

- During the war, did you find great differences in the surrounding areas, the towns? Did you go into town, market days, were they the same?

Well, we did. But not as much as we had done previously.

Most people more or less kept where they were. There was no reason to move about a lot, only to go to shop. And we hadn't a transport in any case.

Really, and these bombers were coming over and dropping their loads and all around the country, saying it wasn't very safe to go with a horse and cart into a town because you never knew what was going to happen.

And I say, if you had a car, well, you just hadn't got the petrol. They were for essential journeys. And you had to just restrict it to essential journeys. There was no good saying, well, I'll never direct the seaside because you couldn't have gotten the seaside I had any case. You were barred. **We were banned as the D-Day approached when they were going to carry out these landings. The whole of Shrubdon (sic Shrubland) Park was one giant assembly point and there were literally thousands of guns and tanks there. They were All in there ready to go, ready to go overseas.**

And all the roads were closed, you couldn't get along there, unless you had a pass, if you lived there and they gave you a pass so you could get to your own dwelling. But otherwise, oh no, you couldn't go around there.

- **Was there a heavy concentration of soldiers in the area at that time?**

Well, yes. But they seemed to be continually moving. Whether that was done on purpose, I don't know. I suspect it could have been. Because if they stopped with an assembly, if you had 10,000 or 20 000 soldiers on mass, and they were spotted by a German plane, he could bomb them out overnight. So they moved around in slightly smaller units.

I've forgotten whether I did recall the time when we had a signals unit come here. Well, it was one Sunday evening and an army truck pulled up outside the gate and two officers got out and said, "We're taking over your farm."

I said, "Oh." They said, "Well, we're taking over all the buildings, and we're going to take over the house." I said, "Oh, well, how long do you want that for?" They said, "Oh, just for the night."

I said, "We're on an exercise." I said, "And we've got to spend the night in this little cabin. This is where we're going to stay." I said, "Oh." I said, "Well, what rank and what are you?" And they said, "Oh, we're the Royal Signals Regiment." I said, "We shall be coming in now, any moment now, with anything over a hundred vehicles, and how many troops are there?" Thousands of them. And they just arrived. And after they arrived, they started to put up signals units, a lot of deep things they'd got with their wires and everything on, and they were in communication with all the other groups of soldiers all the way around in the county, I suppose. They could speak to each other, you see, they knew where they were. And it turned out that there was a brigadier and a colonel in charge of these, and My brigadier and the colonel came round to the door and they had a word with me and they said they wanted the rooms at the other end of the house and they were going to use that and they wanted, you know, what beds we'd got available upstairs. I said, "Well, you can't sleep upstairs." Anyway, we had a little bit of an argument, but it turned out in the end that the Brigadier slept in the bath.

And the next morning the Brigadier and the Colonel, whether they were in conference or whether they were deciding what the next move was, I don't know what they were trying to do, but they went up and down my front barn out there and we watched them Well, we were having breakfast, they were going up and down, up and down, until they wore a path up there, wore all the grass off, they went up and down too many times. I know they don't have a land of plans for something or other.

But in the morning as well we tried to get, my chap was trying to get the cows into milk. We couldn't get them in, there's too many wires, we know how to get them in. So I said to One of the officers, could they shift some of the wires away from the gates so we could open the gates and the doors to get the cows into milk? I didn't know it must

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be luck and they said there was a war on. I said, "Yeah, I know. We've got a job to do as well as you." But then eventually they did shift some of the wires and we managed to get the old cows into milk.

But we got about a thousand hens on deep litter at that time. I never had an egg gut that tall. I think they took them. I know they went in the hut, so I reckon they got every egg they could find. In fact, they waited in the hut until the old hen dropped one and they fell off.

But there, But there, there, you couldn't do anything about it, you had to just accept it. And after that, there had been trouble where these people had come along and caused an awful movement on some farms. And we had notices, a little cardboard or whatever. We had little notices provided, which said 'out of bounds' on them. We had to nail them on the gates. Well, they took no notice of out -of -bound notice. Didn't take any notice of that at all.

