

## Flying Boats and Fellow Travellers

**Interviewer:** Allan King (I)

**Interviewee:** Jeff Gill (J)

**Date of interview:** 17<sup>th</sup> February 2007

**Subject:** Work in the Windermere factory

J

Jeff Gill, born in Lound Street, which is only 2 streets down from here, well it's the first one opposite the phone box. I was born in that street. And then after that being in the army and one thing and another, navy and then when we got married, we lived with my mother down in Bank Fold when we went to live when I was a baby, and then after that well then we went to Hallgarth for 4 or 5 years, then we bought this house in 1956 and we've been here ever since.

I

Always in Kendal?

J

Yes, yes, well you go all over the place in the forces like – went to India twice

I

Were you? Oh gosh – with the army?

J

Ay, well with the navy first cos that 's what I wanted to be in when I was 18 but after D Day they didn't want that many sailors, they reckoned, or air force, and there was a quarter of a million transferred out of the air force and navy into the army – if you were A1, you were infantry, because that's where they were going to need them.

I

I didn't realise that – that's interesting

J

And then war ended in the far east, and there was loads of shipping, and them that had been abroad for more than 1 year and 10 months but less than 2 and a half years, without being home, went into a hat, and I was one of the lucky ones – I got home for a month! Well me and thousands of others of course – yes – so we got home for a month's leave.

I

Excellent – when were you born – which year? If you don't mind me asking

J

1925 – 25<sup>th</sup> November 1925. I'm 81, 82 this year god willing

I

You don't look it! I'm only saying that so it's on the record! You worked at Short brothers factory in Windermere – when did you start there?

J

I did yes – I can just give you a little bit of a roundup on that one, because it was when I was 13 when war started in September (laughs) we used to go down there every Saturday/Sunday morning to my Auntie who lived on the first houses on Sandylands – there were no other houses then, just the stone ones – the first 2 rows of the houses they had 1 row either side, and at quarter past 11 my auntie had come out as I was bouncing a ball against their wash house and she came out and said 'get away home lads, the Germans are coming' (laughs) – that was a good one – get away home!

I

That's Sandes Avenue?

I

Sandylands

I

Sandylands – oh yes

J

Sandylands – as you go onto Sandylands there's brick ones lower down and then there's Sandylands estate, but there were only the stone ones then – there was 6 or 8 either side.

I

It's a good way of keeping teenagers under control!

J

Yes, so that was that yes, but so anyway this is a funny bit – a silly bit – I just put it down here! I've always been interested in aeroplanes, always, even in 38/37 when me mates were buying hotspur and all these boys books, I used to be buying flying or flight – I was always interested in aeroplanes, yes, so I was (*inaudible*) when everything went overhead I knew what they were and there was a chap who used to get off the bus from Netherfield with me father just lower down the road here, where they used to get off the bus, and well, I said to my dad when he came home, one dinner time in September/October, I said eh there was a skewer – Blackburn skewer only about a couple of squadrons he had then - they weren't a big success but Blackburn skewer were over today, so anyway – he was telling them all about it and when he came home at night, he said I was talking to (I can't think what his name was now), he was in Obsever corps – they had a hut above Netherfield Football ground – on that bit of a hill there, and he said to this guy, our Jeff said there was a skewer over yesterday – and he sai Ay – they didn't know what it was up there – it was in the direction of Lancaster and they phoned Lancaster to see if they knew what it was. So he said how did he know that and he said oh he's interested – now 2 or 3 days later, a hamden went over – unmistakable – like that one I've got there – you know, hamdens.

I

Oh yes – it's a very long thin fuselage – quite distinctive.

J

Oh yes everything was all in the front, so I was in the back bedroom and I heard this aeroplane so I looked out of the back window, we were just living across there, opposite the phone box, down bank fold there was 4 houses down there then and anyway I went to meet my father (*inaudible*) like I used to do, next day or a couple of days after, and this fella who was in the observer corps said er there was a plane over I believe yesterday or the day before – an odd looking one. Did you know what it was so I said 'yeh it was an Hamden – 'no', so i says 'it was', and he said 'no', I said 'it wasn't a whitley'?? because that was the only other one with a twin fin, I knew it wasn't a whitley but I thought I'd take a stab at that – I was only 13 mind, you know. So he says, no – I says well what was it? He says it was a Harford. Now, Hamden Harford were the same aeroplanes – they just had different engines. I thought wasn't that petty for a grown man to say to a 13 year old, 'no' – same air frame! So, oh so and then when I was 14, got to Netherfield, because everybody went there, most people. There was 1500 working there in 1939.

I

In Netherfield? What were they making

J

Netherfield yes. Oh shoes – shoes – at the factory

I

Oh shoes, of course

J

And I'd been there about 12 months, 18 months – I didn't like it – didn't like the thing, and also I said to me father can I leave and go somewhere else, I'd Shorts in mind cos then they were going to open a factory then, I'd been told. I thought, aeroplanes, that just suits me! So he says no me lad, you're there for life – Netherfield, you're there for life, which they were – everybody had their working life there so that sounded like a sentence, so I didn't like the sound of that. Anyway I asked him a few times after that can I leave, no – cos in them days you wouldn't do as you wanted at 15/16, you went where your parents, your father told you to go.

I

Did your father work?

J

Oh ay

I

Was he working at the same place?

J

Oh ay – Netherfield – his brothers,

I

So you just followed them into the same job?

J

Oh well yes, so anyway, he got TB which a lot of Netherfielders did, and they all went to Meathop to sanatorium there, well me father went for 6 months and then when he left there, Netherfield had a recuperation house at Silloth, and he was going there for 3 weeks, so I thought I'd try him again before he goes, so I said, can I leave and go to Shorts flying boats, so he said no. Anyway, by the time he'd gone away for a week, I cycled up on Saturday morning and went into the office there, and I got yes you can start – I served a week's notice at Netherfield, so they said start a week on Monday then, which I did. That's how I got to Shorts in the first place. So when he come back ,I said I've left Dad – he said you've lost a good opportunity there m'lad, you'll be a rover all your life – and I had been at work – I never used to stop anywhere long. I was never out of work though, no 51 years I'd be working time 14 – 65 and I only was out of work, sick once or twice – just my ears, heart attack, but I was only out for 9 months out of 51 years. But I used to, I did shift around a bit. I was at Ibis 4 times – engineers. Yep

I

So what year did you roughly start at Short brothers then – can you remember.

J

Early 1942.

I

Right, just as they were getting going?

J

Yes. First one hadn't flown then. And, I went to their office and one at office – the chap in the office he said go down to the hanger, cos that was the top shop – just over that wire where you can see now, he said, go down the hanger and Mr Nather was down there – well he was the boss, Mr Nather, and he said.

I

Do you remember his first name?

J

I don't know his first name, no and he said go down and tell him, so this lad out of the office took me down and Nather came out of this DP176 – this was the new one – it was all sprayed up in camouflage which after that 3 or 4 then they were all white you know, well camouflage on top and white sides. So he says yeh you can start a week on Monday then – this was at the top shop, which I don't know what I was doing like, I can't remember what I was doing up here, but I was only up there about 2 months, whatever I was doing up there, and I was moved to the hanger, and I was on riveting – well, dolly boy – they would call them dolly boys them that held the rivets on the outside yeh.

I

Yes, someone with a rivet gun on one side of the sheet of metal, and you have someone holding a lump of metal on the inside.

J

Yes that's right and the dolly boys used to – well if was outside skin, it was just that round hole or a 10lb weight heavy piece of wood with a piece of rod going through it, you used to hold on to it while he knocked it up.

I

Yes, was it – you say knocked it up – was it by hand or with an electric or a

J

No it was by hand – a lot of it was by hand. Some were by riveting gun

I

with an air powered

J

Yes they were all air powered

I

Air powered

J

Just same as drills were air powered, yes. So

I

But some of them were literally by hand?

J

A lot of them were – and especially (*inaudible*) - and all that – they were all done with hammer, so I went there. I started there and me father wasn't so chuffed when he come back. Like I say, it isn't like now where they do what they want now, but then you went where you were told! What else have I put down here? Oh ay – there was a lot of us used to come from Kendal. There were 3,4,5 buses used to leave town hall at 7 o'clock.

I

And that's what you did – you used to be at – walk down the hill to the town hall. It's quite handy cos it's not far from where you were – Lound Street.

J

Yes, yes, they used to leave from there, and then it was – 4 or 5 buses used to go – full buses – to Shorts and then you used to leave Shorts at about half past 5 at night something like that – it was a full day there, yes. And then Saturday morning was the same – 7 – 12 I think it was.

