

It's the 25th of April 2025 and this is Toby interviewing Ewan Wannop about his experience of the Second World War and VE Day.

When were you born and where? In March 39 in Aberdeen, North East Scotland.

Is this way you spent the War? Yes.

Who were you living with during the war and what occupations were they doing?

It was my mother, father and my elder brother and elder sister, and my brother and sister were at school, and my father was working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, working in farming. He was sent over to the USA as he was trying to improve farming in the UK, to make it more efficient because one of the things in the war, was we needed to grow as much food as we could. So he was working doing that and he was sent over to the United States at one point on a ship, because we can't fly over in those days. He was sent over there to look at their farms to see what benefits were from that, and it turned out he found their farms were far less efficient than others!

What can you remember about the war? Well, I was young, of course, when it started, so it was about mid time of the war I started remembering things, but I remember going to school with my gas mask. I had my gas box in a little box which I had to take to school at first, but I don't remember that was all the way through, I think they realized the Germans wouldn't be dropping gas after a bit and so we didn't have to carry those.

My house had iron railings outside and those were all taken down to melt down for munitions, that was that was common all over the country. I don't remember, but what would have happened was that aluminium saucepans were handed in because aluminium was easy to melt and reuse but was more difficult to mine and get it out from the ore, so there was a big drive to get saucepans to make spitfire parts with.

What do you remember about the rationing? We had a ration book, of course, we were allocated to a particular grocer or a shop selling food, and my mother would go in and she would ask for a pound of sugar or she probably wasn't allowed that much, but her allocation of sugar, and they would put it into bags of a special paper called sugar paper, probably have heard of sugar paper and it's a thickish paper, usually blue or brown and so you would buy your food like that and then she'd have to hand over the coupons from a ration book to get the food. She's only allowed so much and it was very little. The government didn't ration bread, that was deliberate, so at least people could have something nutritious to eat, but if you made a slice of toast and put the butter on, it was dug out of all the holes. There was so little butter, and you had to be very careful, but it was enough to be nutritious and keep you going. We had a benefit, though. My father was from farming stock and so we used to get food parcels ever so often from the farm with things like sausages and meat because they could kill a pig and, this kind of thing. And then we also had cousins in Australia, and they would send over food parcels. There was a bit of sacking, I remember, over it, and in there would be things like jellies and chocolate because there were no sweets available in any of the shops during the whole war, and they didn't appear until three years after the war, I think it was '48 or

something that sweets actually came along because sugar was needed for the other things. So there was limits on certain foods, but we used to get these parcels from Australia, and they had to come over by sea, because again, you know, there were planes, but not in the way we think of it today. They came over by sea and inevitably the chocolate would be all covered in white because it is hot in these boats coming on up from Australia and up through the tropics, and so they'll be white bloom on the box of chocolate. And you'd have to scrape it off in order to eat! And things like jellies too, there were odd little sort of concentrated jellies which had fruit and stuff in them, and you melted with water and made jellies. The milk we got was unpasteurised in those days, so what you did was all the milk that was left over you let it curdle and it you could make cottage cheese from it.

Did you experience any bombing? Not directly except at the end of the street, there was one at the end of streets. I remember they used to have a lot of water tanks all over the place, to help their fire engines put out fire and there was one which I remember was either round and then it went square or was square and went round where a bomb had dropped on it, and that was at the end of the street, which was several houses up anyway, but that's all I remember. Aberdeen was a fishing port and that was bombed as it was on the east coast so easy to get to from Germany, so they came over and they bombed the port a lot and obviously one went a bit too far and dropped one nearby. But we had the brown tape on all windows. You've probably seen of that. And I also remember that the searchlights at night, when planes came over, the searchlights were these beams, you know, going on the sky to catch the planes so the Anti-aircraft guns could shoot them down.

Did you have any family members or close friends serving in the forces? No, my brother was born in 1931, so he was nine or ten or so when it started and 16 when it finished and then my father was working for the government. When he went on the ship to America, he was lucky that the ship didn't get bombed. There was eight passengers on it, so I'm not sure what else was on the boat but one of the passengers was Nils Bohr on his way to America to develop a nuclear bomb.

Do you remember the announcement of the end of the war? I don't remember it specifically, but I mean we had a radio because there was no television, of course, in those days, well, it had been invented, but it wasn't available anywhere. So we had radio and we listened to the news on the radio or the newspaper, but I don't remember it because it was only six so I don't remember any street parties either related to that.

But I remember Churchill came to Aberdeen once on a visit and all the crowds were on a street corner watching this open top car going past. There is one thing I do remember at one point, one night all the searchlights went on now that may have been VE Day I'm not sure. I also remember VJ Day, which was the next year (actually a few months later) when Japan fell and seeing photos, mother father used to get the picture post, it was a magazine based on photographs and there were photographs of the Hiroshima damage.

What was life like after the War ending? Well, it carried on because the rationing carried on for some years in one form or another, I think up to the early 50s, but that's all I knew I'd known.

How did you end up in Box? I left school in 1957, which is 12 years after the war, and I went down to London as a student for a year, and in walking round London you could still see bomb sites because they got most damage, of course in London, so there was still bomb sites and damage there in '57, and even when I went back as a student in '61 because I went back again as a photographic student, I wandered around London and it was still bomb sites in the mid 60s in London.

I saw an article on the noticeboard, they wanted a technician and lecturer at the Bath Academy of Art, which was up in Corsham at the time. So that brought me down to Corsham and then I looked to find the house well first of all, there was residential accommodation, so I was put in over the summer in one of the huts, but we had to move out of there when the term started, so looked round to find a house, came down here. This was on the market saw this and bought it and my wife at the time was very upset because she wasn't there at the time but when she saw the house she said I've done a good job. So that's what brought me to box and then I worked at up in Corsham right through until the mid-80s when we'd physically moved into Bath. So there was no point in me moving because it was just meant that way instead of that way into work. And then I retired from there, got earlier retirement in 97, so I've being retired now for 28 years, something like that.

Is there anything else you remember about the war that you think we would like to know? My brother, being older, was interested in airplanes and I remember him coming back one day, he had gone to Dyce aerodrome which now is Aberdeen Airport, but then it was just a small aerodrome with pilots flying down all the whole of the east coast, and he came back with a bit of a propeller, which looked to me just like a bit of plywood and it was sort of yellow and black and green I think, but it was a bit of propeller from a crashed plane. He also I think brought some a little switches the kids were going up finding these crashed airplanes and stripping bits off that could have as souvenirs and bits of shrapnel, I think occasionally from aircraft the anti-aircraft shells exploded in the air to try and knock a plane down but of course it's all going to fall down, and bits of that were collected and remember that. But apart from that, I don't remember that much.

For news, you would go to a cinema and they showed newsreels. And that's all they showed just nonstop, so a show lasting perhaps half an hour that that was a way you could get what nowadays you'd see on TV news. You could go and see films and often there were in in theatres as well. I remember there was a big theatre in Aberdeen and they would have pantomimes and things at Christmas, but they had a screen that could come down so they could turn it into cinema and that's where I saw probably Cinderella first.