I remember we had some here, and I nailed them on the gates. That would never have stopped them. If they wanted to come, they'd come.

But you see there, given credit for one thing, They did keep to the roads. They didn't go across the fields.

And so I said, I was thankful that they had gone in a day, but we didn't want them too often. We would have been in serious trouble. But they were on the move the whole time. Of course, a lot of these troops did go over from Pethicstone and Harwich and anywhere along the coast. A lot of the metal, they call them ducks, the things that could go on land and in the water as well and a lot of the small boats were all stationed and packed away at the creeks around Boynton and on the marshes And when the time came, they just got them out the way they went.

➤ Were you still in the home guard at this time?

Yes, I was in the home guard, yes. Oh yeah, well I didn't leave my wife here alone. Once I got my daughter, she was only a tiny baby. My wife used to get frightened in case the child woke up in the morning and wanted to know where I was, but I don't think she haven't in, so I don't know. Well, she never asked me where I'd gone to, but we used to patrol, we used to have to watch, on fire watch.

But, you know, you'd see the incendiaries come down. But in those days, There seemed to be more danger of bombs during the daytime than they did during the night in this particular area. Because they knew where the towns were, they knew where the factories were, and they bombed those. We could stand here and see them bomb Norwich, and we could see them dropping the bombs on Yarmouth. We knew we were never bombing Yarmouth. And of course, you could along the coast, you could see them along there. And, you know, when they went to the field, and the occasional ones used to come into the Stowmarket, but more often than not, they'd be a daytime dollar. And the airfields, well, they were fairly well protected, but there again, they were trying to bomb during daylight. They'd come in under cloud cover, and then just swoop out of the cloud and drop a couple of bombs, and they were often gone like mad hares again.

But we often used to see one, see a couple of British fighters chasing the German bomber across the sky and the bomber would go into one cloud and the fighters would go into another and you know, you'd say, "Why aren't you going behind them?" Of course, they didn't even know, it's really gone in, I don't suppose it. That was in the days when there was very little radar if there ever was much at all.

But over here, well, that makes sense. on half way between Stowmarket and Old Newton, and shelled them up.

And I went up there. First night I went on guard. And the sergeant who was in charge of us, he produced some rifles, some .303, the Enfield rifles. The first time we'd ever had any rifles.

And I had this rifle and during the course of the night, well the early part of the night, you were always visited by the Commander Novosel. He could be a Captain or a Major or somebody and he came around and there were two others standing out there on guard with these rifles and he came and spoke to us, He came and spoke to me and he said, "How long have you had that rifle?" I said, "Oh, about five minutes." He just didn't bother what you said to his judge. So he said, "How many times have you fired it?" I said, "Never. I've never fired it." So he went back and he found the

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sergeant who was in charge. He says, "Take that rifle away from that man," he said. "Dangerous man, never fired it," he said. "Can't have a man stand out there and never fired the rifle." "Take it away

from me," he said. "Put some on my own duty, or he'll have five months." He said, "Take him off." So off duty I went. And I went into a hut we had, just to sit in and have a bite there and a note. And then the chap came out and took my workplace. Well, there was a terrific thunderstorm that night. The other poor chap got wet through, I never got wet. I sat in the hut and the old sergeant came

to me afterwards and he said, "What did you tell that officer?" I said, "I told him I'd had the gun about five minutes." I said, "I told him I'd never fired it."

I said, "That's true, isn't it?" He said, "I know, I may agree that "That's true." He said, "But you didn't tell him what a good shot you were, did you?" I said, "No, I wouldn't tell him that, because I suppose at that time I would probably have a better shot than any other mother there." But we used to go on duty, and during the summertime there were actually hundreds of hares on the fields, big fields up there, and these old hares used to come and be on the move during the night, and when it was just getting light in the morning, you could see these old hares hopping about on the fields, so we used to take a 2 -2 rifle out there with a silencer on, and we shot no end of those hares.