I  
So you worked Monday to Friday

J  
And then Saturday morning as well it was a 5 and a half day week, yes.

I  
You get kids complaining about that sort of thing these days don't you? Laughs

J  
Oh ay, yeh they would ay. Anyway, then I went on to 10-17 weeks with the Hulls – you know, the flying boat hulls, in the gantries where they were built

I  
The jigs?

J  
The Jigs, yes where they were built yes, but it was while I was working in this top shop that I called it then, I think this after section of the boat used to be built up there, do you know, the after section that last 12 foot whatever it was, with turret in and that and the fin were built up the top shop, and then they were joined down bottom shop, down in hanger

I  
So not just the actual tail fin but the actual 12 foot of fuselage – that whole tail section?

J  
Yes, yes Ay they were put together and joined up down the bottom shop, so I was up there and the er, by then all of us lads said when's first one going out cos you know it was getting a long way on, first flying boat, and anyway, Chargehand then come round and he said later on this morning he said, bell will go and you can all go down the stripway and watch the first flying boat launched. So, bell went and we all run down top shop down the slipway – whole factory, whole lot of us – women and mend, lads, and we waited there. And then it went out and we heard the roar of the engines, past white cross bay nearer Ambleside and then as it just past us, it was just lifting off the water eh – marvellous sight. And we waited there cos it was only going to be up about 20 minutes, and er well quarter of an hour, 20 minutes later, it come down. Yes, so that was a sight!

I  
And you'd worked on that aircraft?

J  
Oh I hadn't worked on that one because yes

I

But that was already well advanced and you were doing the wholes on the other ones?

J

Yes, that was the first one. And then there was about 6 or 8 in gantries – in jigs, where we, where as they went and then they put a thing, well it wasn't a funny thing, but the cranes, one of the 2 or 3 cranes – it was a big hanger, it was the biggest hanger in Britain without a central support was Shorts flying boat hanger, and after the war it went to Newcastle – to their bus station. Anyway, when they were ready to go onto the beaching gear, the flying boat, whichever one was in the gantry was next one out, the balance of the thing, back and front, from where the crane used to lift it, it needed a bit more weight, well, we used to stand in, on flight deck what 6 of us, that was just about the extra weight – it lifted it up – it come up level, so we were all hanging round each boat to get in there just to be lifted up eh, and then they you used to take it out and put beaching gear on it.

I

So there was actually 6 people standing in the flight deck when they lifted it up just so it was correctly balanced?

J

Well you see they got this far, and then they took it out

I

And onto and put it on a little trolley or something

J

Yes, cos then they'd to put the beaching gear on it, wheeled dual wheeled thing at the back and to the side – yes. So that was the thing we all waited for was that. Cos we used to run to get up on to the thing (laughs)

Talks to his wife about sports programme

Puts tv on

J

First boat flight was about May 1942 was the first one that went out and all the workers went down for about 20 minutes – DP176 it was. One Monday morning oh yes, they went in one Monday morning and down by the big hanger sliding doors there was this glider – a hull – a glider with a, yes

I

And were they made, the flying boat hull under the glider wasn't it – yes

J

Yes, we didn't know what it was, anyway I think it was the same one now is hanging up in the

museum - boat museum at Bowness – it's hanging up in the roof, I'm sure that's the same one

I

It is the same one, yes

J

And er, and then later on maybe only a year or two ago, I read it somewhere where they'd been doing some tests with this (*inaudible*) where they could take these up tower ?? (*inaudible*) and them on lakes, but that one now is painted white, but this one was kind of a brown colour, but it's that same one yes.

I

Oh, that's interesting, different colour then

J

Yeh, yeh and it was just inside, but just against the doors, yes like a sail plane, with (*inaudible*) doors, yeh and then. Oh them in the canteen, they used to have these dinner time concerts, some of them used to put BBC concerts, they used to be put on to workers play time, that was (*inaudible*) different factories, they had workers play time when they had a kind of professional performer just to come up at least one when i was there – I was there 2 years.

I

Did you take part in those at all? Or were you just?

J

No but others, workers from the factory used to do with one or two good entertainers but there was - probably twice/three times a week there was a concert in the canteen, yeh.

I

Mind you, making you work long hours, it's good that they were laying on entertainment as well.

J

Yes. (*inaudible*) When I was up top shop one or two air raid warnings, 2 I can remember that's all while I was there, but one of the them - I was standing outside the top shop which wasn't far from the wall really which it goes now between Windermere and Ambleside and Blacksmith's shop, was along there as well and er air raid warning went one afternoon, it was a pretty murky day but German engines, you could soon tell them. We had them over Kendal many a time, especially if they'd been bombing Barrow or Liverpool ,they'd come up this way. They used to (makes a noise) and it, plane went over, luckily, maybe they were looking for it, I don't know, but it was a bit of a murky day.

I

And it was German?

J

Yes, oh it was German alright, I could tell them – used to go over Kendal and all through the

night if they'd been bombing Barrow or Liverpool, they used to come up here to probably circle back up.

I

Do you think they were looking for Windermere?

J

Oh I would think so yes, because I mean they were taking quite a toll were flying boats with their u boats they were.

I

I suppose they could have been heading for Barrow and just got hopelessly lost

J

They might have been, but that was afternoon, usually bombers were night bombing wasn't it?

I

Interesting – but they didn't actually bomb the factory?

J

No, no, no luckily they never got a (inaudible) where they built – 35 Sunderlands altogether. First batch was 25 and then they'd a 10, but by then I'd left and I'd got into the forces by then. Oh and then there was some witty guy who must have been a poet as well who did a 4 line verse of there were about 10 or 12. He was kind of a, I don't know what you would call it really, like a musical thing, and he'd written these and they were very witty verses and I'd like see them now or hear about them now, I only remember a bit of a couple of them .

I

Were these written for the Ensa concerts?

J

Oh yes, (inaudible) quite a lot out that lads, cos he was a fella and there was 20 odd verses about Shorts

I

Can you remember any of them?

J

No, I just remember a bit it was something, something and it said Shorts Palaces they have been named, the walls are so thin, you dare not knock in you might give your neighbour a sock on the chin. There's another bit I remember as well, after that, a lady next door she was having a bath, when all of a sudden she sneezed, she sneezed and she coughed and she blew the roof off and exposed of what was left of the breeze. That's the only bit I can remember, there was about 12 verses, and his neighbour was in 2 of them and we remember at the time he got sacked there was

a fella.

I

Because he was mentioning the management by name?

J

Yes it wasn't very complimentary what I remember about the Nather bit. I'm sure he got the sack cos there was lads of 16 then you see who heard all these things. But anyway, when I got to the bottom shop I got on with a fella from Rochester because a lot of them come up from Rochester the main factory, and Arthur Sears they called him, he was a droll fella, never smiled, but he had, he riveted all the false roofs of the Sunderlands, plugged the wing, when the wing went on I should say and I used to be outside on the top of the hull dollying they called it.

I

So the dolly was on the outside of the hull? And the rivet gunners on the inside?

J

Yes, yes, I used to put the rivet through, hold a dolly on it, and then he would knock it up from inside. He was as I say, he never smiled, I can see this Arthur Seers now, but he was very good at it and because we were on bonus, from his false roof I used to get about £2.10, £2.50, £2.10 in proper money and so it was while I was being with him, that I got fed up with him and I said I want a go with somebody else, so he says aye you can bugger off, bugger off, "bugger off and don't bloody come back" something like that he was from (inaudible) so I went with another fella who was local Billy Birkett they called him, he did this, all the keel strips, or one of the chaps cos they were, the keel strips, they were heavier rivets so the dolly boy had to go down inside between the frame with big long things you'd put on end of rivet, and a dolly on top of that, and as they were hammering underneath, lying hammering underneath, your dolly was taking the (inaudible)

I

Bouncing the dolly off the rivets?

J

Yes, that was, as they hit it, but Billy at that time there was a popular film that came out Billy the Kid, so I used to shout through when he used to – I used to shout, I put me rivet through because you hadn't much room between frames, put me rivet in, get it knocked – give it a good knock in and I use to shout out 'Ok Billy Kid' cos there was talk of this film eh? Well! He had a side kick called Pedro did Billy the Kid. in the 60s and 70s, if I saw Billy down the street he used to, or across the street, he said 'Hiya Ped how you doing?' all them years later eh! Cos Billy then was in his 30s at Netherfield but I was working with him and I was only 16 but he used to still shout – and he would be in his 70s and I would be kind of in my 40's and he still used to shout – cos I used to still call him Billy Kid and he used to shout 'Pedro'!

