

**Interviewee: Edward Aylward**

**Interviewer: Bill Fairclough**

**Location: University of Greenwich**

**Date: 06.08.2010**

Interviewer: This is an interview with Edward Aylward

Edward: Aylward

Interviewer: Aylward. Date of birth May 1925.

Interviewer: And it is a 45 min interview and my name is Bill Fairclough.

Interviewer: So Ted, you have come here today... I am wondering because I don't know you what you would like to talk about.

Edward: Oh, I thought you were going to ask me that, a point of fact. What do I want to talk about...I was in the ARP at the beginning of the war. After I've done x amount of months of fire watching as they called it. And then I joined the ARP, we used to visit shelters that were in the roads, some within the houses, some within the gardens of the houses. And I mean the day war broke out if you are interested I was actually digging a blooming great hole with two of me brothers pto put our Anderson shelter in.

Interviewer: And where was all this happening?

Edward: This was happening in Deptford, SE8 in London. And we used the shelter quite a lot a matter of fact and - except of me mother – I do this – I really could have brought some tapes that I've done with the BBC a matter of fact – my mother as soon as she'd see us nodding off she used to walk – to get out of the shelter to make more room and I got told off by this presenter at the BBC for praising up to the women but I genuinely thought that women – without them during the war - bye bye. As simple as that.

Interviewer – So you talked about your family and your mum but can you say who was in your family at this time.

Edward: Oh, there was me mum, one brother I think – before he went in the army – and his wife whose father was a swimming instructor at Laurie Grove Baths at New Cross, a place that no one knows. It's still a baths as far as I know, it was just a place that we went to after school and etc. But adding to that basically that was most of me family, on the odd occasion we had the me brother's wife's two sisters to stay with us but mostly it was just about five in the shelter. And that was it - quite honestly. But as I started to say earlier on the thing that got us was that me mum used to creep out of the shelter and we'd find her sitting in the coal cupboard – in the coal cellar. Cause she felt that she had to give us more room to us all to relax.

Interviewer: To be comfortable.

Edward: Well, yeah. Because basically at the height of the Blitz we were still working, I mean I started work when I was 14 – and it was a job that we had to – you know – we had to get a living, we had to go to work so that me brother and me brother's wife – she worked for the Red Cross by the way - up in Oxford Street somewhere. Anyway another story. But basically we - I used to admire me mum. Because she used to, apart from cooking for us all and making sure we was fed, to think that we hadn't got enough room in the air raid shelter and that she used to creep out and sit in the coal shed well that needs a lot of believing but it was actually true.

Interviewer: It sounds as though it's something that means quite a lot to you.

Edward: Well, it does and I honestly believe that without the ladies during the war, we'd have folded. Simple as that. It might only be my opinion but that's how I felt and I thought that they were very brave our ladies. Especially in London. Although they had their own problems in other parts of England of course i.e. Coventry. I think that was another heavily hit place. Anyway, that's basically my story of the air raid shelter.

Interviewer: So I suppose what we don't know looking back on it is what happened. How many raids you had? And what it sounded like? And what of things you'd feel when you were in the shelter.

Edward: Well, you could rest assure that unless it was a perfectly moonlit night you were gonna get air raids. And that went on to the early hours of the morning and another point that I was trying to make earlier was that we'd still had to go to work. So not only did you get these raids all night but you'd go to work and in maybe two or three hours you'd be in the middle of another air raid. Which had become a bit of an upness and I worked for a company in Charlton called G.A Harvey's and they had, had a couple of bombs on the roofs of their buildings and which fortunately only penetrated through the roof. In the basement it was these air raid shelters which we used to be constantly in and out during the day, which was a pain and you know.

Interviewer: What were you doing now? What was your job?

Edward: I started life as an apprentice electrician – eventually they had to take me back after the war anyway cause that was part of their honour. And by that time I had gone in the Navy anyway that's another story. But really I wanted to impress, the worst thing that was happening was the bombings, I mean I had one girlfriend pardon me – so you won't get those straight answers I'm an idiot – and when she came out of the air raid shelter they had no house at all. It'd been completely demolished.

Interviewer: Is that local to here?

Edward: She was in the next street to us and I know - all of a sudden we heard this voice, we were down in the air raid shelter when we heard this voice: "You're all right down there?". And my brother said to me "I'm sure that's the messenger of the school care-taker". So I shouted "yeah we're alright" and then we sort of "well how did he get in?" not realising that when we went to go out that there was

no street door, it was simply blown off. The nice part of the story is that the guy next door - in the house next door - he was a carpenter and people just genuinely helped one another it was as simple as that. And he was putting hinges on doors and genuinely being helpful. And that's what I found about during the war - quite honestly.

