

(incorporating)
Trans 12
Trans 12a

INTERVIEWS: JACK WOODARD - POW / FLORRIE SMITH - TWEENIE (FEB 1995)
TRANSC12.DOC

?: Good morning. What is your name, please?

J: Jack Woodard.

?: And your address?

J: 23 Lemonwell (?) Drive, Eltham.

?: And you've lived in Eltham all your life?

J: Yes.

?: What street were you born in?

J: I was born in Plumstead High Street, but moved to Eltham when I was about two and a half, three.

?: What road did you move to in Eltham?

J: Wendover Road.

?: And where did you first go to school?

J: My first school was Eldon Square school. From there I went to Enwick Road. From Enwick Road to Brisset Road.

?: Were there any teachers or personalities in your school life that you well remember because they were eccentric or something rather special?

J: My first headmaster, I shall never forget. Short, rounded-faced man. Mr H.H. Hunt. Always used to sign his name H.H. Hunt. All the H's. Another one was a Mr Bradford. He was the Art Master. He had a cauliflower ear, his right ear. The one and only teacher I got the cane from at Eldon Square. It wasn't my fault actually. I was dishing out rulers and someone told me that theirs was broken. I said "Don't tell me, tell him". I was caught telling him and I suffered for it. We had a Mr Martin, used to drive a little Morris Minor, a very handsome man, used to be the choir master at the church at the top of Shooters Hill, opposite The Bull. He was the organist there. There was a Mr Reeves, the Art Master. A very clever man with his paints and brushes. And Miss Shipman who had perpetual indigestion, was always supping hot water.

?: Are you religious? Did you attend a church or join the scout movement of anything like that?

J: I joined the cubs for a little while and I wa one of the original Eltham St John's Ambulance Cadets. I've still got my St John's Ambulance Certificate. I think the date on it is 1933. That's the Cadets. Mr Jumps the Superintendent, his son and I were the two originals to start the Eltham Cadets going.

?: Where did you meet?

J: In St Saviours Hall in Mayon Road. Whilst in St John's Ambulance I was asked if I would join the choir. Someone had heard me sing, "Would I be interested to join the choir?" St James's Church at Kidbrooke were looking for choirboys. Not mein particular. My voice was no great guns. But I was asked if I'd join cos they wanted recruits. I went up there. I had the audition, interview, and was asked to sing various chords. Because of nerves, each time I sang, my voice started and stopped. Nothing would come out. But, I sang there for some time. Then Mr Edwards the choir master, I found that it was interfering with my St John's

Ambulance clases, choir practice used to be Tuesdays and Thursdays and St John's Ambulance used to be Tuesdays and I couldn't get there in time.

?: Where was St John's Ambulance held?

J: IN St Saviours in Mayon Road, but of course I had to get to St James's Church Kidbrooke for Choir practice. And because of it that I left the choir. The choirmaster came after me and undertook to take me to St John's Ambulance as soon as choir practice finished. In his car, a little Standard Nine, he used to run me down to St James's Church.

?: Were you good at any sport? Where did you play?

J: I was Right Half at football and I got a cup winner's medal for Eldon Square School. I was brought in at the last minute. They wanted someone to make up the team at the last minute in the cup final against Hamo Road. I play right half. Suddenly I saw the ball coming towards me after a clearance by the goalkeeper and someone shouted "Shoot!". Which I did. To my amazement it scored. The one and only winning goal. I got my cup winners medal with my name on the back, but I don't know where it is now.

?: You were still living in Eltham on the outbreak of war?

J: I was living in Wendover Road, yes.

?: And you were going to work then? You had left school?

J: I worked for G & H Harvey at 14, in Greenwich. I was there for about a year. Then I left there. I was getting 9/6d a week there. I left there and went to Siemens for 10/6d a week. After being there about 6 months we were called out on strike by the AEU, which meant we got nothing at all. In the meantime I'd lost my father and things were a bit tight. Mother had put my name down for a job with the Council, which was reckoned to be a good job then. I eventually got the job as a tea-boy and went to work down Runningsford Road.

?: That was a Council establishment?

J: That was the Council laying out the roads for the estate down there. The roads and sewers. When the war broke out in 39 all building stopped, of course. We were then taken down to the covered market at Woolwich to put the underground shelters in there. Dug the underground shelters in the covered markets. When that finished it was just a question of biding your time waiting for someone to find work for you. In the meantime I joined the navy. It was obvious I was going to go into the services so I decided to try for the one I wanted which was the navy rather than the army.

