

John Maurice Hubbard

Memoirs & a career in the defence of the realm

Background

John will begin his interview by giving some background to his family and how they moved from post war France to England in 1919. John focuses on his mother, born in the Somme region of northern France in 1906. She was to experience the horrors of the Great War, a time in her life she was at pains to forget, as she moved to London. John recalls members of his family, centred around the small town of Steenvoorde and recounts visits to the area, which he made later in his life. An interesting section of John's memoirs recounts a Polish uncle, who was forced to choose between making uniforms for the Germany Army in World War two, or certain death in a concentration camp. His mother met and married his father, a Londoner and John was born, the youngest of two brothers at the family home in 1932. At this time, the family was living in Welling, Kent, but soon moved to Edmonton, North London. John's father was himself a war Veteran, having served in the British Army in a Kent county regiment.

Wartime years

John was approaching his seventh birthday when the second world war began on 1st September 1939. He was attending a primary school on Edmonton, north London and has vivid memories of the period that became to be known as "the Blitz". John describes how the family would retreat to the Anderson shelter in the garden, or more commonly to the Coal cupboard under the stairs. He tells of hearing the whistling of the bombs as they fell on London, the explosions and flashes of light created by the blasts.

Evacuation

In 1941, the danger posed to John and thousands of other children by German bomb raids on the capital, was greatest. This forced the government to initiate the evacuation of children to the countryside. John accompanied his brother and cousin onto an Omnibus, left his parents behind and was transported to Clacton upon Sea in Essex. However, it soon became apparent that Clacton was none too safe, as Sea Mines were drifting onto the shore, as well as the town being on the flight path of the waves of German bombers attacking the capital. Repatriation to London was soon followed by a second evacuation. This time John was to find himself stepping off a train in the Welsh capital, Cardiff.

There followed a random placement with a family of Welsh Miners, the Davies' of Ystrad in the Rhondda valley. John describes a wonderful welcome to the hillsides, by a caring family. The lives of Mrs & Mrs Davies were already heavily effected by the war. Their son Dennis was serving as a fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force. John has mixed memories of his time under

the care of the Davies' in Ystrad. He describes feeling welcomed by the family and playing with friends in the abandoned mines and mountains nearby. He also recounts visions of the German bombers attacking the docks in Cardiff and watching the dog fights overhead, as the RAF Spitfires furiously defended the skies over Cardiff. However, his memory of the evacuation is tinged with sadness, as he recalls witnessing Mrs Davies receive the news that Dennis had been killed in action, whilst flying his RAF Spitfire. That sad event would lead to his mother recalling John back to London.

Return to London

Leaving the relative safety of the Rhondda valley behind, John found himself living back with his parents in Edmonton. The threat from the Luftwaffe was still very real and apparent. John describes seeing the V1 rockets flying over London and exploding in the streets. Like many who experiences these terror weapons, John used the familiar term "Doodlebug" to describe them.

Fortunately, the defeat of Nazi Germany followed. The bombing came to an end for London. Twelve year old John joined the whole community, as everyone came together to celebrate Victory in Europe day.

Post war years

John returned to school and finished his studies. A positive set of results allowed him to join Engineering college. Engineering was to become his lifetime career. He qualified with a HNC and was on his way to becoming an accomplished Draughtsman. However, now that John had reached 18 years of age, he was called to complete his mandatory national service. John doesn't know how, but was pleased to have his engineering qualification recognized by the Army, as in 1950 he was draughted into the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Military service

John humbly describes his national service. A period of his life, where he is called upon to focus on many laborious routine tasks, which he describes in the film. John was stationed at Aldershot barracks and remembers the most important task he was given was to assist with the Army's geographical mapping, Unfortunately, John contracted Pneumonia, which led to an long recovery in hospital. The Army discharged John, which allowed him the time to recover his health.

Defence engineering

Following his service in the REME, John was to resume a career in the Engineering industry. His first placement as a Draughtsman was with Sangamo Weston Limited. He spent some ten years developing his knowledge and expertise with the company. John worked with projects that supplied complex platforms to the armed forces and remembers designing componentry for airframes such as the highly successful Vickers VC10 and the Panavia Tornado multi role combat aircraft. Both of these aircraft were used extensively over a long period of time by the Royal Air Force. John joined the Technical Services department of Marconi Space Defence Systems Limited, based at Elstree, London. It was in this highly technical team that in 1979 John worked on advanced Radar technology. This Radar was fitted to the previously mentioned Tornado MRCA that allowed the aircraft to hug the ground to avoid detection by enemy radar. This system achieved notable acclaim during the 1990 Gulf War in the middle east, as the RAF pilots flew ultra low level, to avoid detection by the Iraqi ground defence shield.

Those early post war years, studying at college and those childhood days in the Rhondda valley watching the dog fights over Cardiff may have influenced John to serve our country throughout a successful career in defence engineering.