Interviewer: So there is a helpfulness and also this part that the women are playing...You are very keen on emphasising that aren't you?

Edward: As I said, it is a pity – I've got a tape that the – that was done by the BBC which I thought I had put in but no I haven't - which is a nuisance cause it's on film and I could have shown it out there I assume you can do the old fashioned tapes, the big thick things, I can't remember what they call them.

Edward: Right anyway that's my story of the early part of the war. After the fire watching, when you say fire watching – people say fire watching? What were you watching fires for? They were incendiary bombs.

Interviewer: And where were you watching from? What sort of place did you have for that?

Edward: Ironically enough – the old road I lived in – in one of the gardens at the back of a shop was an old sort of out house – for the want of a word. To be perfectly honest if someone would have said Dang it would have collapsed. That's how old it was. And we kept our stirrup pumps and our sand in this place ready at hand. And basically we used to stand about five of us at the street corner looking generally to see these incendiary bombs. Which me brother and I, we had one bounced off the roof of our own house – and well you never seen that amount of earth like it. We threw so much earth on it, it looked like a mountain. [laughs]

Interviewer: And did that work?

Edward: [unclear] about an incendiary bomb was that when you disturbed it, it would still be alight if you know what I mean. It is sort of you move the earth around and trying to get more earth on it. And suddenly you'd see whisks of smoke and you think the damned thing is still alight and that's an incendiary bomb and that was a pain in the butt really.

Interviewer: So you were trying to – what you were trying to do was to get to the bombs and extinguish them before they started a fire.

Edward: That's basically what you would call fire watching. Sounds silly title to give people but there you go.

Interviewer: So you'd be out when the raids were on?

Edward: Yeah, yeah. Literally when I was in the ARP all I had was a tin helmet and a whistle. And that was my safe guard.

Interviewer: And how did you feel about that though? Going in from a normal sort of peaceful life to being out with your helmet and your whistle.

Edward: I think it was because I used to visit the air raid shelters to see if other people were ok that was an active life. What you had to be very careful about is when the anti-aircraft guns hurked their shells skywards and was the bits of metal that dropped, that was more dangerous to people who were just walking the streets. Shrapnels they called it. But other than that I think because I was a teenager, fifteen and a half/sixteen, I thought can't hurt me like you know. You worry - I mean people say when I go to schools they say "Eddie what did you feel when - Hitler speech, you know about the war" Chamberlain's speech rather. Well, it didn't worry me really that silly little men that keeps putting his hand up like that who wants to be afraid of him. And I think kids were - you know we were stupid because needless to say within months the whole thing had simply changed.

Edward: Anyway that's basically - not much of a story but I tried to keep alive I suppose. And then I suppose when I went in the Navy that's another story but yeah... I finished up in Australia and married a beautiful Wren in 1947. Provided me with me children, two lovely daughters and all me grandkids and me great grandkids.

Interviewer: So it took you a long way away from London the war then didn't it?

Edward: Yeah, I finished up in Australia.

Interviewer: A new life for you then?

Edward: I went on to the Japanese War - before the Japs had come into the war through Pearl Harbour as you probably know and so that's where I finished up in Australia.

Interviewer: So what sort of service did you see in the Navy? What were you doing there?

Edward: I was very fortunate that most exciting bits of it was when I come home on leave. Dodging the bombs, and rockets and doodlebugs. Well they were another thing - you did have a bit of a chance with the doodlebugs because the - once the engine cut out you know that it was just gonna drop and explode so you had virtually maybe half a minute or something to be able to get yourself down the ditch and you know so the explosion hopefully would blow over the top of you. Other than that, no, my Navy life was quite comfortable. As I say I was more in danger when I came on leave. I happened to be on leave when the rocket fell at New Cross on the Woolworths which was prior to Christmas of that year and that was November it was as a matter of fact. And I mean within a minute we were involved - I was home and a friend of mine, he was in the navy as well, he was on leave and we were on our way to visit some friends at New Cross, the Pigs Hill at New Cross and we got partly down Lewisham - which is now called Lewisham Way, there is virtually a pub on the corner - I can't think of the name of the pub, I used to use it quite a bit. I can't remember the name of it. Near Goldsmiths College. And this rocket fell and hit Woolworths and in actual fact I did have a photo of it in a book but completely - . As I said I was in more danger on leave than when I was in the navy which I can honestly say - apart from meeting a lovely lady - me navy life was quite comfortable. I

used to enjoy me tour around – yeas, I'm quite helpful now if you wish to give me a cup of tea and a drop of rum.