?: What did you go in the navy as? What was your job?

J: I just joined as a seaman. From a seaman you graduate. You've got to take up some sort of trade and I became an ack-ack gunner, anti-aircraft gunner.

?: What action did you see?

J: Dieppe was my first trip.

?: With the Canadians, when they invaded the coast of France? Was that in 1942?

J: Yes. August 42.

?: What did you think of that action?

J: A shambles. When we got there, some Canadians were asked, "Where have you been? We've been waiting off you for 3 days." Whether this is true or not, I don't know. But we were a little unfortunate. The first wave that went in, run into a convoy of German ships that blew it up to the German authorities of course. They spotted us and that was it. When we approached Dieppe at just a little after six in the morning, it was just bedlam. There were tanks on the beach that couldn't get off. We got our tanks off. The tank mainly got off next to us.

?: What type of ship were you serving on at that time?

J: A tank-landing craft. That's all we carried, tanks. I think we had 3 Churchill tanks with the crews, Canadian Infantry. When we landed we got the tanks and troops off but the landing craft next to us - as we approached the beach the order was to start the engines of the tanks so that when we got there, drop the doors off and they would be able to get out. But the next ship was a bit too enthusiastic. They started the motors and went straight away through the door into 40 foot of water. But they got out of the tank. The landing craft went straight over the top of them but they got out of the tank, they survived.

?: Your tanks got ashore alright from your ship? Did you back out quickly?

J: We backed off. There was another landing craft that was crippled and we were told to tie up to that and wait for an escort back to Portsmouth. Before that could happen, we were in the pool and we were told then to let go of this crippled ship and go in and try and get them off. The RAF laid smoke for us. Not only us, but several ships. A destroyer came across our bows and backing in laying smoke the whole time. It was a most eerie feeling cos it was dead silence. All you could hear was the slap of the water. Then when you came out of the smoke, all hell let loose, one gigantic firework display. So many coloured tracer shells. As we went in, all the chaps that had got off the beaches - the beach was a bit like Brighton, where you come down the beach and there's a bank. They were hiding in that, under this bank to protect them from the Germans. As we came in of course they spotted us and they stood up and ran towards us and then Gerry cut them down. Our skipper said "That's it. Lets get out. We won't go in" and we tried to get out. But in the meantime we'd been hit, our engine room had been hit and we could get no reverse speed at all. We just drifted, further and further out and we were just a sitting target then. Eventually they hit us again below the water line and we just had to get over the side and did our best to get ashore. The tide was on the turn then and the tide took us round to Dieppe Harbour and there were German soldiers waiting for us. It's a strange world - I mean we were only 19 then. Yet you look around you and soldiers are only 19 now and you say "...(?) boys" Yet we did the self-same thing.

?: You were taken prisoner of war then, were you?

J: Oh yes. We left Portsmouth on the Monday morning. We didn't know where we were going. We finished up in Newhaven. We sailed to Newhaven at quarter past nine at night. We then landed at Dieppe at a quarter past six. We got in, got out, got in, got hit, drifted out - about a quarter past eleven we went down and we were in the water till about half past three. We were picked up..

?: Were you in boats or Carly floats?

J: No we just had cork life-jackets. That's all. Like 4 squares of cork, back and sides. That's all we had. We were eventually hauled ashore over the harbour wall at Dieppe and that was it all over.

?: Did the Germans treat you badly initially?

J: Initially they did, yes. Yes, they did in France. Well, there was no food for a start. There was nowhere to sleep. There was no clothing. Waiting to get off my landing craft I was in the hold because we were being machine-gunned since we showed ourselves, even in the water. They hit our diesel tanks and we got soaked, smothered in diesel oil. Our bodies got saturated

with it and we had to get rid of all this diesel oil clothing cos it was burning the skin. It burnt all the skin off your body. All I'd got was a pair of naval trousers and a naval shirt and that was it. When I got to Dieppe and I got picked up and the Red Cross gave me a pair of...it was rather funny, all I got was a pair of French riding breeches that were far too small, a blue civvy shirt, no socks, and a pair of wooden Dutch clogs. That's all I got. Trying to walk in those was, well! Looking at it now, it's laughable.

?: But it wasn't at the time?