➤ **And were you in the home guard all through the war?**

- Oh, no, no, no, I wasn't, no.

But one thing that is hard to believe, well, I don't know whether that younger generation will believe it, but we've stood up on that guard post many a morning when it's just got light and the bombers are Americans. They were almost all American airfields around here, and the Americans were coming off with their faultless bombers and liberators, ready to go on a day like right through Germany. And we've counted between one and two thousand bombers at a time in the air, all going out together, and above then there'd be a double that number in fighters to protection. And the ground just vibrated, the ground just shook under your feet. The vibration was terrific when they got up. They were all fully armed, fully bombed up, and off they'd go.

And they'd go off at about, about six, seven o'clock in the morning, but they'd start to come off the form, get into formation on the airfields. They'd be coming off at five o'clock in the morning.

You can't credit that number of planes and the noise, what a terrific noise. But they were all fortresses and liberators that they had.

But at the end of the war, we had a final parade down at Coombs Ford and so on, when we were disbanded, And we'd got to be down there pretty early in the morning. We had to be down there, half past nine or 10. And all the units from around the whole of Central Suffolk were all to assemble down there on parade. And we were supposed to be inspected by some high -ranking officer. And then dismissed and thanked for our services.

So, I know I was busy that morning, but you've got cows to milk and stop the feed, you know, you've got to keep going, sir. Anyway, I eventually got round, so I went down to the parade. And when I got down there with my fellow members from up here, they took a look at my shoes. They said, "Cool, look at that, you never cleaned your' I said, "Now I'm going to have time to play in there," and instead of then, "Oh, Carter" like I said, "I'm going to have to just put up with it. I haven't played in." So I got dirty boots, very comfortable boots. I'm the most comfortable boots I've ever had in my life.

But I stood there, we all had the finest ranks, you see. We stood there and there. I came to this office around, inspecting all of normal person having a little word with one here and there and came to me and he stood there and he looked down at my boots and he said, "come over here, come over here." So he, I went out the front, you see, I don't know, no man's going to do it, don't worry me. And he says, Well Carter he said look here he said I think there's one thing I should point out to you' I said 'oh' He said 'you're the only chap on parade is it with the proper army boots on' he said 'look you'll put Davin on them'. They'd never been polished and I got all the credit because I

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hadn't even cleaned them yet nor put Davin on' These other chaps got shiny boots. Well, of course the army never have shiny shoes. They put dubbing on to keep the water out. They couldn't make that out.

I could never live that down long ago. Long ago I was in the RV that didn't suit the other's boors. They said, "You lazy beggar, never even cleaned them up. Now you've got all the credit because they should all be lucky." But there, that's how it was, but we were let off.

➤ **How long did it take you to get back to normal after the war?**

Oh, I don't suppose things, well, things never got back to what we were used to. They never did, but I suppose it must have been into the '50s, early '50s, before things began to settle down and there was a different pattern to follow in Tharn, all the other. Because the days of the horse had gone. These factories you see, which had been on war production, tanks and planes and all the rest of it, they suddenly switched. And a good many of them switched over to agriculture and machinery and made them tractors and that and combats. And once they began to produce new machines in pretty large numbers, Farmers began to change over to machinery with less labour because they hadn't got the labour then. They had less labour and they changed over. And the horses just died out. And I suppose my last horse was sold somewhere around mid -1950s.

That's when they got rid of the last one. You see, and again The young chaps went into the army or into the services and the older ones who'd come through the war They were on the point of retirement a lot of those chaps were just on the point of retiring and There were new young horsemen coming along there was no one to take on and trained as a horseman. No one wanted to go to plow, walking across the fields backwards and forwards all day behind a pair of horses. Now that had all gone and everything changed completely.

