

Interviewee: James Hayward

Interviewer: William Francis

Date: 31.08.2010

Interviewer: This is William Francis interviewing James Hayward on the 31st of August 2010. So, James, where were you when the war started?

James: The war started – I was living in the town of Orpington in Kent and I spent all of my childhood in Orpington so – in fact I didn't move out of there till a long way – a long way down the road. So, yeah, that's where I spent my time.

Interviewer: Did you move around at all during the war? Or did you just stay?

James: No, it was all just Orpington. I didn't get evacuated and stayed in Orpington the whole time.

Interviewer: And how old were you when war broke out?

James: Now, the war broke out – I was just over two years of age. Oh, no. No, when the war broke out it was September the 3rd, in actual fact, so I was about eighteen months old when the war broke out. But my recollections don't start until just over two years of age.

Interviewer: So who were you living with at the time?

James: Mum and dad.

Interviewer: Ok. What kind of experiences do you have during the war? For example evacuation, air raids, armed forces, civilian work?

James: Well, regards – things like that – the very first instance of this of when I was just over two years of age and I remember but – I was in the pram and my mum took me up the High Street for, obviously, shopping and in those days mum's could leave their babies or young toddlers in prams and go into the shops and which is what mum did. And this is where I heard the first instance of what was going on and above I heard two distinct bursts of machinegun fire and I sort of glanced in the direction but I could see nothing because, obviously, at that age it didn't sort of, you know, work out what was going –. But I distinctly heard these two bursts of machinegun fire which obviously later on in life I worked out what it was. So – and at that point probably been about July/August 1940 at – when the Battle of Britain in actual fact started and we lived probably about as an aircraft would take about five miles from Biggin Hill airfield which was probably the most fine – famous fighter airfield in the country, I would think so. That's why you got a lot of sort of, you know, things going on from there as it were.

Interviewer: Do you have any experiences with air raids? Can you remember much about –?

James: Yes, that's right – the air raids. Now, I'm gonna jump a little scene and go to – and this is an actual fact. This is where it could be a little bit what's –. We'd got an Anderson air raid shelter and we went down there and I can never – I can never find out why we left the air raid shelter and came back into the house. But we did and this was the strange – dad, who was in the Home Guard at the time, and we actually put saucepans on our heads and we'd almost got indoors when suddenly there was a clunk and something had hit the saucepan that was on my dad's head and we went – we didn't waste time, we went indoors and the next morning, came out and after an air raid you could walk into your garden and find pieces of shrapnel and near down by where we got in there was a piece of shrapnel. Now had my dad not, or any of us, been wearing, had these saucepans coming from the air raid shelter indoors things could have been totally different. So that – that was one incident of an air raid of what would have happened to us.

Interviewer: Can you remember any other kind of air raids? Did you –?

James: Um.

Interviewer: How did you feel during them?

James: Well, for me at my age it was all a game. It was all excitement, you know, there's nothing – no sort of sense of fear or anything. And another time – this wasn't an air raid but this time it was with my mum during the day and mum suddenly said, 'Oh, it's one of ours, wave', so what happened was an aircraft came over, later I found it was a Spitfire, and for a brief second we – mum and me are waving. Very briefly the aircraft just going above chimney shop high, the pilot looked down, acknowledged us and in a second he was gone. And I realised he was then going back to Biggin Hill cos he was going in that direction but, of course, at the time, I mean, this was absolutely incredible and there we were so that's another example of, you know. What – where he'd been and what he'd been doing I don't know but there we were, waiving, you know, and he looked down and acknowledged the fact that he'd seen us. That was quite incredible, actually. I remember that as clear as anything. The other¹ incidents, now this time it was – this time it was with me dad and we were walking away from the house. We were going down the garden and suddenly a – over the top of us were two aircraft and dad said, 'Wow, it's one of ours trying to get a German'. Now, it was over in a – in probably seconds they were gone roof top height when chasing and I think what happened was the Luftwaffe at this time were doing nuisance raids and they were using single seat – single engine fighters Messerschmitt BF109 or Focke-Wulf W190s with a two-fifty kilogram bomb under the centre fuselage and they came in low and fast to avoid detection by radar and they would select probably an airfield or something like that. In they would go, release the bomb on their way back and we think this is what we, dad and I, were watching. That the guy had done the thing, got away but, of course, he – the Spitfire may have been in the area at that time and chased him. No, he wouldn't open fire then and there because he was going over the town so I would assume that probably when he got in