I

So that, before you were doing the false roof inside the aircrafts, you were on top on the outside, but this time, because you were trying to get a flushed rivet on the hole, the rivet is on the

outside, but you were on the inside with the dolly

J

No I was on the outside with a flush rivet

I

You were on the outside with the rivet?

J

Yes, you put them through and then you just put your dolly, you had no, what they called – they called these things with the snap head in, no you just used to put them on and then you used to knock them up from inside.

I

But they were on the inside of the hole?

J

Yes, the guy was, the riveter, and then if you happen to loose concentration or shouting at somebody and he knocked it and it came out, this Sears used to bloody shout ‘get on the bloody rivet, get your mind on the bloody job’ he used to shout in his cockney stuff. So, yeh, but that’s why I used to get sick of him a bit.

I

So it mused have been quite strange having all these cockney and Kent accents in Windermere.

J

Ay, yes it was 50 RAF fellas up there and more out of the RAF, fitters who was also working at Shorts.

I

Were they loaning fitters or were they just?

J

No they were fitters

I

They were just helping out because they needed the staff?

J

Yes, they’d come out of the RAF, they were still in the RAF, but they worked up there and they stopped on Shorts Palaces they used to call them, these prefab things.

I

At Calgarth?

J

Ay, yes, just where school is now just at back of that.

I

Yes, I know it well

J

Was there anything else – I thought of something in bed this morning and thought I must put that down cos me memory's bad. We had one morning a hell of a stormy weekend it had been must have been a Monday morning, anyway if we got there, bus was there 10 minutes early, we didn't sit in factory, we used to go out for a walk down onto slipway or around bay. Went down this morning and there was a petrol launch or barge it was. I think it must have had an engine cos that's the only way they could have done it, it sunk. They made a concrete jetty there which was still there last time – I went down a few years ago to have a look. I went to the house where the police guy – well that was the police houses – it's still there is the police house.

I

Just as you go in?

J

Yes, on the right.

I

Has that been extended – is that bigger now than it used to be?

J

Oh it might be but it was police house then and they used to go and watch you go in and went down there (inaudible) and er so it must have had an engine – probably was a launch, but I remember these big 40 gallon drums of petrol used to be in the barge. Anyway, it had sunk, it had gone down underneath water by the stone jetty and it must have been a wild night.

I

Did they manage to get it back up again alright?

J

Ay they must have done yes. Only time I saw a flying boat over here was in ATC and it was a victory parade – they used to have a few of them you know, collecting them – spitfires fund or wings for victory and things like that, and I saw one, one came flying round town a Sunderland – one of ours so that's the only time I saw one over Kendal.

Did you ever see one Sheila – a flying boat flying over?

S

No, I never saw a flying boat.

J

No it was the only one I ever saw was on that particular day and we'd been on this march with

army air force and navy, they were big parades they were, and they were crowded weren't they? You know the pavements – they were 6 deep! Yes it was great, but that's the only time I saw one flying over.

I

It wasn't – presumably it was just on a test flight, it didn't come low?

J

It would be for the day yes, it would be on a test flight – it was on a Saturday afternoon and it flew around – I saw it – parade had about finished and I was walking down Stramongate back to Stramongate school where we disbanded.

S

That's right – where we assembled – I was in the training corps

J

Yes that's right, and it flew across there just kind of – must have been 500 foot, but it, yes, that's the only time I saw one flying here.

Talks about his notes

I

So your typical day at the factory – you would arrive there – you'd leave Kendal at 7 in the morning, so you'd be arriving at the factory before 8 o'clock?

J

Oh half past 7 because we started at half past seven.

I

You started at half seven till half past five – that's a long day.

J

Yes it was a long day – it might have been quarter past 5. For coming home the buses used to come down and stop outside back of the hanger.

I

Come on site to where the hanger was?

J

Yes of a morning they didn't – they'd drop you off on the main road at the top and we'd walk down.

I

So you'd get in at 7.30 and straight down to the hanger and work?

J

Yes, mindst you there was no great push. Another time I remember who is it turning up as well – Stafford Crips – he was Mr Aircraft Production or something at the time. I remember him coming down.

I  
1944 it would have been if it was him.

J  
Yes it must have been early cos I left fairly early 1944, but yes I remember him – I can see him now in his rimless glasses in set of 17, in the hanger, yes Stafford Crips.

I  
Just wandering through the hanger?

J  
Well he had his bosses with him

I  
Did you have to get everything tidied up ready for him?

J  
Oh I would think so, yes, but anyway I remember him turning up.

I  
So your typical day down there, meet up with the riveter and

J  
Yes if you were there, well you were with him so, mind you one period of time for about 3 months the manager down at the bottom, down in the hanger, I went to see him. I said eh how about – I'd been there about 12 or 18 months, I went to see him and I said – I can't think of his name, and I said how about me being a riveter – I can do it. So he said alright then, I'll give you a girl cos then they were all girls dolly girling as well, the easier bits we used to do on the sides and that, well hell I used to get – I'd be waiting on a rivet coming through – nothing! I used to knock on sheet and I used to shout come on whatever they were – I remember this lasses face now – it was quite a flat face she had, anyway, forgot her name, so I went up through turret – I could see her from there, went up a few steps and looked over to the side – nobody there eh, and then she'd turn up and I'd say where've you been? I've been knocking on the frame for you, and she'd say I had to go there hadn't I? Can't help going to the loo, so I said no alright then. Anyway, it only lasted – it didn't last long. I thought, I'm making no money with these lot so I went back, that's when I went with Billy Birkett

I  
Were you paid according to how many rivets you knocked in?

J  
No we got a flat rate, but a job was timed and then if you could knock kind of three hours of it or

a day, that was paid as bonus

I

You'd get that time as bonus would you?

J

Yes, but I never made that with these lasses – they were never there! We used to be knocking on saying come on, eh, waiting for a rivet coming through - nothing! So I thought this is no good, so I went to see the boss guy again and I said put me back with somebody on dolly and these lasses they're never there. 5 minutes, they're away going somewhere that's when I went with Billy Birkett. I worked with him till I left in early 44.

I

And the pair of you were getting a few bonuses then?

J

Ay yes with Billy yeh

I

It worked much better! The rivets had to be softened first didn't they?

J

They were soaked in something, cos you used to go to rivets store, and they used to give you about happen 20 or 30 dual alumin inaudible rivets if you were just on the flush parts you know and then you used to go with the rivet box, this little square box, and they were always ice cold so they must have been put in something to soften them in cos they were dual al eh, cos aluminium was too soft – after, before the war all the aircraft were made of aluminium, and then they got some process where it was dual al – it was aluminium and something else that made it tougher and that's how we got the rivets. Anyway, I had to go back onto the job and if you got a good riveter as well, we used to make a, well if you made £2 extra, well you thought that was marvellous!

I

Yes because that would be like a week's wage wouldn't it?

J

Oh yes ay it would – I was only on, when you were 16 you were only on about 17 and 6 a week Or it might have been longer yeh, you wouldn't get £2 – you wouldn't get more than your wage, but for the whole false roof with Arthur Sears it might take us 5 days to do it and then we used to get, he was alright with his bonus, mind you, he relied on you as well for all the rivets and getting them through fast enough.

I

It's a partnership

J

Yes, but he never smiled didn't Arthur he used to live on Fellside.

I

I suppose if you're trying to get these rivets in within a set time whilst they're still soft enough to do them, and you don't go off to the loo, then they've all gone off and would have to be (inaudible ) again

J

Oh yes they lasted a long while, yes. The little ones 5 32 or something they were – only little rivets, and then of course things went, well it changed a bit did flying boats as they had places in the front where they had 4 303 coming out of the front, which I see them now in pictures when you see of Sunderlands but at first, when I first went up, they had no guns in the nose pipe.

I

Yes they started putting those on

J

It was where the guns would fire through. They were for strapping submarines calling towers and that as they were going in no doubt.

I

I think there was a point when the submarines started sitting on the surface firing back at them

J

Oh they did – they thought it was safer to stop up – especially if there was 2 or 3 of them to stop at the surface and fight it out.

I

So you'd need these guns to fight back

J

Ay yes, because they had these 20 and 40 mm cannon in quadruple things so that there was something to take on I believe but er

I

Certainly a change in the design of the aircraft – you were actually building those in as they went out new?

J

Ay yes, so far out and 10 aircraft into the 25 when I was there, then they started putting these, you know, just like the gunman sticking out but they were behind there and er that's what we referred to when the pilot was going down, pilot would operate them and er. But I say these U boat things used to stop on the surface and they had these multiple 20/40 mm cannon shells when they were coming in low for the depth charger attack they had to keep it level to get it some flying boats - like Catalinas and Sunderlands they were shot down.