And even the village blacksmith, you see, because the horses died out he had to change his pattern. He lived longer with a farrier. He became a, well, a repairer of agricultural machinery in a way. He was laying ganks of harrors. He was doing all sorts of repairs on machinery. But as far as horses went, he never saw one. I know we've got hundreds of horses now around, Nearly every child's got a horse.

But this has only happened over the last 15 years or more when they've come in quite large umbers. But in the 1950s and '60s, they said the numbers weren't there.

And transport became more available, you see. You could move about a bit freer and easier. Yeah.

➤ **One of the largest changes which took place was the bringing of electricity into the countryside. Did you not have electricity?**

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. We had it at the end of the war in a very limited amount. But there were

Those are properties that never had electric light. They never had electricity. It wasn't there. You see, there was no electricity board. They were all little private electricity companies. There was one, the old East Anglian Electric Light Company.

Now, I remember there was one in Stowmarket. There was another one at DISS. They were all little private companies.

And There was no large -scale production of electricity. So when the war finished, the cows that you kept, they were hand -milked then? Oh, they were all hand -milked, and we used to take a couple of lanterns out, and the horsemen had two lanterns in the stable, we had two in the cow shed. Oh yes, we used to have to bring them up and fill them up with paraffin and trim the wicks every night, ready for the next morning.

Oh, yes. We tend to forget these things now, but that's what happened.

❖ **That's what happened. So how was your house?**

Oh, we had lamps. We had an oil lamp, although all oil lamps, but we had just the ordinary oil lamp

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with the wick to start with. And then we got an Aladdin, which was a brighter light, and the Aladdin might get a good light, but they've got a mantle on. The only thing with the Aladdin was that if you jumped on the floor and vibrated a bit, the mantle fell a piece. So then you had to either put in a new one or have a candle.

➤ Did you have a radio during the war?

Yes, we did. Yes. But they were battery operated. We used to have to get the accumulators charged, but we could sit and listen to the news as it was broadcast. I can remember now sitting here, listening to old Churchill and his Sunday night broadcast, "Narvelous man !" And I said, "Oh, I should think you could..." Well, it didn't matter where you would have had a pin drop when he was talking. You felt that he was somebody that was in complete charge and what he said was going to be done would be done and if he said you were going to win well you were gonna win and there was no question about it I got that man and he got the gift of putting it over marvellous man for that there's never been another one I don't know whether there will be but there were certain Variety programs that came through during the war.

It was a bandwagon program and an old arthrasque in some more minutes. They were all tied up with ENSA. They used to go around in different camps, you see, and entertain the troops. Very good idea, too.

But electricity, now we didn't have that. I know an old chap who, when they first put the electric light on in his house and his wife, he sat in front of the fire and the old man kept sitting there looking at the lights, you know, just looking up at the light hanging over the center of the table and his wife said, you His wife said, "If you sit here and keep looking at the end, that'll affect your eyes." He said, "You should never sit and look at that. It's too bright." The old man said, "Well, turn it down, Mrs." He said, "Cut on. Is that not smoking?" I said, "Of course you can. You can't turn it down. You haven't got a dimmer on it."

He said, "Is that it?" I said, "I've got They were just entirely new, we weren't used to these things, completely new. But everything, once the electricity got into the houses, well what happened, let's say you bought an electric kettle, you bought an electric iron, you had an electric radio. Everything got thrown But all your old irons that we had, the old box irons and flat irons that we used to heat on the fire You know, I don't want those anymore. You had a smart electric one You cooked with an electric cooker where previously you'd had either a kitchen range, a Dutch oven or a brick oven Never used again. Never wonder anymore See, they're all gone. Maybe we used to go to bed with the candle Well, you don't want that now. You've got lights. You could put a switch on and you've got a light

But I don't know. It's amazing when you look back and think Life must have been easier for your wife with the advent of electricity though Well Yes, although, you know that I Don't think she really liked it to start with because we've been so used to the other way and And we discovered that when you had the laden lamp on the table, you had balls from the table. But when you put an electric one up and hang it down from the ceiling, there's no warmth in that. And those old ladens didn't warm the place up.

