. So this is her with two of her friends. And some of them, you get a sense of of the, you know, the that sense of friendship, and and and fun almost. There's one here, I really like this one of my mum, she's saying 'Me off duty'. And she's holding some sort of cuddly toy or something.

00:07:29 Speaker 2

It's like a stuffed animal. Yeah, a little donkey.

00:07:33 Speaker 1

But I suspect someone's given it to her to pose with, because she's got a big smile on her face. And there's and this this this is one that that was taken in Brussels. And on the back, it's getting very fragile, on the back it says, 'To Mother with love', or something, 'Brussels 1945'. And then these are more photos of of Belgium. And then there's then the mail [?]. This is a really nice photo. That's my mother there. And here they getting more relaxed.

00:08:21 Speaker 2

Yeah, just hanging out there.

00:08:36 Speaker 1

It's a real shame that we we didn't we didn't really know. My older sister said that she'd my mum talked to her about it a little bit, but I'm annoyed I I didn't really know what she'd done. And my dad was the same, he was in the tank regiment, and he would never never talk about it. I mean he finished up in prison but he didn't, in a German camp, but he didn't he wouldn't talk about it.

00:09:02 Speaker 2

Yeah. That's a common theme that's emerging today is lots of people saying 'I found out very late' or 'I only found out a few things' or 'I found out from family members many years later', kind of thing. So it's interesting because it's the photos some of the photos, they are clearly having a good time, at least in the picture, like they're catching these moments where they're they're larking around. But it's still something that wasn't being talked about, not even the good bits, you know.

00:09:28 Speaker 1

Yeah. And and obviously what what they were doing was quite dangerous work and I mean these these are just her her service records that that document, you know, where she was. I mean, she was at Richmond when when, you know, they they they had all the anti-aircraft sites there because the the bombs were coming in and so it was it was dangerous work and there was a whole range of different, I mean I have no idea what particular work she did or whether they all did different jobs, but apart from manning the guns, they did everything else in terms of spotting the planes and predicting how and where they were going to so yeah.

00:10:14 Speaker 1

So I don't know whether there's anything else I can say, really, in terms of. And I think the the I suppose in terms of of, you know, the role that they were taking on, that was quite something to be in a mixed unit and to be doing work that had previously been done by men and I mean clearly it worked really well because after that first mixed unit was set up, they continued to do that. I've just been reading recently a book from women who went to war and that was talking about how how it worked so well that that, you know, and that was all part of of recognising the potential of women in different roles rather than the traditional traditional ones.

00:11:15 Speaker 2

Yeah, rather than just you can do a man's job but you have to stay at home to do it. You can actually sort of and do it. It's an extra step forward I guess. Did you have any memorabilia, no, I don't want to say memorabilia because maybe that's the wrong word for it, but is all that you have linked to your mother's service? There's nothing that you have linked to your dad's at all?

00:11:38 Speaker 1

No. No, not at all. I mean I've got his war service record but we don't have any any photographs, anything anything at all. No.

00:11:50 Speaker 2

OK. I just wondered, some people have like things that were like postcards that were sent home and like little letters and bits, but yeah.

00:11:58 Speaker 1

No, no. There's there's there's there's nothing, nothing at all.

00:12:03 Speaker 2

That's fine it's just I was just wondering. It's just it's interesting what gets saved and what doesn't and whether it's just down to siblings or just down to not saving anything, you know?

00:12:13 Speaker 1

I mean well what I've done with with these **photographs [?]** because I've got I've got six brothers and sisters, and there was only one album and I finished up being the the, you know, the curator of it or the, not the, that's the wrong word.

00:12:29 Speaker 2

So the custodian of it.

00:12:28 Speaker 1

But so what I did with that, I scanned the photos and I made a family history tree, so I've got I've got all of the photos, and then I did 7 copies and we've all got we've all got the photos now. But but there's only this this this one, this one book.

00:12:48 Speaker 2

It works out. It's as good as anything. Some of the pictures here are really good quality. I was thinking some of these larger ones of the of the other women on their own or just one or two of

them, it just they must have they must have cost money. I mean, I mean yeah, like that those style of ones, they're really good. Yeah.

00:13:04 Speaker 1

Yeah, I mean [?] isn't it.

00:13:10 Speaker 2

It makes me not wonder but I've seen I've seen ones this quality from World War I but they're studio photos and these are not, these are taken outdoors. These are definitely sort of in the place pictured [?]. So I don't know if it's better technology, or if it's just just a very talented photographer doing them all on the same day. They are wonderful.

[...]

00:16:56 Speaker 2

I mean some people said that they remember their parent and they were different when they came back from the war and some say, like, I never knew my parent before the war, so I don't actually know if it changed them or not. I don't know if there's any because you say they didn't really talk about it, but did you ever have the sense that that was something that that your mother hadn't experienced, that changed her, that nobody ever seemed to ever hint at that or anything?

00:17:25 Speaker 1

Well, I think I think I mean now when I think about it, I think the, you know, because her her, you know, the fact that she had the scholarship to Manchester Grammar and then was forced to leave, and then her world opened up in the sense of she was with a team of people, you know, she wasn't living at home, she was away, and she was doing something that was both really important to the war effort, but also building obviously lots of friendships and learning new skills, and then travelling, you know, being in Belgium and then in Germany which you know from someone who's not set foot out of Manchester, that would have been quite something. And during the war, that was when they were bombed and she the family finished up moving to Tod so that was when she came here. But she was out in in Europe when that happened. So I I think it's that sense, to me, it's that sense of the camaraderie, of all of the women working together and the the friendships. And you can tell that from the album and the way that, you know, there's photos for other people's weddings and it's all in the connection of the 435 battery, and the children, you know, there's photographs of the friends with children and that. So there's obviously a very strong bonding experience.

00:18:48 Speaker 2

Yeah. They stayed in touch clearly, yeah.

00:18:50 Speaker 1

And then but but so I I I mean, I don't think she certainly, as far as I know, didn't wasn't, well certainly not not since, I mean, she was I suppose she got married in 1949 and then had 7 children in 10 years, so it was a very busy time! And I suspect that her world felt more narrowed down again, because, you know, she had, you know, this large family, not a huge amount of money and so it was, you know, there wasn't a lot of time to think about what she would have been doing before. But I mean I never felt that she, you know, she she she was very focused on on us all as children and and my dad was too. And and I think clearly there would have been a lot of difficult memories because they can't all have been happy days, you know. It it would have been very challenging and no doubt she might have been, you know, people that she was on duty with badly injured and things like that. But I mean, I I don't know. So her and that may be why she didn't want to talk to us about it. I mean I

did I did I went up and did history for my degree, and I don't know why I never asked her about it , really, but she certainly she certainly didn't want to talk about it. Although I imagine, you know, if she'd have met up with any of these friends, it would be really good for her, but they were all scattered, you know, around the around the country and that that that wasn't so easy.

00:20:43 Speaker 1

It's harder to keep in touch back then. There's no no Internet to make it effortless.

00:20:49 Speaker 1

Indeed, indeed.