

Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 3

This is Stephanie Cunningham in Thetford on the 21st of October 2023 and this is participant number THE 007. Would you like to introduce yourself?

00:00:10 Speaker 4

I'm Jane Barber. I live in I have lived in Thetford for 21 years now, but I came originally from Derbyshire and then moved to Yorkshire.

00:00:21 Speaker 3

I'm from Derbyshire. Yay! Sorry, carry on.

00:00:26 Speaker 4

I have lived in many places around the world and finished up my final years, I think, here in Norfolk, which I like very much so I have some memories of the war because I lived right through the wall so.

00:00:43 Speaker 3

So who is the person gonna be talking to us about today? Is it your own stories, your family members?

00:00:49 Speaker 4

Yeah, partly myself, partly my family, things that I remember from those days. I I lived not very far from where all the steel works and and the coal mines were in South Yorkshire. So we did have bombing.

00:01:03 Speaker 4

And I can remember night after night as a small child of being in a dugout shelter in the garden. I still suffer from claustrophobia because of that. I remember being shut in this dark hole, you know, it's a bit damp and not very nice, and listening to the the shoot shooting and the bombs going off

00:01:23 Speaker 4

I did one night dee what what was known as a doodlebug flying over. I was in bed at the time and the noise woke me up and I saw this thing flying past.

00:01:35 Speaker 4

And my grandmother said, 'Well, as long as the engine kept going, you're alright. When it switches off, you know it's going to come down and explode.' And apparently it landed in Manchester and I can remember that as if it was last week. Really, it's still clear in my mind.

00:01:52 Speaker 3

And what is that? Sorry, is that like a flying bomb?

00:01:54 Speaker 4

Yes, it was a flying bomb, when they were sending them over from I think they were launching them from France, then. And I must have been about five years, 4, 5 years old so.

00:02:05 Speaker 3

And what were your parents doing during the war?

00:02:08 Speaker 4

Well, when the war started, my father more or less, I was about 20, 21 months old then. We we lived in Derbyshire and my father almost immediately joined the Air Force. So he [?] in the Air Force.

00:02:25 Speaker 4

My mother went with me over to her parents in South Yorkshire where we stayed, but after a while she also joined what was known as the ARP Nursing Auxiliary and she was driving an ambulance, especially when bombings started in places like Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield.

00:02:43 Speaker 4

Going in and out of those, I didn't see a lot of her in the war either. It was my grandparents that were my significant, significant others.

00:02:51 Speaker 4

And and I had two uncles that had first lived at home until they were old enough to join the army. And they travelled all over the place and they came home occasionally, as did my father. I have a brother who's almost four years younger than me, so Dad must have come home some time and.

00:03:15 Speaker 4

He he was brought up eventually after a few months with my father's mother and maiden sister. So he lived in the same town as me. But now at the other end we didn't see each other very much.

00:03:26 Speaker 3

OK.

00:03:26 Speaker 4

So we didn't get to know each other until we were quite a bit older. I was about 8 going on 9 when eventually when we we joined Mum again.

00:03:33 Speaker 3

Wow, OK. And that's just because your mom was so busy at the time?

00:03:34 Speaker 4

Yes, just because because of the war. It didn't work out very well. But.

00:03:49 Speaker 3

And what kind of things were your grandparents doing?

00:03:53 Speaker 4

My grandfather was a coal miner. My grandmother was just a she was a housewife, but she was also a leader of the local church, local Congregational Church, and I spent a lot of time as a child at the church. You know, it was my playground and where we spent a lot of time so.

00:04:08 Speaker 3

And whereabouts was this? What town?

00:04:09 Speaker 4

This was Mexborough in South Yorkshire. I actually was born in Chesterfield.

00:04:17 Speaker 3

So your father wasn't a coal miner, though? Just your grandfather?

00:04:20 Speaker 4

No. Yeah, just the grandfather. No, my father was a area manager for a for a firm for a commercial firm.

00:04:30 Speaker 3

OK.

00:04:31 Speaker 4

He got his job back after the war and we went back to Chesterfield when I was 9.

00:04:36 Speaker 4

And I did the rest of my schooling there.

00:04:39 Speaker 3

And has your father ever spoken to you about his own stories from the war? Did he ever speak to you?

00:04:45 Speaker 4

He told me quite a lot about his time in Iceland. He spent quite a lot of time in Iceland. In fact, when I was at university as a student, we had a chance to go to Iceland on on a 5-week work tour, and he gave me money towards it on the understanding that I took photos for him so. And but the the hospital where he worked was actually turned into the university by the time I went over there. And yeah he spent spent several years in Iceland.