I

You weren't there when erm – you left in early 44 so you didn't see any of the battle damaged aircraft coming in for repair?

J

One – We went in one morning – must have been a Monday again – everything happened on a Monday morning, and as we went out of the main hanger the small doors – we must have been 10 minutes early so we weren't going to sit in the factory eh, went out and up to one side to right hand side, there was this old flying boat still in old camouflage paint –

I

Not in the modern white?

J

Not in the white no in the old – and er, and we went up to have a look, anyway it was open was the doors so we went in and it was a smelly old boat it was and that was an old veteran Sunderland.

I

Do you know what happened to it?

J

No I don't and you see you didn't have any information – nobody said nothing about anything. It's like when you went abroad in the army – you were never told where you were going.

I

Because they didn't want you to tell somebody else who might tell the enemy

J

Oh yes, It was top security. When we left the navy I was in Wales and them that were going to be transferred into the army well, did say there was a quarter of a million air force and navy transferred into the army. If you were A1 you didn't get a choice of being intakes or guns, you were infantry, so you got no choice. When I got me medical end of 43 you did have a choice – if you chose the army you'd a choice, if possible of what you wanted to be in. Well if I'd have had my choice I'd have said tanks – I was always kind of mechanically minded you know, liked things mechanically minded. But me first choice was the navy, I wanted to go in, I wanted to be in the navy. When I got to 17, I said to me father again can I join up? Funny thing about it (laughs) when it had started, the war, my mother said never mind me lad cos I was 13 then- by the time you have to go it might be over, and even at 13 I thought bloody hell I hope not I want to get there because we all had different attitudes then. I want to be in there – I want to get there. So when I got to 17 I said to me father eh can I join up in navy so he said you can for me my lad, but ask your mother because I was an only son so I said to mother is it alright with you if I join up so she said but what if you don't like it, you can't get out again, in any case in a few months you'll be going anyway, they'll be calling you up so I said alright then I'll stop. Now if I'd have joined up then 4/5 months earlier, they didn't, anybody who had joined up in the navy, didn't get to go in the darby *inaudible*, you were alright

I

Oh right because you were signed up for a commission – a longer commission

J

Ay well you joined – you chose that, well I chose it when I went for my medical at Carlisle, and for my interview, but that didn't cut any ice – If your name went up on the board and I'd been in the navy 5 months I think, and er anyway we were all packed off on the train from where was it I was at Sheila – Pwhelli, oh Pwhelli – yeh, stone frigate they called em eh because there were ... anyway, we were all marched out from there must have been a few hundred, onto a train at Pwhelli – didn't know where we going because nobody, you weren't told where you were going, all got on the train and oh no we were kitted out there as well in army kit, except they'd no hats, so that was the only time I think in history where a lot of soldiers had their khaki on with their sailor hat with HMS on. Anyway took us to Liverpool – right to the docks onto a troop ship I thought, wonder where we're going – we've had no training, so can't be so far, anyway sailed at night and next morning we were in Belfast lock, so we were there for 3 months in training in Northern Ireland.

I

Next to another Shorts factory!

J

Yes, I saw another one flying round as well I think it was in the September and some big army general come around to give the talks there – I got a thing upstairs as well from the (*inaudible*) saying that they were sorry that we had to let you go into the army but we know you will be as keen as a soldier as you have been as a sailor and all that, anyway. So he said – this general said, I'm going to say – how many's had leave since you come in in April whatever it was – nobody had had leave, so they said, well you're going to get 9 days leave – I'm going to see you get 9 days leave in September, then you'd to go back there for more training, so we went to Larne – went to Stranraer and I met a mate of mine didn't I eh – Harold from Kendal I used to work at Shorts with Harold eh! I was sitting down in the hold on the Princess More, anyway they were built for the Stranraer north channel cos they were bloody rough channels they were in the north and er we were coming back from Northern Ireland for this 9 days leave, and I was sitting down there, I looked up, and there was Harold Bateman sitting with me, there was no seats, on the deck down below with your back up against bulkhead, and I said Harold, cos he lived in Kendal of course, and he was at Shorts with us! So we went to Larne, and when we came back from Stranraer to Larne after 9 days, bloody hell it was stormy. When we got to Stranraer, pitch black was everything, we sailed at about 6 o'clock in the morning from, when we got to Stranraer, and even before we got out of Lock Ryan this ship was all over, this small troop ship, it was only about 2,500 tonne I would think all over, and when we got into the main channel, everybody was sick, and it used to be about – it was about 2 and a quarter hours – it was only 24 miles from Stranraer to Larne, but that particular time and it had damaged a lot of the ship as well had the waves and that, I was bloody glad to get there – we were all sick – and it took us 4 hours, and the storms were so bad in the north channel they suspended – there was others who had gone a week after us from our battalion who had 4 more days they put them up in Stranraer barracks because the ships weren't sailing – so we were the last one. So we got to Larne and we

were coming off the ship we were waiting for transport back to Firebalttown *inaudible* near the border and a Sunderland was flying around off and on the docks, and they had the drog door open and there was flashing lights to somebody – maybe on a destroyer that was – there was some escort ships also nearby, and it must've been somebody he knew eh. The lamp was flashing – that's the only other time I saw one!

I

Amazing – wonder if it was er – might have been one of the Windermere ones, but more likely made in Belfast.

J

Oh likely cos there was, we only made 35. I mean the main place for building them was down at Rochester. Well that's where they'd been built in the first place.

I

Did you – well you met quite a few of the lads that had obviously come up from Rochester with their cockney accents.

J

Oh yes, well that's where these, that was bombed – I've read in books that Rochester factory was bombed.

I

The er – this aircraft that came in in early 44 – was it exactly the same type as the ones that you were building or was it an older model or?

J

Yes, no I think it was the mark 3 – it might have been the mark 1 – mark 1's had a 9 inch step on the hull and a mark 3 had a 3/4 “ step – I can't remember where it was but I've got bits – well we went up onto the flight deck and there was – in navigators place – there was some round card with (*inaudible*) – I think I took one of them – ay yes, it was coming back for repair so I've got it in a box upstairs, yes.

I

You've still got it – fabulous!

J

Yes

I

What's on the card – is it a route plan or something?

J

I don't think there's anything on it – I'll have a look, but er there was a little lad – well little lad – he was a bout a year younger than us so he was a little lad eh! Fox they called him – I can't think of his first name, his father was on the buses – ay well this, he was younger than us, anyway he

came out of this old veteran Sunderland with a whole – what did they call them guns now the er – the round thing – Vicars Kay guns I think they were and of course they used to stick guns out of all those places didn't they – drog door, where bombs used to run out, because German used to call them flying porcupines, because they'd guns sticking out all over the place!

I

And he actually took one of those with him

J

Ay he did – he brought it out yeh

I

How'd he get that out of the factory without being caught!

J

Well he got back dinner time you know and had our dinner, he'd put one into a vice – this Foxy lad, because he said if I can get end out I can make a lighter with the case, he said, so he said I've got to get rid of this bullet – how daft we were eg, so he tightened up into the vice and was hammering it with a punch to try and get bullets out! Anybody could have been killed eh! Cos he said I've plenty more bullets in here, I can make some more lighters and sell them!

S

Well that's what they did didn't they, they made an awful lot

J

On the lighters yeh,

I

So he was using the bullet case to make the lighter if he could get the little bit of led bullet off the end of it

J

Yes, he'd get the bullet out and then he used to ... course were always at

I

If he put it in the vice and hit the bottom of it, it would come out well enough!

J

Well yes he was hitting the bottom of it trying to get the bullets out!

I

God!

J

I can't remember his name – it was either his uncle or his father was on the buses I knew you'd remember him!

S  
It was Bobby Fox

J  
Bobby Fox

S  
Bright lad

J  
Bright little - Bubbly lad he was

.

I  
I heard that one of the lads at the factory was caught by a foreman one day with nothing to do and he was asked why he was standing around doing nothing and it was apparently because you know, the job he was waiting for he needed the part to be made to be given to him to work on it, so he was waiting for this to be given to him, and foreman said well don't just stand their idle, bugger off and make a cigarette lighter! And it was that sort of thing – it wasn't just that it was people making stuff that they shouldn't have been making, it was to keep the workforce busy wasn't it.

J  
Yes they used to make little spitfires as well they used to bend pennies then they used to take them up to the buffin shop and a fella used to make things for flying boat and then we used to hand them in and go back at night and they were all buffed up silver.

