

Terry Ford for South Shields Local History Group on the 2nd of October, 2023, interviewing Peter Dixon with general stories.

Peter story No:

1

The first story that I'm aware of that applying to my family during the war was that my father that I got from him, he was standing in the back garden on the fifth night of the 5th of September, 1940, and there were searchlights scanning around the sky and he was looking towards the south and he saw these searchlights illuminate an aircraft quite a distance away. This aircraft happened to be over Sunderland, and you said you could see the aircraft in the cones dodging around and you could see anti aircraft gun burst going above it, behind it, below it, in front of it. And eventually one hit and he said there was lots of bonny coloured lights that fell to the ground, that aircraft, I know a lot of details about that aircraft. There was a crew of four, two of them managed to get out, but they were too low for the parachutes and I've got more details than that if you wish it

2:

Next. Both my grandparents were in the ARP, one of which I never actually met because he died more or less the time I was born. And I did get stories from other grandparent they often used to meet down at near where the new swimming baths are now down beside the beach. There was a revetment built into there and he saw an aircraft come down off the harbour.

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He attended the marketplace when the marketplace was bombed, and I've actually got something that he picked up from the marketplace with me. (Photo)

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The next thing, the other thing was stories which I got when I was very young. My grandparents used to have a big old fashioned valve radio set and they used to tune into all different kinds of stuff and they often heard Lord Haw-Haw and he would often claim that ships were sunk, they were in the River Tyne they could see them.

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And also on one particular night, they tuned into the Cullercoats Radio and they could hear an awful lot of swearing going on because basically a German submarine had surfaced in amongst the place where they were forming the convoy and people were saying; Are you're blind? Are you blind? Look, it's over there. So there, and they were firing loads and loads of star shells, the sky to try and find it. Next morning a number of ships hit mines, and one I know was beached just north of Marsden Bay. It was carrying bauxite because the ore was in the coals for many years after that.

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My father joined the Air Training Corps and he attended camps and then one of the camps he attended was down at Middleton St. George down at Teesside and there was two Royal Canadian Air Force Lancaster Squadrons based there. On one night he was in air traffic control on a visit watching the aircraft go off on a tour and one of them lifted off the runway, went over a railway line, came down, boof! up it went and there was a little bit more story after that.

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But the one which affects my family most is on one night. And I know the dates available, but I haven't got it. I've tried to find it. There was an incident happened, I got a description off my father, what he saw, and I subsequently contacted the Ministry of Defence and did research on it. And basically what happened was there was a raid on, and my father was just down the road here in Lilac Avenue and the aircraft coming towards him from the north in searchlights. And as it was getting closer, there was still distance off about a mile off. All this tracer shot across the sky, and it was a Junkers 88. It jettisoned its bomb load, cranked off to the left and shot out the sea. I subsequently traced that this aircraft had been followed by a Beaufighter and I used to have a letter, but I haven't got it now I regret. And it would tell you that the aircraft was either from Acklington or Ouston, and it had the crew members', names of the air crew who were flying this Beaufighter. The bombs that came down came down at Marsden Street and at the top of Dean Road in Marsden Street when they came down, it killed a warden, a policeman and I know that it killed two people near the garage opposite the Readhead Park where there used to be a little garage on Sunderland Road. The bombs that came down in Marsden Street, I had an auntie living there. It demolished quite a lot of Marsden Street, and I know this Amy Flagg did some photographs of it. So to get a date from that, but I couldn't find access to the date in the house when the bombs came down blow all the windows out and the ceiling came down, she had just had a young baby and the ceiling came down on top where the baby's cot and the baby was blinded for the rest of his life with the lime off the ceiling, the plaster.

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Gosh, what after that, I've got from here, I haven't got, my dad had a, he picked up his postcard, I've got it in the house and it of a Heinkel 111 and he says, I bought this postcard because that's exactly what I saw. The angle and everything, the size of it, it was very, very low. It would've been flying parallel with Prince Edward Road it would come straight down here in searchlights, one engine burning and you see a guy looking at the button. He said it disappeared behind the houses. And a few seconds later, the sky lit up with a big glow and it went down and this going down somewhere just off Marsden Bay, probably on the north of it. Because after the war me father and some of his friends were kicking around the rock pools near Camel's Island and they came across a propeller blade wedged in the rock pool. And I've used, subsequently found bits of aluminium when I was a kid down there. And I don't know a little bit more about that, but I haven't got the date. I could trace it if I had a date. Gosh, what else? There is other things.

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My grandfather, when the market was bombed on the 2nd of October (1941), he was down there helping to clear up, well both my grandparents were down there, the grandparents who I never met, the grandfather who I never met. I was told by his wife, his wife, my grandmother with a grandmother that he was really, really upset by what the sights that he saw because they knew they were pulling bodies out and different things.

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And my grandfather, on the other side of the family picked up the back of somebody's watch, do you know the little plate on the back? I've got it with us. And the poor fellow had been caught in the blast and the blast had hit him so hard, all of cog wheels and everything is embossed in the back of the plate on the back of his watch. I've got that in my pocket here. Yeah, if you want, I don't know if you need a photograph it?