00:05:18 Speaker 4

But the rest of the time he spent in Germany. I know he was near Cologne at one time.

00:05:24 Speaker 4

But he was still there a year for for about a year after the war, finishing on what he called clearing up operations. Whatever he was doing, I don't know. But I can remember as a child all the other fathers, uncles, brothers and whatnot were coming home and my dad didn't. He was there, in the Air Force.

00:05:47 Speaker 3

So you mentioned that you worked at a hospital, So what was he doing in the hospital?

00:05:49 Speaker 4

He was he was a dietician cook at the hospital. He did the diets and he did the cooking and everything, but lots of other things going on as well. I think they have to turn to almost everything in a situation like that.

00:06:08 Speaker 4

But as I say, it was interesting. I've been to Iceland twice, but I don't think I got the excitement he did when he was there. He got frostbite at one time I remember, so it couldn't have been easy.

00:06:20 Speaker 3

And did you do you find that your father was quite open about talking about his experience?

00:06:25 Speaker 4

He was. It was my grandfather's experience in the First World War, he wouldn't speak about it, so he told me, like when I was in my later teens, my grandfather, and it was horrific because he spent quite a lot of time in the trenches. So I mean, it wasn't nearly as bad in the Second World War. Thank God.

00:06:43 Speaker 4

He he also had, my father, at some time, had some time in Malta because he made friends with quite a lot of Maltese families, which he kept up for years.

00:06:58 Speaker 3

And what about your mother? Did she talk a lot about her stories and experiences?

00:07:01 Speaker 4

No, no, she didn't. I didn't, didn't I didn't know my mother very much really at all. Even when we were together again, you know? She used to say that she'd some got photos of her with the ambulance. They'd they'd drive around with the ambulance crew and go to places. And that's all I know is the basics of what she did, that she was more or less in a nursing team going around.

00:07:28 Speaker 3

Would you like to show me the photos that you've got with you?

00:07:34 Speaker 4

Try to separate them up.

00:07:38 Speaker 4

That was my dad in his Air Force Days. I've got some of my uncles as well. I think that's a great picture of my uncle with a gun.

00:07:49 Speaker 4

[?] his younger brother.

00:07:58 Speaker 4

That's my father, it says on the back that this was taken in Germany in 45, so that must have been the time when he was out there when most other people had gone. That's another one of.

00:08:13 Speaker 4

That was 41, my dad.

00:08:15 Speaker 4

Well, that's mum with the ambulance in the ARP. Quality service, it says.

00:08:25 Speaker 3

Yeah look at that. All of their uniforms. They look so smart, don't they?

00:08:31 Speaker 3

Are just are these the only ones that you'd like to share with us today?

00:08:33 Speaker 4

No. You can have a look at any of it, but these are the [?]

00:08:37 Speaker 4

Those were just my father while in the Air Force. He's this is my uncle, when he was in, that's the same uncle, my mother's eldest brother, he was torpedoed off the coast of Africa and came home. And from there on he was profoundly deaf.

00:08:53 Speaker 4

He was profoundly deaf, he [?] in the he spent hours and hours in the water before they were picked up, so he's got quite a history. I mean, they're all gone now, unfortunately. And this is, oh dear, that's me. And this is my mother's younger brother who did quite well in the army.

00:09:12 Speaker 4

He finished up [?] in New Zealand, would you believe. [?]

00:09:20 Speaker 3

And this was your mother's younger brother?

00:09:21 Speaker 4

Yeah. There is he again, and there he is with the gun.

00:09:28 Speaker 4

It just says Albert. That's my grandmother's writing so some time in the war, but I honestly couldn't tell you when. And these are there are others that are just

[audio cut]

because we they lived in Earls Court.

00:09:43 Speaker 4

And we used to go into the shelters at night. We came home a couple of days before the wedding and the whole of the top floor of the house had gone, which is where all the clothing was stored, so everything had to be cobbled together very quickly. My friend made that out of out of [?]. Everybody was dressed up in things that weren't really supposed to be there [?].

00:10:08 Speaker 4

These are all just wartime pictures of me as a child. I didn't know whether you're interested in, but I put them in because they all [?] having gone through them, there might be some of interest.

00:10:20 Speaker 4

Some of them I think are written on the back, some are, yeah, 1940, you see, just after the war started.