I  
I'd love to see one of those. I wish I'd met someone who had one – I've seen a couple of cigarette lighters that were made at the factory

J  
Well they had a wheel on top – pretty crude but

I  
Yeh, you put petrol in them and they light! I've seen them made out of tubes and I've seen them made out of blocks of aluminium.

J  
Yes that's right – I made a few things up there. I used to make rings out of Perspex and all – snake rings they called them eh

S  
Yes they did

J

If you made them too thick your fingers were held apart with this snake rings!

S

I used to have one and it was flat

J

Yeh and we used to burn hot needle ends put them in, take a bit out on to Perspex and then we used to put some red paint in it and when it dried it used to look like snakes eyes looking at yer!  
Laughs

General talk about coughing

I didn't loose it until I got past Gibraltar going back to India – age doesn't matter – I was only 21 then – fit as a flea.

I had a bad (*inaudible*) in jungle you know down in southern India (*inaudible*) – should have gone to see a doctor there but I never did somebody said rub plenty of vic on your chest – It might help it, so somebody used to, well there was a wagon used to go into Misor everyday for rations, so he said if you see so and so in motor transport section, he'll get you some. So I gave him the money and he brought me a tube, a little jar of vics – bloody awful it was, of vic, and so matey that brought it back, and he said , when I had it bad before – when we've been down here, because everything was all wet through in the jungle, everybody was sleeping with a single tarpaulin top, it used to drip on your mosquito net, he said, when you've rubbed it in your chest, get a spoonful – a fingerful – and swallow it because he said it's good from the inside and all.

S

Laughing – worse thing you could have had

J

Yes well I don't know, but well I did yeh. They used to, you used to build your own bamboo huts and it was there was this single piece of tarpaulin – 6 of us used to sleep, most of em – 6 people, make your beds as well with this, you used to hammer bits of bamboo to make it about this high and I been on rear guarding a battalion with 30 others, 29 others cos the army goes in 30s, and er we were rear guard to (*inaudible*) and he said we have to er, the nearest battalion was, oh I tell you what it was that welsh lot because they used to parade every night with this goat.

S

That's right yes – Royal Welsh Fusiliers

J

Ay, whatever they were, cos we used to go and see goat – goat was always dressed up in battalion colours so yeh when I went like I had no bed because I got to jungle camp and they said well posts were hammered in because we kew somebody else was coming and they said for time being if you want, the lance corporal, he said for the time being if you want cos it's too late to start making a bed top now – it was only with bamboo hammered and tied up with scrim – he

said use the door which they'd made door for this pasher (??inaudible) and put it on top of there – well I never bothered, I thought sod it I'm alright on here, so for 3 months after that in all the monsoon season, I just slept on this door- cos you'd to live on your rifle as well because you were responsible for your rifle and you only had one blanket – they don't know they're born these days eh! So you'd to sleep with your rifle down. Oh battalion, well they were inaudible, tailors, for making alterations and we all took our one blanket and got it sewn up to one blanket – and got it machined up left about this much at the top – just enough to fold back yeh , so that was easier for your rifle because you got in, and got your rifle tucked down by your leg so that was alright that - midst you, you were wet, oh and rats – bloody big Indian rats! They used to fall off the rafter things onto the top of your mosquito net, well by the time their weight used to get on they were about this far from your face – bloody – used to try and knock them off. They don't know they're born these days. They complain now about being abroad for er – it's a bit rough – 3 months – they'd never been home! And I thought, they don't know they're born these days!

I  
It's all quite different

J  
But it was alright – it was – you could right a book about army service eh – when they keep cropping up.

I  
People do! You mentioned that the air raid sirens going off a couple of times – where were the air raid shelters?

J  
Oh they were in the building – just brick

I  
Right – round the edge of it?

J  
Yes – with the – see where they were in the market place, just brick with about a 4 inch concrete top – yes they were in there, but door was nearby where you could go in, I thought well I'll go and stand outside – and a woman was standing outside and she said get near – she was from Liverpool – get near the door m'lad then if we hear anything coming down cos she said I was in the Liverpool blitz, and you can hear them coming down, so get into there as quick as you can cos I'll pass you she said. I was only 15 or 16 or 16 or 17 – 16 likely cos I was still in the top shop and this noise came – she said there it is, there's one going over – I only heard the one – but it went right over the top of the factory but it was in the murk in an afternoon so I reckon that was looking – looking for Shorts.

I  
Looking and didn't find it – yeh

J

Anyways we didn't have to, cos she said if you don't run fast m'lad I'll pass you – it was only from here to (*inaudible*) and she had!

I

It was that people were coming from a wide area – I mean you've got people from Kent, people from London, Liverpool from all over.

J

Yes

I

Someone said there was a group came up from Birmingham as well from Offsteads was it?

J

Yes cos they come to these prefab things they were living in Shorts estate

I

Yes at Calgarth, yes

J

Yes they were all over the spot

I

Right

J

There was a lass Barbara Armer they called her – come from Hawkshead all the villages roundabout – they all come in from there and all to Shorts – Hawkshead, Sawrey Far Sawrey, Ambleside, and er Harold Bateman crops up again. We used to be sitting having our cup of tea and Harold and me would be sitting there and another lad – he used to have patches on his knees cos he was a fitter – sheet fitter, and he said, it'll save me knees. Anyway, that's another story! We were sitting having our cup of tea and Barbara Lamb was a dolly girl, mindst you she was a bit older than us was Barbara – she'd be about 19 and Harold used to flick rivets at Barbara sitting at t'other side of the flying boat, and sometimes the odd one would go down the front, and she used to say to Harold, you put another one down my front and I'll make you come over here and get it out. And Harold was trying all break time was Harold – he was 6 months older than me. Yeh, anyway her father worked there – what did they call her father- I can see his face I know, anyway, I was working for Crofts, this was in 60's, Crofts farming implements, and I got to Hawkshead, and I knew the farm I wanted was up on Fellside somewhere, so I stopped me wagon and I put me head out of the window, and I said to this woman Thompson ground! Isn't it funny how names come back eh! I wanted the farm Thompson ground, so I put me head out, I looked down at her and I said 'Thompson ground – which way do I go for that?' and she looked up and I said 'Barbara Lamb that was!' and it was eh – all them years later! She says Jeff Gill – I says that's it!

I  
Fantastic

J  
She'd been to the shops or something, cos there's a housing estate just outside that – we once parked up there eh. That was Barbara Lamb! But her father used to give her a tight hold of Barbara, for lads around there cos lads would say eh don't get on with Barbara Lamb cos father comes up and gives you a good clout! Laughs

I  
There must still be quite a few people around that worked at the factory?

J  
Oh I would think so, I don't know, you know you don't hear. The time I went down on my bike maybe 10 years ago I was passing just for a ride up to Ambleside for me exercise, I stopped here at that police house there were probably security there then because they were just going to get caravans and that in there then and er fella was standing outside so I just go off me bike and I said eh I says, can I have a look down there – I used to work here – and he said, do you know you are the first person I know that worked here in the war time – and I said well I did, and he said well they never built a bloody boat did they and I said they built 35 boats, and he said well I heard they didn't do anything and I said oh no, they did plenty.

S  
What about that man lived near Natland Jeff – I can't think of his name

J  
Oh yeh, yeh – I know who you mean! Can't think of his name now – I went up cos he was going to show me some photographs he took of Shorts inside hanger, I don't know what they call him now, anyway he lives on that Oxenholme

I  
Stan- Stan O' Connor – yes I know him – I've met him

J  
Well he lives on Oxenholme Lane, goes through Oxenholme Road.

I  
He's done a lot of research – I don't think he took photographs – I think he's got photos that were taken there cos he's done a lot of research himself just to kind of find out a bit more about it.

J

Yes that's right

I

I think I'm probably going to go and see him fairly soon. You said that there was 50 or so RAF working there – were they in uniform?

J

No, oh yes, they had the top on just for a coat to put on

I

Yes, still RAF uniform, yes

J

Yes but they were fitters – they weren't riveters – they were..

I

I presumed that would be training for them in how a Sunderland was put together as well as

J

Well they must have been fitters on aerodromes mustn't they their frame fitters – and there was 50 of them at Shorts. That would be a nice steady number for them eh – you know, not being on parade, not being

I

Was it always the same or did they change?

J

No they were the same –

I

Same blokes all the time?

J

Yes

I

Must have just been transferred to make up the numbers. Do you remember the aircraft leaving as well, because you saw the first test flight – did the air crews come to pick them up?

J

Yes, crews used to come and pick them up – you know crews with bravets and that to fly them off.