J: No. You couldn't walk in the wooden clogs. We were walking bare-footed.

?: How long was it before you got some food then? Several days?

J: They marched us away to a camp, a French POW Camp. They marched us away there and all we were living on was, there was no water even, the water was just a trickle coming out of the taps. I suddenly found I was, we were laying on a pally-ass (?) and I suddenly found I was eating the straw out of the pally-ass. I said "Pull yourself together. You can't do that". And we didn't. Then we were put onto trains. No, we were moved to a brick factory and sorted out the following morning. I'd had my last meal on the Sunday before I left. We're now round to the Wednesday. I hadn't had a meal. I'd had a bit of bread and butter and a bit of bread and cheese on the ship going over and that was all. We came out of this brick factory on the Wednesday and 40 of us were put into these cattle trucks. We were given a tin of horsemeat, which is like a tin of stewed steak and a small loaf of bread to last us 4 days. That's where we finished up. On the train into Landsdorf. From Landsdorf we were searched again. They'd got cooked food, they called it. All it was was seashells, potato peelings, the whole lot just boiled up. They came out with a big dustbin and that was dished out to you. The only thing you could eat it out of, all I'd got, was the wooden clogs that I'd been wearing. Food was put in that and the inside pocket of my battle dress, this French battle dress. I tore that out. I was using it as a hat and I was also using it to put dinner in. We eventually got into the camp.

?: This camp was where?

J: This was Stalag 8B in Landsdorf.

?: In Silesia.

J: Yes. In Silesia. As I walked in, all the lads that were in there were giving us a cheer and wanted news. Someone said "Where you from?" I told him. He said "What regiment?" I told him, the navy. I suddenly felt like king of the castle. I'd got 2 Gold Flake cigarettes. One behind each ear. I think the other one was a John Player, smoking that walking up this roadway in the camp. When we got into the main block - There was hundreds and hundreds of blokes in there. Three tiers high in these bunks. No toilets inside. Everybody'd got dysentery. God, it was filthy. It stunk to high heaven. It was alive with flies. Terrible. Fortunately, after a while - I had that for a little while - that was in the August and in September, the Red Cross had kitted us with clothing, the army battle dress, and I went out to a working party in Beckendorf, close to the Czechoslovakian hills where the water had swept down from the hills and the mountains and has swept through the river bed and washed that away, washed a house away. We were trying to reinforce the banks but the frost was so deep in the ground we just couldn't do anything with it. We were just doing our best to sabotage the tools, just keep digging away with a pick until you got a hole and then lever to break the pick-shaft, break the handle.

?: Did life become tolerable?

J: It became tolerable. There was only 50 of us. We were kept billeted in a local guest house. We were paid, I think, 15 pfennigs a week. Camp money, not real German money. But we could spend it on pencils or a case of razor blades. We could even buy German civvy beer, which was like drinking Coca-Cola. The Burgomaster did change the money, you see.

From there we went to a sugar beet factory for the sugar beet harvest for 6 weeks there. When that finished they marched us on to a forestry party, lumberjacking, which again was beneficial to us cos we were getting Red Cross parcels. For a bar of soap you could barter that for bread, for eggs, for chocolate. Whereas the Red Cross parcels given you quality, what we wanted was quantity. We wanted the bulk to fill our tummies. Get the local bread and a few eggs off the local farmers, local peasants. They were terrified of the German guards of course.

But we had some very good chaps. We had one German guard, he was very very good, very nice chap, elderly man, he was to us then. He was like a father to us. He asked us one day if we could pick him some blueberries to take home to his wife. He lived in Leipzig. We said "Yes, of course" because he was good to us. He used to stick up for us. If the civvies (?) used to demand too much work from us, he'd stick up for us. We picked basket upon basket of blueberries for him to take home and his wife was delighted, sent us back various odds and ends, there was a tin opener, a pair of hair clippers, that sort of stuff. Very good, that Frank.

We had another one, Napoleon, four foot nothing, use to stand on the stump of a tree surveying everybody, watching everybody. Whereas Frank knew that we'd nip away into the bush for a bit of bartering - a bar of chocolate for a loaf or something like that - this Napoleon wouldn't have it. We tried numerous times to get old Napoleon. We'd get someone working one side and get his attention, and someone behind him sawing like mad at a tree trying to get the tree to fall on him. We missed him. We had a couple of close calls but we never got him.