Edward: Ironically enough the Naval College, I mean this has always been here and it has survived that war and I've got an idea one of me brothers worked here for a period. And how they always managed to finish up with guinea pigs, I don't know if he was dissecting them or what. [laughs]

Interviewer: Guinea pigs?

Edward: Yeah, I don't know whether they were doing a sort of – I can't think of the name – anyway but they always used to finish up with guinea pigs.

Interviewer: As pets?

Edward: As pets, yes [laughs]

Interviewer: Not pie or something like that? [laughs]

Edward: Oh, no. They might have tried but I don't think my mum was that horrible.

Edward: Yes, so apart from photos I can't really...

Interviewer: So it was a time when you went to sea?

Edward: Oh, well yeah. I had to go to sea to go to Australia.

Interviewer: You say that there was something about you know the bombing here which was still in your mind and honestly if you were down and saw the effect of the rockets say on Woolworths and all that and you'd be thinking of the civilians back home. I mean - and is this part of the women holding things together that what they did was the thing that held together things back home?

Edward: I honestly believe that the – oh I've got a photo of me when I was in the ARP actually. That's me with me eldest brother, he was in the air force. I take these into schools and the kids are more interested in photos than learning about the war actually. Come here your pissed... Yeah that's me eldest brother he was in the RAF.

[Pause]

Edward: Oh that was the devastation when the V2 that fell on New Cross.

Interviewer: So did you feel that the people back home were having a harder time than you because you're talking about the navy but then you are telling us that you were fairly comfy there.

Edward: Yeah, I mean as far as I am concerned my navy life was quite pleasant. That was the last ship I was on. And that was me. [laughs]

Interviewer: So was this when you were on the carrier then?

Edward: Yeah.

Interviewer: So what did you do on the carrier?

Edward: I was only part of [unclear] crew.

Interviewer: Was that quite busy? Was carrier life quite busy?

Edward: It especially was when there was an air craft on it. I really started of life as a mere mechanic but never mind it I had a...not that I had anything against the male officers but this particular one said that I didn't know what I was talking about half of the time. [laughs] And I think he was taking more notice than notes that I made. They asked me silly questions like when I was an apprentice electrician and I would have finished that probably, hopefully, as a near mechanic E as they called 'em, which is an electrician and I had this lady officer she asked me questions on the contents of batteries and things like that and I thought I'd answer correctly as I knew and her report was that he doesn't now what he was talking about half of the time – so I'm not surprised. [laughs]

Interviewer: So it sounds like you didn't get on?

Edward: No, that's right. Anyway that's another story. Somewhere I've left all my information and photos at a school but I can't remember where I've done it. Anyway can we get on?

Interviewer: Where do you want to go next?

Edward: Oh, I see. I didn't know if you had any more questions.

Edward: The other good thing I would like to show if I may is my swimming certificates.

Interviewer: And these are from the pool you talked about?

Edward: Yeah. They're falling to bits anyway – but most teachers are amazed at the colouring. They say "I didn't know they've done coloured things when you was a boy.

Interviewer: I have never seen certificates like this before but you've brought them before us. I wondered why you brought them? What does it mean to you? Is there something about them?

Edward: Yes, yes. Apart from the fact that I went into the navy which was useful to be able to swim. Basically to take out – when I go out and visit schools kids like to see 'em and you know they tell me that they don't get anything like that these days.

Interviewer: But they would like things like that you think?

Edward: Yeah they would. I mean what's nicer to say than here are my old swimming certificates?

Interviewer: It sounds like you were quite as a youngster, I mean we are talking about you know the beginning of your adult life you were quite of an active sort of person. Is that?

Edward: Yeah, I mean I was into swimming, football, cricket, captain schools football and cricket teams.

Interviewer: So sporty?

Edward: Yeah - but generally I didn't want to [unclear] quite honestly. I liked my job I was doing as an apprentice electrician and got on well with the elder mechanics.

Interviewer: With the who?

Edward: Elder mechanics.

Edward: That's how I met Dr. June.

Interviewer: How was that then?

Edward: Well, I do a thing for people with Alzheimers and she came to a place to go to in Shooters Hill Road which remind me – don't get old cause your memory goes when you get old.

Interviewer: And so for your family, you talked about the war. The war obviously had a big effect on your life, you met your wife and you travelled....

Edward: Oh, yeah. My wife –

Interviewer: So she was a Wren when you met her. But there were no Wrens aboard ships at that time?

Edward: Not at that time. That was her leaving Australia actually.

Interviewer: So which of these ladies –

Edward: Only one of them.