But she had to get used to it in the end, and she did But It was a slow process. It meant a complete change round. But she never did have an electric cooker. Although we had an electric cooker on about 1946 or '47 I think it was. We never did have an electric cooker. What she did was we bought a three burner valour.

And it was said in the time when we bought it, this must have been way back in 1936, that the valor ovens weren't as good as the Florence ovens. So she said, "Well, we won't have a valor oven, we'll buy a Florence oven." So Florence was another make. So we did. That was in 1936, I cooked my dinner in that day, in 1987, I'm still using it, and a funny thing happened, she wouldn't part with that for anything, although it's got rather decrepit now and but it's a wonder it goes, but it does, and a few years ago, I put it, it must be, Eight, ten years ago, it was quite a problem to get wicks for it, and we couldn't get any wicks. And so I went and saw the chap I'd bought it off, and I said, "What's the wick situation?" Like, "Oh," he said, "on that sort that you've got." He said, "That's best, and that

moves him down, there's no market." I said, "I swear you should put that, you know, on that whole thing now." My wife said, "Ah, I don't know, I'm not going to part with that yet, there might be some wicks turn up from somewhere.

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Well, we decided we'd buy a new one, a new three burner valet, so we bought a new one. She wouldn't have the other one, she's no one, she doesn't have the other one on it. So we bought this three burner, 18 pounds, cheap.

We put it in the kitchen. I said, "What are you going to do with the old one? Take it to the museum?" "Yeah, no fear, put that back." She said, "Oh, am I worth that again?" So she tried the new one, very fierce heat. She didn't like it. She couldn't get used to it.

And as luck would have it, we'd got the original and the new one, came from Swain shop in Stowmarket. Now, well, John Swain sold his shop. We all now know that the Abbey National Building's the Tardy. John Swain came up here one lunchtime, just before he cleared out, he was after he'd sold it. He came up here and he saw my wife. He said, "I've got a little present for you."

She said, "Oh, what's that? He found something. He said, "Yes, I've found half a dozen wicks for your old stoo." We still got some of them. So I'm all right yet, I'm still going on. And he found this out. He said, "No good to anyone else from you." He said, "You're the only one who got one."

And he gave her these half dozen wicks. And she promptly got the old one back in the position as you want it, and put the new one back, and the new ones out there, they've never been used.

It's amazing, but most people had either, they had an oil too of a sort, but brick ovens were commonly used before the war, and I suppose up until probably 1950s, there were a lot of brick ovens to be used.

➤ How did you heat your water

then by the copper see most of these cottages were fitted with two coppers they had a washing copper and they had a brewing copper the washing copper was there was so you could wash your sheets you boiled your sheets or anything else in all of them you could put in the washing copper and that was used every week where there was a great big brewing copper which would about 20 to 25 gallons of water which they only used when they brewed beer because there's a lot of brew and went on.

You could brew home -brewed beer and there's old chaps used to have home -brewed beer. If they could get a license to I think you had to get a license to brew so many bushels of malt. You got the license from the District until again. And you could have this license twice a year. One they used to brew in the spring and one they used to brew in the autumn.

Oh yes, they drunk and then we're in the home brewed beer.

➤ Were they still allowed to brew during the war?

No, no they didn't brew during the war. I can't remember that they did. I don't think they could get the license. But up to the war they were brewing and I because I still had these big brewing coppers But when we killed a pig you see that we had to skull the pig and we had to heat the great big copper To get sufficient hot water boiling water the skull the pig to get his bristle top

Oh, yes a Lot of them The older cottages where they haven't been modernized a lot. They've still got their coppers. We've got one out in the kitchen. There was a

quite a large brewing copper in the house over the road, and that's still standing

out in the garden. It's just standing right through that door,

{Extract taken from an Audio file held at Suffolk Record Office}.Where possible corrections have been made for clarity but not always s possible!}