I

And they'd just come up, collect them and disappear?

J

Yes we used to hear the roar of the engines out on the lake.

I

Did they come in with another aircraft first or did they used to come up by train?

J

No they must've come up on the train.

I

I gather later on they might have been used in other aircraft to ferry them in, but I think that probably at first.

J

I'll just go and have a little decko at that lilttle card I've got.

J

I just can't think of his name – anyway, he had brown overalls on – one of the few who had brown overalls on this lad.

I

Was there a difference – do you get different overalls for different status

J

No I don't think so, I think we bought our overalls – like a bib and brace, and there was this thing where we were looking at down there

I

Down at the front of the aircraft

J

Yes, where I thought was, yes in the bit, where I thought was – Tucker Fleming I think they called him eh – I think it was him, anyway, this was bent over this – she was trying to watch keel and all that was there were these brown overalls, with a bottom sticking up, so I was going up into flight deck because we were probably working up there, and I thought, it's tucker, and this female voice said 'who's that?' and it was a woman! I kept on going up those half a dozen steps into the top! I just thought when I saw that then I can see this bottom sticking up! Laughs

I

That's in the back- right in the back, looking forward – so you had a little work bench inside the aircraft as well?

J

Yes, they used to go onto the – that was where turret was just up there, yes, that's where Barbara Lamb and me used to sit there having our cup of tea – on that bit of platform there. Barbara's

not there as you know – laughs – and Harold was the one with the flicking rivet. He always seemed so much older - He was only kind of 6 months older but he always seemed a lot older did Harold. Funny when you see these people eh – I saw

I

Presumably they brought the tea around the hanger and you just stopped where you were working – you didn't go off to the canteen for tea breaks then?

J

No, no I don't think there was tea breaks. You used to stop and took a flask of tea.

I

Yeh, you'd just get a quick drink and carry on a bit.

J

Yes that was it, cos at IBIS there were no tea breaks – you had to work 5 hours before you were eligible for quarter of an hour tea break, but that all changed when we came back from the war, manager used to say get on and we used to say oh sod off! You know it all changed then, soldiers came back, we finished saying sirs and then if they were a bit nasty we, cos some of the silly old buggers used to say I was on the crane at IBIS for 13 years, and they used to say I'm going on girder for me to go (*inaudible*) and he was a miserable sod he was and he used to hammer (*inaudible*) and he'd come up and stand in the aisle because our cranes were parked down the middle and he used to shout 'and i used to shout I'm having my tea' and he used to shout back 'i'll go and see George Wells'. Well he was the manager – he was a miserable sod was George – nobody liked George. Well he was the manager in an office, in the factory up a dozen steps, so he used to talk down both aisles, past machine shop and up, and then that's when you know when you see David – he always comes like this cos manager used to come underneath my crane and look up and he used to look like that, then he used to make go down the ladder -he wanted you, just as he did this morning – didn't David he was a fitter at IBIS – David Dugdale, and he was passing he would come like this to me, anyway, so I would go down the ladder and he used to say I've had an (*inaudible*) you're refusing to give him a lift on his drills – these big radial drills, so I said I'm getting me cup of tea and he said well as soon as you've finished, give him a lift. Mind you at first he used to say never mind your tea, get on and give these lifts, you're paid to be a crane driver, and then after that they used to think no, used to say no, no I'm getting me tea, you'll have to bleeding wait! So it all changed with us coming back from the war like yes. Otherwise we'd all been far back as we were then eh – nobody dared say boo. There was some of the old hands on tin smith benches which was below my 5 bay, there were 4 bay – the long bay crane and on this bench, and when they wanted a little biscuit or a little morning coffee, they used to look around first eh the old hands. They used to pour the tea out – I used to watch them off the crane, put it down and then George he lived on suicide row – on Burneside Road cos there was a lot of suicides on that road can't think what they called him. George Morton, he was an old hand, and he used to open his flap – he had brown overalls – open it up and took a mari (?) biscuit out and then put it back in and look at them – start nibbling this mari bisuict, and there was me up in the crane, then lads who had come back from the army used to shout get on with it – never mind about George Wells we used to shout – and they were just frightened of him. They were frightened they were going to get the sack. Cos they used to sack a lot of IBIS –

sometimes 20 a week sometimes if there wasn't much working, they used to sack them. Yes, so that was on these benches – the old hands. I worked for McCormicks which were shop opposite war memorial what is it now Halfords? Well I was working there for a short while because I'd left IBIS – wait a minute, IBIS closed- they closed down. The whole factory shut down. And this is a similar kind of thing – Mr Atkinson who was the ex mayor of Kendal, Mr Atkinson, and his wife – lovely person and his wife – very quiet, an old couple who worked there for 30 years – and wife, they were both in the shop and er when I first went there, cos Mr Atkinson said I'm afraid you 'll only be third sales – you didn't get much commission anyway, they used to charge top price McCormicks because a lot of their customers, they were quite happy to have McCormicks van stop outside their house, cos I used to say to one of my customers, well Simmonds on Highgate Bank – half the price – and it was the same bed! You know people who I knew I used to say why bother and come here – I got nowt of McCormicks anyway – apart from a poor wage, so we used to..... So first Christmas – I was only there about 9 months, but Christmas came into it so I said, it was on the Thursday was the Christmas, so Mr Atkinson said right Geofferey \_ I used to get my full name off him eh! – right Geoffrey I'll see you on Saturday, but we'd Thursday off, so I said ay right – so I said to him but how about our Christmas day – cos it was Christmas day and boxing day – well we had Friday off well Christmas day was a Thursday which we had off anyway because we didn't open on a Thursday, so I says to Mr Atkinson, well what day do we have in lieu of last Thursday then – it was Christmas day – and he said but you were off Geoffrey and I says no that was our day off anyway, we'll have to have a day off in lieu of that, and he said oh Mrs McCormick wouldn't go for that. cos she only came through once a week. This was on a Wednesday I think it was, cos Lancaster shop shut, she had a shop in Lancaster shut on a Wednesday so I said well when she comes on Wednesday tell here that we want a day in lieu off for Christmas day because tell her if I don't get it I'll take a day off anyway. So anyway, she came, and when she'd gone, he used to give me a lift home occasionally drop me off here. He was a very quiet man, and he said she said we can have Monday off. So I said – she's not giving us anything. So he says this weekend you can have Sunday and Monday off in lieu of what you were talking about – well I saw Mrs Atkinson come in – she used to come in to do shopping – his wife and she says Jeff we have been here Ron ( I never used to call him that – always Mr Atkinson) Ron has been here for 32 years and all bank holidays when they fell on the days we were off, we never got an extra day. Why didn't you come here 30 years ago! Laughs The wages were no good anyway. But yes, she'd put on, and the old couple – I got on quite well with them later on but only after we didn't speak for days couple of weeks after I'd started then, cos first morning I started there she – Evelyn and Tom – they were like 2 gnomes. They'd been there forever with mr Atkinson – same hat 30 odd years, so she said you're the new starter, so I said yeh, and she said well Mr Wee and Mr Atkinson likes their tea pronto at 10 o'clock brewed so that it's fresh. So I said I've a flask – I don't need any, cos id always taken a flask everywhere. So I said no, she said oh no, you're the last here, so you must brew the tea and take it up. And I says never! So they didn't speak for a fortnight! She would go up if there was anything to deliver because I did the delivering an all and she used to go up to Mr Atkinson in to little office and say tell him that I've sold a table and it's to be delivered tomorrow after 3 o'clock so I used to say right o. Anyway, after that, they all got a day off didn't they so they changed their minds after that – and even, maybe she's died now.

S

Oh she is dead, yes

J

Ay well Tom died first didn't he – even so from then on like, cos I was the different character. I was the man in the white helmet and charger and used to shout sod em we're taking it off! That was funny wasn't it!