Interviewer: So not one in every port. Or seven in the same port?

Edward: [laughs] – that was the Navy's – oh buggar – that was back in Toronto Park back in Australia.

Interviewer: So had did you...

Edward: Oh, and that was...

Interviewer: So how did you meet then? How did all that work out then?

Edward: Well, she was on a ship going out to Australia and I happened to be going on the same ship at that time. I can't find the one blooming photo I want to find. Never mind.

Interviewer: So you were both on a ship and you were both going to Australia?

Edward: Yeah.

Interviewer: Why was that? Why would the Navy send...

Edward: It was a cruiser. It was a cruise ship called the Rontrise (?). I have a lovely photo of it. [looking for photo] Anyway – on with the stories. I've run out of words. Oh, that's me dad's – merchant navy – he was in the merchant navy. That is a very interesting...

Interviewer: So was his, your father's, career in the merchant navy?

Edward: Yeah. That's his whole journey – (...) church.

Interviewer: So you've kept a lot of things haven't you? From your young days.

Edward: Yeah. And the kids in school they love this. [plays toy?]

Interviewer: So you've kept a lot of things from your younger days?

Edward: Well, unfortunately I've left some in a school somewhere. And which I had photos of the rocket that hit New Cross - that I don't seem to be able to find. These are all school letters.

Edward: Anyway. Any more questions? [laughs]

Interviewer: You're going down to Australia and you – on a...

Edward: The idea was that – to get involved in the Japanese war at the time. That was the idea and I only finished up in the air craft carrier when I was coming home. [pause] I don't know. Anyway. Yes, the Japanese war was still on. [pause – flicking through photos] Street party.

Interviewer: So was this your street?

Edward: Yeah. That's me I sneaked out on leave. I was waiting to pick up ship to – at Portsmouth. So I sneaked out on leave that day.

Interviewer: So are you in this photograph?

Edward: Yes. The – oh – I didn't even show you the book did I?

Interviewer: Well we have...

Edward: We send it – this book we send it out to schools. And they ask questions – they ask certain questions. That was me. There.

Interviewer: That's you there.

Edward: Look at all these letters that I get from kids. Which is really nice.

Edward: I hope I haven't bored you to tears. [laughs]

Interviewer: How did your family get on through the war? Were your brothers in the air force and...

Edward: One in the air force and one army and they were both – my eldest brother who was in the air force he got captured in Italy – no he was in Egypt when he got captured and my other brother sort of followed him through. He was a desert – one of the desert – oh there is my wedding certificate. I managed to get 51 years married life in. [laughs]

Interviewer: And your father was at sea throughout the war was he?

Edward: No, not the this war. Not the Second World War. No, I was only seven when me father died and that was in 1950 – 19 – oh God – I was only seven.

Interviewer: 1932

Edward: I'm sorry I'm desperately going through all this – [flicking through papers].

Interviewer: You would have been 7 in 1932 so your father died in 1932.

Edward: Well done.

Interviewer: So it was just you and your – so your family was just your mother and your brothers.

Edward: And sister – one sister. [pause - flicking through papers] Anyway on with the chat.

Nicole looks bored to tears.

Edward: Right Bill what do you want to ask me now? You're supposed to be doing the interviewing. Can't be very interesting.

[pause – flicking through papers]

Interviewer: So what was, before she became your wife, what was your wife doing in the navy? What was her job?

Edward+ She was – she finished up four ranks. She was a petty officer. Cook. She was a cook. She got me (...)

Interviewer: She found a way to your heart through...

Edward: Yes. Yes, she was a good cook and wedding cakes were her – one of the things she used to do. And people knock on my door and say 'Is the lady who made the wedding cakes still here?'. And I say 'yeah what do you want to her to cook for you steak and kidney pudding?'

Interviewer: How did you find things when – I mean you talked about the photograph of the street party when you back when you were down in Portsmouth for a bit. How did you find things when you came home again? How did it strike you?

Edward: Peaceful. How did it strike me? I don't know... I don't know – as young people you took it in your stride. As I said 1947 I was fortunately enough to get married. My wife she came from a little

village in Oxfordshire. The nearest town was obviously Oxford. So I had to meet her family and which was quite something different as it meant I could go by train from Paddington and when I say it cost ten bob people say 'ten bob!' and that was a return ticket to Oxford if you don't mind. And I met me new mother-in-law on Oxford station and she – I didn't understand what she was talking about for the first quarter of an hour. Very very strong accent in the local sort of... I got used to it in the end. Yeah, quite nice. Well known in the village – uncle Ted. [laughs]

Interviewer: So you moved there after 47 or?

