



The Friends of Chain Bridge Forge Geoff's War Time Memories

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Geoff's War - Geoff' War Time Memories

The following is a summary of an oral history with Geoff Dodd

VN680022 – 24th October 2011

Ian Geoff, your reminiscences about the second World War, we've been looking at other data and other sources and it was mentioned that there actually a bombing that occurred in Spalding, I was wondering whether you could tell me about that.

Geoff Well, I know there were a number of raids, a night raid of fire bombing which took out most of one side of the Market Place or rather Hall Place and part of the Market Place but I think, later on in the war, one Sunday afternoon we, in the house here, we heard machine gunning and of course immediately went out to see, to see what was happening and from the garden we could see, looking over towards Fulney that there was a Beau fighter and a twin engined German bomber of similar size in a dog fight. The Beau fighter, I think we must have missed most of it because the Beau fighter took off and we heard later on that he'd been damaged and had to disengage. The German bomber circled round and was heading towards ..., I think at this time it was probably somewhere over, quite a long way, Holbeach Road, roundabout the Pigeon pub I would think or perhaps even a bit further away. He circled round and headed towards us and, I mean, I actually saw five bombs leave the plane and my father said then 'quick get through the house and onto the road because there' and he was quite right but in fact the first bomb went over our heads, I mean we weren't watching by then but the first bomb landed behind Chishurst which was the house John Grundy's old home, the house this side of Cley Hall now gone of course and it landed only a few yards, between 10 and 20 yes in the garden behind the house. It was thinking, probably wasn't a very big bomb but there was quite a crater but it didn't do a lot of structural damage to the house itself, blew out all the windows of course.

Ian And would Spalding have been specifically targeted?

Geoff I don't think so, I think the pilot was just getting rid of his bombs, really but had turned to try and drop them on the town to at least do some damage that wouldn't be wasted altogether perhaps he thought.

Ian And what locations were you aware of at the time that the Germans had actually hit or had targeted?

Geoff Oh I don't think there was anything they would think of targeting in Spalding, possibly the beet factory but further inland I mean there was industrial... in say Peterborough and Grantham, probably more likely to have been the target. The first bomb had landed in Chislehursts, the second one by the old clinic in Holland Road, the third one landed just behind the Parish Church Day School, the fourth was in Ayscoughfee and the fifth was actually off, and those were all in line, was off line somewhere in ... at somewhere in Alexandra Road.

Ian I see. And were there casualties?

Geoff I don't think so. No, I don't think there were casualties at all. Grandfather had had the tiles on the workshop roof pointed up only a few months before and it rattled the whole lot loose. There was a blast right along the street because it flew, it broke the windows in what was then the Co-op shop, three or four doors ...

Ian And could you sense, could you feel the blast ?

Geoff Oh, yes.

Ian And as a, as a school child, if I could term it like that, would you have been aware of the types of planes that were overhead.

Geoff I should think I could have told you then that it was a Heinkel or a Dornier but not now. I should think there would be a record of it somewhere, I'm sure and the date of course.

Ian Yes, I seem to remember through reading sources it was something like 1942, in the middle of the war.

Geoff Yes

Ian Were there any air raid precautions in and around Spalding?

Geoff Er .. yes we had ... of course there were air raid sirens installed, one on the gas works building. There was organised fire watching and some local men on a rota, Lady Gleed next door lent us or lent them the a little out building right next door near the road and they were bunks in there, they slept, fortunately I don't think in this end of the town they were ever called out as at that time I ... in the outhouse was the fireplace and I every day provided kindling for the fire and filled up the fire bucket for them and from bits Lady Gleed gave them for fuel and they gave me a few pennies for that.

Ian And did you as a family have an air raid shelter?

Geoff No, we er.. Yes we .. I've forgotten which is which .. there were Anderson shelters and Morrison shelters.

Ian Ok

Geoff One was a ..

Ian Anderson, I believe, were situated in people's back gardens.

Geoff Gardens, yes, that's it

Ian The Morrison is the one

Geoff The tin one

Ian Was the one inside ...

Geoff The Shelter, that's right. We had one of those installed in our front room of the house there. My brother and I slept in it for a little while and then it minimal I should think and my mother then made up the bed on top of the shelter so that if there was an air raid then we had to clime inside it.