There was another chap by the name of Martin, from Croatia, a slimy little chap. Shot two of our chaps and had a go at the third one. The third one went for the guy and got the rifle out of his hands. He was transferred. He went to what they called the Starclub (?) or punishment camp, either a coal mine or a stone quarry.

?: Were there any attempts made to escape?

J: Oh yes, several. We had a trap door underneath one of the beds in our little working party. The chaps would get out through the camp and they'd go away but unless you'd got a compass, there was so much forest around you, you'd lose your bearings. You didn't know where you were if you got lost. Chaps would escape. We had 2 chaps escaped and we thought they'd got away but they were picked up and apparently they were taken to one of the huts where they thought they were going to be fed and washed and cleaned up, but they were taken behind the hut and shot....(?) escaping. They had been, but they had been recaptured. No one from there really got away. You hadn't got a chance.

?: was there any tunnel building?

J: At Stalag 8B there was a tunnel. There was main tunnel in Stalag 8B that went from one of the huts, out under the wire and behind one of the watch towers. Providing you could speak the language, and get away with it, look the part and dress the part, they had an escape committee that would guarantee to get you out of the camp with clothing, with contacts outside and they'd fix you up with all sorts of things to get you out of the camp. But once you were out of the camp it was up to you. They'd give you the contacts and that was it. The contacts would get you through to Czechoslovakia, or to Spain or to Sweden. They'd get you out of the camp and get you on the way, they'd set you on the right road.

?: Did the Germans ever find that tunnel?

J: Yes. Someone gave the game away. A guard just walked in there one day with the Camp Commandant. He walked up to the bed and the guard stamped on the floor under the bed and there was the trap door leading out of the tunnel. The Camp Commandant was furious but congratulated the chaps that dug the tunnel. Promptly all these guards were sent to the Russian Front for letting the chaps get away with it, building it under their nose. That was promptly filled in of course.

?: When were you released? Were you released by the Americans or the British?

J: Neither really. It was January 21st 1945 It was my birthday. We'd left the working party. The day previous we'd broken up all the beds and made sledges and whatnot to carry all our gear. We then started marching and picked up other working parties on the way. We were heading West.

?: Had the Germans left you there?

J: No. The Germans were marching us. All going West away from the Russians because the Russians had started a big offensive. We'd crossed the Oder. The Germans blew the bridges there, over the Oder. We got across the Molder and when we got to the other side, the Germans wanted to keep us going but we said "No, we've had enough". We decided that we were going to have a rest.

?: You must have been cold?

J: No. WE were now into May and it wasn't quite so bad. I'd got an ulcerated right leg and left ankle so I was having problems getting about. On my hands and knees virtually. On this particular morning we said "No, we're going to have a rest. We've been on the move since 3 o'clock in the morning". To our amazement the German guards just fell into two lines alongside us and they turned round and marched back East and left us on our own. We made our own way to the Ell. We crossed the Ell and made our way into Leipzig. We had to wade across the Ell cos the bridges were down. When we got to the other side there were some American troops there and we asked them where we were supposed to go. He just turned his back on us and ignored us. So we had to find our own way as best we could. We got into Leipzig and we met the Russians and the German police. The German police took us to their flat and we heard Churchill's speech in their flat and we went back. Because my legs were so bad I was taken to a hospital, it was more or less a United Nations thing, every nationality in there. I went from there after 3 days and the Americans took me out of there, tried to get me into the Leipzig general, but that was full up. I was put onto a lorry and taken to Hally (?) Airport which was a big German Airforce base and from there given medical treatment. And from there flown down to Rheims and again put in hospital in Rheims and from Rheims home to Reading. A train from Reading to Northolt to Mount Vernon Hospital. I stayed there for 6 weeks.

?: When did you eventually get home? Your mother had moved during the war I believe?

J: My mother had moved. She was now living in Churchbury Road on the Middle Park Estate. Before I went, she moved into Middle Park but she had a flat. She went from a flat into a house. When I joined the Navy she was in the flats. When I came back she was in the house. My wife lived next door although I didn't know her then. Her father had put bunting up all outside, flags up "Welcome Home Jack". By the time I did get home it was tattered and faded and had virtually fallen down. He'd given up.

?: I take it that when you first went home you were on leave from the army? You didn't get demobilised immediately from coming from hospital I wouldn't think?