S

Well they never went away overnight did they – he wouldn't sleep in anyone else's bed

J

No he wouldn't sleep in anyone else's bed, so whenever they went they'd come back in the car – they'd sleep in their own beds – they never had a holiday in their lives because they wouldn't – she used to say Tom won't sleep in anyone else's bed so we can only go away for days. And they had plenty of money – no kids. I got on well with him after a bit because we'd been out for some deliveries – it wasn't far away Hincaster or somewhere, but I was getting in the driving seat because I'd been taken on as driver, apart from the third sales, I was taken on as driver cos I'd been with Ronnie Byrom and John so I knew all about furniture and delivering. So I was getting in the driving seat, so he says er just a minute – and tapped me on the shoulder did Tom. Tom was then – about 69, so I said yes, and he said I'm the driver here, and I said no I'm the driver here now cos I've been taken on for that and he said well go and ask Mr Atkinson. So Mr Atkinson said go on he said humour him eh – left him drive! So I said alright, so we went to Hincaster. And I had my bag – always had my bag with us, Nigel Byrom used to say – when I saw him a couple of years ago he said, you always were geared up with a flask of tea and a cake – and I said that's right I was Nige! With a bag on me back! So we delivered it, so I was getting my bag out and he said er oh – we'll have to get back so there's the tea to brew you know for me wife and Mr Atkinson. I said not till I've had my tea Tom! If you're driving – you can't have everything. Well he said be as quick as you can because he'll wonder where we've been at. Well, I said you just tell Mr Atkinson that you couldn't set off because I'd me flask – me cup full of tea out of me flask. He won't like it. I thought hell it's like going back to Dickensian days eh! And this was only in the 60s!

I

Amazing! Very strange. That's that view that way, this is looking the other way, so there's the ladder you were saying up onto the little platform

J

Yes that's right

I

So that's looking towards the back of the aircraft.

J

Yes that's right – that bit there it's there- and that went along, that's where I tumbled down off the plank – towards these (*inaudible*) but there's no then there was no shooting on a far as I can remember because that goes up into rear turret.

I

Yes that's right yeh. But you can see the number of frames – thousands and thousands of rivets to bind in

J

Yes and stringers that went this way yeh.

I

Yes. Do you recognise any of them? If we start with this fella in the middle – that's George Greatham.

J

Yeh he was there, I remember his name.

I

Yes he's the big boss

J

That's right he was! Yes I remember his face! That looks like Jack Whiteside there Sheila.

S

Yes I rather think that is.

J

Cos he used to be – he had white overalls on – he used to do electricians – ay up on flight deck.

I

So which one's him?

J

Second one in I think – this one.

I

Second from right on the back right – Jack Whiteside

J

It looks like him.

I

Cos they will all be fairly senior people – they will all be sort of form hands and charge hands and managers

J

Yes, well maybe it wasn't him then. I'm looking to see which, if Nather was there –

I

That's what I wondered if you'd see him in there

J

If Nather was there he'd be next to matey who was boss man – the last Sunderland built with senior management – yeh. Well I wasn't there when the last Sunderland was built – no

I

This will be June/July 45 –

J

Ay, yes it would be – the last one because they

I

That's why they did the line up for the photo I presume – it's their last aircraft – their last job together.

J

That looks like that Nather fella next to Greatham

I

Next to Greatham to the right of him.

J

Oh there's a bird down here as well

I

I can't remember what she

J

Oh she has a dog –

I

Yeh her and her dog – I've got the name somewhere – I must get a little plan drawn up of this and start putting names on it. Fascinating isn't it?

J

Yes, last Sunderland – I've got one in my books that er that's on the Thames in some

I

Oh yes, I've got a picutre of one of the Windermere ones on the Thames

J

That was one of the Windermere ones that – DP 198 or something like that

I

Unless some of them aren't moored on the lake during the war.

J

The police used to go out. If we were at dinner time and we were sitting down by the lake, folk would come along rowing and rowing round one of the boats, police boat used to go out and he had a megaphone and he shouted go on – move on, get away, move one, cos they used to be going round just to have a look at them eh. Then they'd soon turn around and went away then! They thought they were going to get shot! Laughs

I

That's Shorts palaces – Calgarth – that's an aerial view of Calgarth – the lakes school would be at this end of the picture and the rest of it all laid out there, and that's

J

And that's the canteen.

I

That's the village that picture I've been told so – did you go to the Ensa concerts down there?

J

Yes, not in the village no there was canteen we used to go which made me think it looked like

I

I've not got a picture of the inside but there was a stage in the canteen?

J

Oh ay yeh, I tell you who used to work up there and I've heard of his name years ago on BBC on wireless especially, what do they call him now?

S

Brian Mickey

J

Brian Mickey! Now he used to produce things on BBC radio not on telly this was before

S

Yes he used to produce workers play time as well

J

He did that – that' why – he worked at Shorts – yes Brian Mickey they call him.

I

Did he?

J

And Joan who is it used to sing an all at old concerts – Joan May. Well Joan whatever her name was then because I don't think she'd be married to John May then

S

No she wasn't

J

No cos she was

I

And she used to sing?

J

Oh well she had a lovely voice – she was in the opera for years and that lad that used to live down near Auntie Nelly – he went to London after the war and was in shows down there wasn't he?

S

Oh I can't think of his name

J

Yeh – he was a bad tempered sod – him and his mother was always fighting eh – she would mention something and he used to bawl and shout cos

S

Oh what did they call him?

J

Can't think of his name – but he was a good singer – a tenor

I

That's some more of the workers. That's the football team at Calgarth in 47 so there'll be some – they will have all worked at the factory but er it could have been any of 1500 people, so

J

I'll have a look – I might see a face eh?

I

Yes you might just

J

No it's faces that elude you you know

I

Exactly – they elude me after a couple of weeks – I saw a chap in Windermere this morning who

recognised me and I'd no idea who he was! Laughs

J  
No I don't know

I  
And then er you mentioned the hanger went to Newcastle – bus depot – that's the bus depot in Newcastle. And I think that's top shop.

J  
Oh is it! It might be! I just heard after the war

I  
No, no but it's interesting that you'd heard that – really interesting that you'd heard it. That is chemical works in Liverpool and that's where the other hanger – the hanger went to Liverpool and er the bus depot as you said was the other building

J  
Yes because top shop was a big place.

I  
Oh both big sheds – top shop was bigger than the hanger – the hanger had that single span, that's what made the hanger special, so – yes just a few shots around the site. A lot of these came from the factory manager's son – he'd collected them and got a bundle of them during the war and he'd hung on to them and given them to his son, and er his son eventually gave them to me as someone to look after them. Good stuff. You've got your own box full.

J  
Well there's a fella up at Oxenholme he had – he showed me some photographs when i went up there.

I  
Yeh I'll go and see him again soon and have a chat.

J  
He was about third house down – his wife never said boo when I went in either eh! No – just showed me in. Cos he wasn't kind of a mate really but he was at Shorts – I remember him at Shorts because I had, something in gazette and i wrote back

I  
Oh yes,

J  
I think I've got them bits – I could show you them , and I wrote – oh it was some woman that had worked, it was someone from Shorts flying boats factory, and this woman said she worked there and she said in the gazette I've got that bit an all. She said yes I worked on Sunderlands

but I don't think they ever did any good during the war eh! So I wrote back eh and said you must send somebody that knows something about the subject – this is what I wrote to the gazette, I said whoever's interviewed this woman hadn't a clue either cos I said the Sunderland with the spitfire was the only aircraft from 1939 – 45 that started day 1 and finished on the last day of the war doing the same job.

I  
You are quite right actually, yes.

J  
Spitfire was a fighter, there was others, like hurricane, but they were taken out of front line service and the Sunderland was still the same – the other one

I  
I'm trying to think and I can't think of anything else that lasted all the way through.

J  
No just them two

I  
All the best 1945 aircraft started during the war like the Lancaster, the mosquito and the. But things like the Hampton and erm the Whitley, they were all given up half way through

J  
Oh they were ay – by 1942 especially at erm Stirling was a bad number an all – couldn't climb they reckoned.

I  
Had short wings

J  
Ay short stirling

I  
Apparently the wings were erm built to fit in the hangers that they had and because they did that they weren't long enough to climb high enough! Crazy

J  
I'll just see if I've got them bits eh. I kept the bits.

I  
I've got them somewhere myself I'm sure I have because I've been cutting stuff out of the paper for years – there was a fair few bits

J  
And I thought silly sod – don't know if they ever did any good she says. Sunk about 38

submarines did Sunderlands on their own!

I  
Yes, well one of the Windermere ones sank a submarine

J  
Ay it did

I  
And there's at least 3 or 4 or 5 submarines were damaged by Windermere aircraft as well so no it's erm, yeh, they were cracking machines. What have you brought down?

J  
Oh yes, 2 boxes I got I thought well they aren't in there - these are just photos

I  
Photos of you?

I  
Ay in India - we don't half change eh? They might be in here eh I don't know, but it was this kind - I thought I wouldn't have thrown that out either.

General talk about photos

I  
The curious thing about the research for this is that you just find little bits here there and everywhere and gradually over the years, we've pulled together enough to I think it would make an interesting book if we could get it all written down and get all the photographs published. There doesn't seem to be official factory records as such so you are relying on people's memories of what it was like.