Ian And you mentioned largely wasn't specifically targeted, do you ever recall masses of planes going overhead? did you ever hear anything?

Geoff Yes, you could hear, nearly always at night time, I don't ever remember seeing, apart from that once in the afternoon when the German aeroplane in the sky to see it but in the early days of the war the air raid siren (disc stopped at this point)

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Ian So a continuation of the interview with Geoff Dodd – we were talking about the single raid that had occurred on Spalding where there was one stick of bombs that was dropped in and around Spalding. Could you tell me Geoff, did you carry a gas mask at that time?

Geoff Yes, we all carried out gas masks to school, don't quite remember how long, it didn't go on forever ...

Ian It tailed off.

Geoff Yes, its a little box with a shoulder strap. In grandfather's house, that's four doors along, no. 35, there's a cellar and air raid warnings went off in the early days of the war at night when German aircraft were in the area, I mean they really obviously were going overhead to find a target further inland but when the air raid, when the siren went we went to grandfather's house and went down into the cellar, as did his neighbours at no. 36 and 37. The men folk always went out into the road to see what might be happening but we weren't allowed. But again, that didn't last very long really and we soon realised it really wasn't ..

Ian And how often did the air raid sirens go off, I mean was that ...

Geoff Difficult to remember .. er .. I can't recall at all. A number of times we seemed to be down there, not every night, I'm sure it wasn't but it's such a long time ago.

Ian And what other things did you notice about Spalding, so you talked about the air raid sirens, obviously there was a Morrison shelter that you had, you talked about the gas masks, what other evidence of there being a war on could you remember, if any?

Geoff Not really very much until troops came to be billeted in the town and again I don't recall just when that was, certainly they were army huts built all around the Grammar School fields.

Ian And what nationality would they have been, would they have been British forces?

Geoff Oh yes, I think so, all of them apart from a few Polish officers, we've mentioned they came earlier in the war, I think to learn English really before they were transferred ..

Ian And was there a large RAF presence, I understand that obviously there were RAF bases in Lincolnshire?

Geoff No, not at all in the town, no.

Ian And can you remember anything about barrage balloons or ..?

Geoff I don't think we had any barrage balloons, but we had a number of search light and anti-aircraft sites, one at Four Cross Roads, where's that – beyond Fulney and between Fulney and Weston Hills and just where the others were I don't recall.

Ian And was there a Home Guard unit?

Geoff There was indeed. My father was a member of the Home Guard of the LDVs, Local Defence Volunteers as they were to start with, yes, he was member of the Home Guard all through the war.

Ian And can you remember him going to practice or ..

Geoff Oh yes, they had training sessions. When they did get some arms eventually, they were more prominent on parade days I think, than day to day.

Ian And as far as the .. if we can then move on to role of the blacksmith, we've already been able to highlight just what a key position it was within the town and the fact that the blacksmiths knew everybody and everybody knew who the blacksmith was, the sorts of work that your .. when your grandfather and father were in operation, what sort of work would they have been dealing with on a day-to-day basis?

Geoff Er .. still I would think, mainly farm work and work for builders and contractors, ironwork, garages, whoever ..

Ian And you, we've already illustrated the fact that the number of horses being shod fell appreciably from before the First World War compared, for example, just after the war, my question to you is what would have filled the gap? What would ..? How would the business have subtly changed over that time?

Geoff You mean post war? The .. er.. one thing that cropped up was the horticultural industry began to get underway again and when my father was able to start doing some work that wasn't too heavy, we did quite a lot of greenhouse heating, installing hot water pipes in greenhouses which were being built just after the war, obviously hadn't been many built during the war, fitting boilers and pipes, mainly welded, one or two cast iron, growers bought second-hand cast iron piping. A lot of greenhouses down in the ... what's the valley just north of London .. a lot of old fashioned wooden greenhouses were being demolished and they were modernising, taking out the old cast iron pipes and we re-installed those for local growers. It was rather cheaper than fitting new pipes.

Ian So it really was a continuation of the make do and mend philosophy.

Geoff Yes, yes, yes, yes and if they weren't using cast iron pipe but were using second hand 4 ins steel pipe which I think mainly came from ships boilers.