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to more open country he would probably have tried to have shot him down. So, that's – that's what that was, you know, that was what we assume and I think that that would probably be about right. But, you know, that's how it would sort of work out as it were so those are the sort of instances were that – that sort of thing took place.

Interviewer: So within you area, were many people evacuated?

James: I would imagine there were. Yes, I don't know of any but I think there could have been people evacuated because again, being with, well, fifteen miles of London but also getting near an airfield i.e. Biggin Hill, that maybe they thought, mm, it wasn't that great (??). But no, in our – in my instance, bo, definitely not.

Interviewer: What specific memories do you have of, like, other air raids? Like in your area, like, houses bombed? Near misses? Losses?

James: Now, the other ones I can recall there was an instance with the doodlebug. Now, this time with my mum and I was in the front garden and we'd got the road going up and we heard this noise and I thought, I hadn't heard the noise before. This would have been about 1944 so I was about six years of age then. And running parallel – flying parallel our [unclear] was this little dark shape and I thought, 'Wow', and the flames coming out the exhaustion and I'm standing there thoroughly enthralled by this and suddenly I've – mum grabbed me by the hand, rushes indoors and we got under the stairs, under the cupboard – in the cupboard under the stairs and I'm thinking, 'What are we doing under here?', you know, and, obviously, mum obviously knew about these things and what seemed like an eternity but it obviously wasn't and then mum said, 'Alright, we can come out now' and we went out and –. I mean, looking back on it I thought, 'My goodness, it could have crushed 'em', you know, but to me that was absolutely, you know, a six year old, absolutely fabulous. No sense of what in earth was going on at that age, which I don't think a lot of people of that age would have done. To be honest, they would have just accepted that this was this, you know, incredible. Another one we heard of and there was quite obviously tragic at that – strange enough in the direction of the one that mum and I saw was a, oh, I think it was a bungalow, probably about a quarter of a mile away and, unfortunately, one of the doodlebugs had in fact crashed in to the bungalow and, of course, people were killed in there, you know. So, yeah, that – that sort of situation – that's – that's what I remember from that sort of point a view, you know. So that was, really, quite – quite interesting from my point of view, you know, but there you are.

Interviewer: So what kind of – what was your daily life like, if you can remember as a child?

James: Well, school, obviously. Well, up to 1943 no school, obviously, it was going out with mum and in the garden and play in the garden and going, obviously, down to the shops and all that sort of thing and that – that was really mainly what I remember until I went to school and, you know, and – and that was it then and, of course, by then forty-three things had quietened a little bit down. They would still, obviously,

got, uh, the instances which with the German planes chasing the other one, obviously, that was taking place maybe around that time, these hit and run raids, and yes, t-that was it really. It was more or less, you know, school days and that sort of thing and after '43² when I was starting going to school.

Interviewer: What was school life like?

James: Oh, well, it was absolutely incredible. I thought – I thought again that it was quite good and in those days, I mean, I think we had quite a bad winters and there you were sitting in a classroom with balaclava, scarves and gloves and coats on and – incredible. I mean, they'd never allow it these days but in them days, you – that was it, you sat there and you'd done your lessons and, you know, and that was it [laughs]. It was quite incredible really but yeah. I thought it was quite good. I thought it was quite good actually. Yeah, very good.

Interviewer: Can you remember what the – the sort of routine of school was? What –?

James: Yeah, it was – well, you went to school, you'd queued up in your forms as it were, you know, and then she'd (??) used to call out your names and then, right, ok, and then you would go in troops into school, into your classroom and then the lessons would just carry on and playtime, right out and playtime and dinnertime and that sort of thing. So it was – oh, I suppose a normal run of things which – which I suppose occurred, you know.