S  
Unless the Shorts place themselves have any?

I  
No nothing - and I'm not sure why, It was either that Shorts lost it or erm might have been that the records went down to Rochester, but then Rochester closed soon after the war and they might not never have been made - because you're having to ship the records twice then, and they might not have been shipped to Belfast, they might have been thrown out before they got shipped.

J  
No it's not in there - you see these things disappear - the little box I thought it was in there's everything else bar, there's only the drafting chits from different ships I was on - troop ships.

I

Don't worry about it

J

Don't know where the hell they've gone.

I

Do you remember a home guard unit at the factory?

J

Yes Arthur Sears was in that eh. Talk about a misfit uniform! His collar was out here eh – it must have been made for somebody like Garth! His little neck was there and his collar came out here – he'd never have seen the enemy! He used to come in his uniform when it was night he was going to be on guard eh.

I

Was that – he worked the uniform through the whole day at work?

J

Oh he did Arthur yeh,

I

And then they were on duty overnight? Did they do anything serious or was it just a bit like Dad's Army

J

No, a bit like Dad's army I think eh what I remember of them. I know I worked, Billy who did the keel strips, he said er we worked till about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and somebody was talking to Billy and Billy shouted 'come out Ped I wanna tell you something Ped'. What do you want Pedro – so he said come out Pedro I wanna tell you something, so I went out and he said they want this job finishing by tomorrow night, so they want to know if me and you will work overnight. So I said, well I've nowt with us, and he said no, they said we can go at quarter past 5 or whenever it was, and then get 8 o'clock bus back and then you can bring some dinner with you for tonight. So I did – I was dropping off in the bottom of that thing! He kept saying to me are you still awake Ped? Cos we worked all day, all night and all next day! Till half past 5, quarter past 5 whatever it was eh! I was dropping off on dollies!

I

And then the next bang would wake you up!

J

Go on Ped –

I

Rush job to get it done. Little boxes of memories

J

Oh ay – tons of photographs eh

Looks through box of photographs.

J

Red force- new deli – I was on a vc parade there- only 2 vc parades in India during the whole war –

I

Right, that's the red for, new deli

J

Red for, new deli, and I was on that parade and – there was 5 vcs that day, 3 posthumous and 2, and it was er Lord Gaunt was governor of India then and erm he was thee. Shorts got an award I remember when we walked past marched past, it was a massive big parade. (*inaudible*) With us being based in new delhi (*inaudible*), we got the British army part of it. There was navy and air force and Indian regiments – hell of a big parade there was marched past these erm, there was Gaunt, and there was wives of thes and mothers of 2 or 3 Ghurkhas got it in them 5. They got this thing as well, mindst you we couldn't go down there because, normally it was out of boundaries was old Delhi, they used to cut your throat as look at you! We were alright with the rest corp because that was during the day but er yeh there was a hell of a lot of troops there!

I

Good stuff.

J

We went to a – what do you call it – only time I flew I was frightened to death of flying after the war when we used to go on our holidays eh – I just couldn't get used to it – and I love aeroplanes you know- all these, they're all wood

I

Are they all wooden?

J

Oh ay they were all – just carved wood.

I

You've carved those yourself?

J

Yes that's right

I

Fantastic little collection

J

Er sandpaper, file., saw, and er

I  
I can't see your Sunderland

J  
Oh ay there's one in there – middle shelf

I  
Oh gosh of course it is yeh –

J  
This is a 144 scale Sunderland and most of them were 144, cos I wouldn't have got them all in if I'd done a 72 scale! That catalina's 72 scale. That was the last model I made 10 years ago – never done one since

S  
I used to keep asking him (*inaudible*) and he wouldn't do one!

J  
Lost the heart, lost the heart.

I  
I had erm, corgi are doing models now I think they're 44 scale as well – similar sort of scale, and I had one of thse on the telly and knocked it off and had to glue it all back together again! Not necessarily such a great idea!

S  
Talks about models

J  
They go back 60 years some of them!

J  
I suppose one of them – one of the greatest sights I ever saw was when the sun came up we sailed from Liverpool in December and er it was a muggy day – it was the 13<sup>th</sup>, no Friday, I thought I hope it isn't a bloody omen eh cos you know them troop ships, they were all packed you know, you were sleeping on table tops, mess deck tops as they used to call them, and er used to sit on them and this was a fast convoy we went on it was 19 troop ships – big ships eh – 20,000 tonnes, well that was 21 and Strathneighbour was 22.5,000 and that was blood rough as well, everybody was sick on there and all, and when we got round, But we went out and you couldn't see much from Liverpool cos we left sight of that in no time at all in half an hour or les and we couldn't see nowt or less, and then we stopped and it was all foggy – couldn't see nothing and I says to some of me mates and wonder where the hell we're at – we must be about 3 hours – maybe we must be round Ireland somewhere if we're gong to go that way, and er I don't know what it was, but I think it must have been because when night came we all went below in

our hammocks or whatever, and next morning, sick as a dog, hammock – bulk head was there and you heard this noise (makes noise) cos hammock was moving – and I must have had about 5 mins and I thought i'll have to get on deck, and I went up on deck – mindst you it was quite light went out – everyone was hanging over the rails eh sick – it was bloody rough. Anyway, looked around and convoy had phoned up eh and it was light - well about light then and all these big ships with all their different flags flying, for the turning zig zags you know – they used to, commodore ship run so many flags up and then there was the blast on his horn, and then all the other ships all followed suit, put their flag sup and one blast, 2 blasts whatever, and then about 10 second later the whole convoy 10 degrees probably that way – bloody marvellous! and right out in front there was 5 friggets! Escort in a v – sometimes you saw them sometimes you didn't they went down in a dip, but that was probably one of the greatest sights I can think of wakening up to – this big convoy with all these liners – not Queen Mary's and that – but big ships – 20,000 ton boats and these 4 frigates. And then we got round to Sunday afternoon and the leader of these frigates, - what they call it leader likely fratila leader of these turned around and he come right down between – there was 5 out of 3 back, anyway there was 9/10 between us and Strathneighbour, and got to the bottom of the ships and then turned out and nearly got onto the horizon and it was dropping depth chargers, so they must have detected something, and he stopped right there and he come back again. Marvellous sights when you think

I

When was that? What year was that then?

J

44

I

44 yeh – so that's the time when the Sunderlands you built would have been up and protecting you as well

J

Oh I only saw one – I only saw one aircraft.

I

Yeh, but he'd have been out there somewhere nearby

J

Yeh they would be – I saw one – it was either a Wellington or a Warwick and it was about a couple of miles away – quite low down on the sea but we'd been at sea for oh I don't know – maybe 4 days and I said to one of deck hands – crew, I said which way we going cos I thought he says we can see sun, we going west, and I thought we're a long while – 6 days it went cos they wouldn't know any different to us, but he said to me he said to dodge U boat he said, we've turned in last 2 hours – the convoy has turned and we were putting down having our dinners he said the convoy has turned and it said at that point we were only 24 hours off New York, the convoy, to dodge the submarines he said cos they'd once they get out there, and then he said we head back towards Gibraltar, if that's the way we're going, which we were, and then these frigats went into Gibraltar and then, then (*inaudible*) was reasonably safe yeh

I

At that time it was

J

Yeh, so all the ships kept to north African coast and they were on their own – making the best speed they could through the Mediterranean – still took us 5 days thou to get to Ports Head, but that was a good tour cos it kept coming over the tannoy where we were at you know – Iran and er Cape (*inaudible*) and all these places and yeh where all these places were, cos we were quite, we were only about 4 or 5 miles out to sea cos all the ships all followed each other down

I

Yes, just skip along the cost. But they let the convoy break up in the middle because there's no threat.

J

Oh yes break up and then we didn't have a convoy then we went down the red sea we didn't have a convoy then, but halfway down they did the lights – had complete blackouts again cos they said some of them (*inaudible*) and them places, they all had ages in there so we went down there on our todd and all and then we got to, we went in Ayden and stayed in there for – we were at Port (*inaudible*) for 2 days and then we went to Suez, then we went down the red sea – that was 5 days down there, then we went into Ayden and it was clear as clear the water eh, and these bloody great sharks flying round all on their backs, all looking up, and all the lads were looking up, and then one of the crew came out and hung a big notice – it said no bathing! Laughs And then we got a convoy from then to cos we still didn't know where we were going, then we got in convey again for another 5 days to across Arabian seas to Bombay and that's er – I wouldn't have missed it for the world eh – bloody exciting!

I

Great time – quite an oppoirtunity to have.

I can't think of nay more questions – thank you for your time it's been marvellous