Edward: No, we chose to live - me mother was a widow obviously and I used to pay the rent for what it was in those days. It was very reasonable. But basically to give her a bit of living we used to take her on holiday with us and you know. She had been a good old stick during the war. But – oh and that things were quite - well you could hardly say normal. I started back and work and I became an (...) and my wife went out and she worked for Westminster council as a cook. So all in all we went back to the life we knew basically.

Interviewer: So did you leave the navy in sort of 45 or 46 that sort of time or?

Edward: Yeah, 46. Yeah, September 1946 when I came out of the navy. Went to get measured for a suit which was a bit of joke...And I had it to go out to until 8 or 9 years ago.

Interviewer: Why was it a bit of a joke though? What was...

Edward: When they said measure...

Interviewer: Alright was it rough measuring was it?

Edward: Well 'that's it' 'there or' [laughs]

Interviewer: So it wasn't Saville Row you were saying?

Edward: Not quite no. It was - I looked quite tidy anyway.

Interviewer: How did you feel about leaving when you had done a fair few years?

Edward: Well, I think – from day one you're saying 'wish I could do something else' 'get out of here like' and you know. And I think you carry on thinking in them terms until suddenly you're discharged. And that's another thing I haven't got is me service – which remarkably says 'very good' all the way through it and people say 'you're joking ain't you'. [laughs] And I got a book here that I don't often show to people. And the first page – oh, sorry I haven't even turned it over to the first page, it's somewhere there. Oh, it's there right in front of you. Read it out.

Interviewer: 'Edward Aylward excellence of character 1938'. So you were 13 and of excellent character that is quite an achievement isn't it. 13 is not the best age to chose to try to go for something like that.

Edward: The pages are coming off. [laughs]

Edward: I don't know where that bloody photo's gone.

Interviewer: So how did you – you started off in the navy thinking you got a skill and a chance to use it. You had a bit of difficulties convincing the management of that.

Edward: Quite right. That is true.

Interviewer: Did you feel after that after that well you know this isn't really right. I am being wasted here? Cause I could be doing more.

Edward: Ironically they gave me – that side of the navy fleet airdrome – they used to call you an airman and I finished up just doing general duties. Whatever was applicable to ship life at that time. But because I had some skills working in offices because as I eventually got on I finished up as a chief engineer in a group of factories and one of them happened to be in Cornwall where I used to visit quite regularly and become sort of office minded I suppose and that was what I was virtually doing in the navy. They couldn't find people to do office work so I was a natural choice (a) because I could write and spell.

Interviewer: Yeah. You could understand that that's what they wanted from office workers. They must have been quite fussy.

Edward: I'm quite sure you're quite right in a sense but at the same time you don't think you're that important. It's just that I got a chance – I finished up – I spent quite a bit of time at recycling in Scotland only because I had office experience basically. The funny thing about the job I was doing was called working in the drafting office. All me friends who I knew who had gone in the Navy I knew where they were and which ships they were on.

Interviewer: You followed them all. Followed their lives.

Edward: Exactly. And funny enough 4 or 5 of them I met in Australia. Yeah, anyway.

Interviewer: That's a lot – for a young man that's a lot of travelling in those days. All those places you went – that the navy took you.

Edward: Yeah, that's right. You lay – if you can't ashore as we couldn't because it's such a big ship in Gibraltar so I never found – I never got ashore to explore Gibraltar. And the same with Malta, I didn't get ashore there either. And I think we used to lay in sort of – in the middle of certain open bits of ocean. One of the place that I remember very well was at the end of the Suez Canal. I can't think of the name of it. Anyway, we just lay off in this expansive water. You could see people – you go down the Suez Canal. You could see people walking up either side. But you don't get to see – to visit.

Interviewer: So you saw lots of places but you didn't set foot in them.

Edward: That's right. Yeah, some I did. Some I didn't.

Edward: Places like Gibraltar and Malta I would have really liked to. The only time I was in Gibraltar was when I went to Spain on one occasion and that was only to shake hands with baboons.

Interviewer: The monkeys on the rock.

Interviewer: We are getting towards the end of our time today. But I think with the things you've brought, the photographs and things they could look downstairs and you could go through them and I don't know about your – I am sure the schools are looking after the stuff you might have left behind.

Edward: Well, I've certainly left photos and...

Interviewer: But June is having an exhibition here and she's should be interested in somethings I'm sure.

Edward: Anyway, it's been nice chatting to you Bill.

Interviewer: Yes Ted. Thank you very much. We'll take you down.

Edward: I hope you've learned something if not a lot.

**End of interview.**