Interviewer: Was you ever disrupted by the war? Like bombings or air raids or –?

James: In Orpington, no. No, in Orpington it was as far as I can remember, I don't think in actual fact there was. I think we were very, very lucky in that respect that, you know, obviously during the day time it was ok. As I say, no, I really don't think we were interrupted at all. School was ok. No problems at all. No, we were quite lucky there.

Interviewer: Can you remember what life was like around Orpington at the time? Just –

James: Um.

Interviewer: Sort of from '43 onwards probably.

James: '43 was when I started school.

Interviewer: You can remember that.

James: Ah, well –

Interviewer: Did you notice sort of any change around the area at all?

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James: Not that I can recall. It was just sort of – you just went – you went to school, you came home, as I say, you went out with your mum and dad and that into a shop and -- and really that was about it. It was no sort of – there might have been an odd building that had got damaged but there was nothing really actually, you know, that was – that disruptive at all as far as I can tell, you know. It was – there was if I can just come away from that for –. There was another little incident which caused quite a thing and one morning, looking at of our bedroom over next – our next door neighbours washing line was a parachute and we thought, ‘Wow’, you know, ‘Is it a parachute?’ and it involved, I think we had the police around, I think even the air raid warden, the army. It was sort of all conspiracies, you know, was it a secret agent dropped, you know, or – or was it an – a shot down airman or something like this and, you know, it – they – they, unfortunately, they took the parachute away and we never found out what on earth this parachute were doing draped over next doors washing line, you know. It would have been quite nice to have found out but never did. But theories obviously would go on as to what, you know, it was quite – that was quite exciting actually and it was, yeah, that was quite good. I thought that was actually amazing that was [laughs] but, you know, yeah, yeah. That was – that was something that was [laughs].

Interviewer: Do you have any other experiences?

James: Let’s see so we got, I think, the only other one as such and this was something to do, I’m sure with the Home Guard. Now dad worked as a postman so he obviously had to get up early. We were awakened sometime during the n – early hours of the morning or maybe night time, I can’t remember that and there was a knocking on the door so mum because dad had to get up early, she went down to answer the door. So, anyway, here’s this man’s voice said to mum, ‘Tell your husband gadfly (??)’ and mum said, ‘What?’, he said, ‘Just go and tell your husband gadfly’. So she came up, told dad gadfly and that was it so I think he went out the house then after that. So whether it was a night exercise involving the Home Guard I don’t know. I would have imagined it would have been cos it was obviously a codeword and, you know, went to say know that codeword then off they go to wherever there – some rendezvous (??) or something and then do whatever they were doing, you know, So that would have been, you know, so and then I think again, I would think this would be in preparation – maybe for D-Day, I don’t know but walking up – marching, in actual fact, up our road was a body of soldiers and, yeah, so I would think again all that would be timed in probably with it³, I don’t know. But that’s – that’s – that’s what I remember about that situation, you know. So that was sort of rather intriguing, you know, and never could find out what – what this what. But I think that’s what it meant. That was the codeword, gadfly, to go off and do whatever he had to do with the Home Guard so,

Interviewer: What – what was your dad’s life like then, in the Home Guard? What were his duties?

James: Well, he was –. Well, yeah, obviously, he had to go and, I mean, when required, obviously had to do various guard duties in various places. Again, obviously, he wouldn’t say because, obviously, as I

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explained, because of war and when not during that he would do his post round and he would go off and doing his post early in the morning and that sort of thing, you know, and, yeah, that's what he were doing. I suppose by dinnertime probably finished the actually post office work then he could sometimes potter around at home and then, oh, unless, of course, called by the Home Guard, no, you go off and what you're required to do with the Home Guard, you know, go on exercise or whatever they did. So, yeah, that – t-t-that's what were happening there.

Interviewer: When the war finished did you notice any, like, any difference in the, like, any change in your life – in regards in to your area, in to your personal life?