J: No. I came out of hospital, sent on sick leave. I had the sick leave, went back to hospital, given the okay, and from there I was sent down back to Portsmouth. When I got to Portsmouth, stayed there overnight, I was then sent to Stockheath Naval Camp. I was then sent on Repatriation Leave, Survivors Leave. Whilst on leave there I got a telegram "Report back for immediate discharge routine". I went back and I was demobbed there and then.

?: It was a job to settle down after your experiences, I should think?

J: Yes but at the same time, bear in mind, I'd been used to working hard, lumberjacking so working never came as a shock.

?: Did you easily find a job when you got back?

J: After the war the council had to hold your job for you, didn't they? I went back and I worked for the council for a time. I couldn't see any prospects there so I left and tried the post office.

?: Have you got any particular memories about Eltham in those early post-war years?

J: When you start to look back on how things have altered. Fisons little bakery down the bottom there with the cigar stall next to it. George's store next to that, where Boots are now, and the Express Dairy on the corner which became Eltham's first supermarket. And there was Grummets just round the corner, opposite The Crown where the Spastics Shop now is. Next door to the Crown was the little Gents Hairdressers. Chap always used to wear a wig that run that hairdressers.

?: Do you remember the last trams?

J: Yes. I've still got a ticket at home for the last tram. I've still got my Ration Book and Clothing Coupons. And I've got a voucher for a mattress. Do you remember Williamsons, used to be in the High Street?

?: Yes. I used to buy cakes in there.

J: It was The Restaurant then in Eltham. Before we had all these smelly Wimpys and McDonalds. The Clode Iron (?) Laundry, the bag wash behind Marks and Spencers, behind the Gas Board Showrooms.

?: Behind the furniture shop Simpsons which is now no longer.

J: It was Almonds at one time, then Simpsons had it. Or was it Bassett and Simpsons all the time? Harlemons used to be there, I'm sure. There have been so many little changes. The dairy on the corner of Pattison Yard. United Dairies on one corner and tobacconist on the other. Kingston the butchers. Coming up a bit further, alongside the bank there was the wallpaper shop and all the little shops there that Alders have now got.

?: In your youth do you remember the open market that used to be where Woolworths now is?

J: No. I remember the market used to be round the back there in the covered market. I don't remember the open market, no.

?: How long was it after you got demobbed when you got married?

J: Two years. I was demobbed - my actual leave finished in March 47, 46. I got married in 48.

?: Where did you go to live when you got married?

J: We had a couple of rooms in a council flat in Capital Road. We stuck that for 5 years and then we got a flat down on the Avery Hill Estate. Saniton (?) Court. Terrible place. In the meantime I joined the police. That was hopeless down there. After a few years down there we managed to get one of these up here at Leatherwell Court?

?: And you've lived there ever since. And a nice outlook on both sides.

J: Yes. Very pleasant.

?: Thanks Jack. Its been a pleasure. This was recorded on Monday 6th May 1985. It was recorded at Pipenhall Allotments along the Bexley Road.
END OF AUDIO TAPE SIDE A

SIDE B

?: Would you like to come down to Chippenham to live? Wiltshire?

F: Yes. There's plenty of places down there because I used to wrk in Wiltshire. In Bortwith(?) near Salisbury, when I was younger.

?: What did you do down there?

F: I was in service.

?: You waited on lords and ladies?

F: No I was the little tweenie.

?: Worked in the kitchen then?

F: Yes. Upstairs in the morning.

?: What time did you have to get up in the morning?

F: Six.

?: And work until..?

F: Until they finished dinner. They used to have late dinner parties.

?: Ten, eleven?

F: Mmm. Christmas Time we used to have to sleep out because the house was full.

?: Where did they used to put you up?

F: Down the village.

?: How much did they pay you a week for that?

F: I used to get thirteen and fourpence a month. Nine pound a year.

?: But you had all found.

F: Yes food. Not clothes. I used to have to buy my own clothes.

?: Didn't they fit you up with a uniform?

F: No. You had to buy it. We had cotton dresses made. Used to send down to my mother, say "I want a new cotton frock". She'd get it made for me.

?: On 13/4d a month.

F: Half crown a week.

?: Still, that was all you had to spend iton.

F: Well, fares to go home.

?: How often did they let you go home then?

F: Only in the summer. I couldn't go home half days, could I? I only had a half day or a day a month off. Couldn't pay all that money to go for a couple of hours.

?: That was Auntie Florrie Smith.