James: Probably the only thing I would think would be that there would be no air raid sirens going off so that was much quieter and obviously the amount of air activity, like, going over, that had completely gone so there was none of that at all so it had quietened right down and you would just up the High Street and so on and so forth. School, of course, and carry on and street party, obviously, after VE-day and all that sort of thing, you know, and that sort of thing going on. But apart from that, no, it was much quieter and, obviously, less disruption [unclear] so that – that really was, no, that's all it was, really. It just quietened right down, I think would be about the thing to say. The only other – the other thing, again, was after the war just to quickly come off of that, was up in – where you can go round playing in various woods and all of this sort of thing which we did. I remember playing on an old doodlebug, there was just this sort of a rusting shell of it and it was, obviously, there was German markings on there. All the good stuff had been taken away and the crater was there, it was filled with water and it was sort of –. Oh, as kids do we was all jumping over it and goodness knows what else, you know sort of thing, 'Oh, what's this?', you know, and that sort of thing. So that – that was another little incident after the war that you could go along and you could find these things in the wood, you know. Well, there was only this one doodlebug that was there sort of thing. It had obviously crashed there, thank goodness nothing was hurt, cos it was in woodland so, yeah, that was – that's what that was. So, you know, but apart from that it quietened right down, you know, no air raids sirens at all and Home Guard had disbanded so there was no soldiers sort of going back, except the only people you would see would be people – that soldiers may have come home, been wounded or something, they were on leave or whatever reason but apart from that, no, that in actual fact, and that's what it was. Yeah.

Interviewer: What were your celebrations like on VE-day?

James: Oh, [laughs], you know, I actually won an egg and spoon race. It was amazing, yeah, down the bottom of our road, you see, and there was a little turning off, which was a little cul-de-sac road and you got your tresses out there and all that sort of goodies made of all sorts of [unclear], and there was or somebody was noshing away with all your jellies and ice cream and all the goodies and there were the mums and dads there and all that's going. And little races running up and down the road and it was absolutely fantastic. Absolutely fantastic, because you didn't as such not eat all that sort of stuff at that

time but this had, obviously, all been sort of – got ready, as it were, you know, by whoever, maybe the Women's Guild or whatever and they'd all got together and they all got together with the people in the street and, yeah, that was absolutely fabulous. You know, you could sort of – ah, there you are amazing. So yeah, it was very, very good. It was a very exciting time.

Interviewer: Did you notice the change in, like, the availability of food and a change in your sort of social life? Is it – did you – when the war finished? Did you suddenly think differently about these things?

James: Yes, I probably think it would because again, you got no blackouts, no 'Draw those curtains!', you know, that 'Don't go and play down there!' There's a change completely, you see, you could then go and leave the curtains open, lights would – it wouldn't matter about the lights being on or anything like. You could run off down the road and no worries about anything like that. In that way you got freedom back if you like, although freedom wasn't really taken away as such but you got that extra freedom, if you like, and you could go and do the things that you couldn't do during the war, obviously, you know. That – that I suppose another good thing that you could do, you know, something was – yeah. That made a hell of a difference, I think, really, you know, that you could do these things. [Unclear] good.

Interviewer: As a child did you know what the war was about? Did you know why or?

James: No. This was it because at such a young age, you know, I mean, to me this was all very exciting things that were happening. No fear, no – anything like that. It was just wow, you know, I've seen that and no idea what it was or what – and various things like that when –. No, absolutely no fear, nothing at all, it was just – just for me exciting and levisos (??) during that period of time, you know, and it wasn't, of course, until I got older and then that I then started reading about it, obviously in school and that sort of thing, history. I thought, my goodness me, what – what I now know what I'd been witnessing absolutely amazing. Amazing.

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much for your time.

James: No problem, Will. It's been a pleasure to -- of meet you and thank you for doing the recording for me. Very nice indeed, thank you.

Interviewer; Thank you too. Bye-bye.

James: Bye-bye.

End of Interview.