

ORAL HISTORY - I (INTERVIEWED BY R)

Transcriber's initials: ICH

Sensitive topics: drowning, war, violence towards animals.

P1: So, my first question for you was, so we've spoken about your experience as an evacuee during the war so can you tell me a bit more about that experience?

P2: Aw yeah... Do I begin now?

P1: [chuckles] yeah, you can begin, yeah.

P2: I was, eh, evacuated for the second time down to Port Patrick. I don't recall much about the first time, other than the fact that, uhh, my big brother and I were in a house in [inaudible] Avenue. Other than that I don't have a lot to recall, except for an incident which took place on the Burlaps Bank. They call it the Burlaps Bank because in the days of sailing ships they would come in loaded with burlaps which they emptied on the beach in order to take on a cargo and go elsewhere. So, this place down at the [inaudible], the Burlaps Bank, eh, Ayrshire, made up of boulders that were... secured in the keel of the boats to keep it stable. And the reason I remember it was that lots of juvenile fish had congregated off of the Burlaps Ban and my brother was keen to catch them. They were coalfish and they called them [inaudible]. And, eh, I just wandered about while he fished. But while I was doing that I, unfortunately, slipped on the rocks and slipped into quite deep water. My brother was sufficiently alert to, uhh, I don't know whether he dived or... uhh, I have no idea, but he secured me and pulled me out. [Sensitive content saved elsewhere]

P1: Oh no. How old were you and your brother? How old were you when this happened?

P2: Ohhhh, he was... I was 7. He... was 6 years older, so about 13. That's when that happened [inaudible].

P2: And that left me with, uhh, Granny M, her neighbor. An old lady who lived on her own, uh, a mile outside Port Patrick. And there was no electricity. And she had [inaudible]. And it's only the other day, when I was ironing a shirt, how she managed to iron her clothes. Would you believe? She had a cast iron iron with a hole in the back of it, and to heat it she had a [inaudible] that she put in the range fire to make it red hot, and when it was red hot she picked it out with tongs and fitted it into the back of her iron.

P1: Ohhh, okay!

P2: I only thought about that the other day! [chuckles] Really, it was so primitive. There was no toilets, there was an outside... toilet of sorts. And, uhh, she, [inaudible] said to me, "I wonder if you would mind not using that?" and, uhhh, when [inaudible] arrives if you would just go up in the fields. I did so, because... uhhh... it must have been unpleasant for herself, looking after herself.

P1: Hmmmm, yeah .

P2: And I, because I fitted in so well, I, for the first time – at that time I was 8 years old of age – and for the first time I was free.

P1: Yeah.

P2: She put, uhmmm, no impositions on me at all. She fed me. I remember that she mentioned that she got 10 shillings a week for looking after me.

P1: Okay, yeah.

P2: Shall I go on?

P1: Yeah! Was your brother not there the second time with you then?

P2: No, no! This time I went with my two sisters, J and E, but they split us up. And my two sisters were boarded in a house up on the high ground at the top of Port Patrick. And I even remember the name of the house! It was called Ben [inaudible]. And I... didn't miss them at all. I fitted into the idea of being out... my surroundings were gorse. It was a single track road on the high road side, stone dyke, and the nearest neighbour down the road was a [inaudible] and

about a half a mile, and the same on the other side. The field adjacent to the cottage I stayed in belonged to the crofter on the far side, and he had two horses. One was called June and the other called Bobby. Now, if I was going in the same direction as D then I got a ride on the back of June... but Bobby was a *psychopath!*

P1: [laughs]

P2: And, there was a wee bit of high ground on top of a rabbit warren in the field next to the cottage and if I wanted to go in that direction I crept up the dyke, the wall, and he was watching my every move.

P1: Oh no.

P2: It never occurred to me that I was the only living person he had seen perhaps for... a week? And so when B saw me [inaudible]. He would launch himself down at me and I had to squirm over the dyke to avoid him... and he would stick his head and neck over the dyke and snort. He scared the wits out of me... On reflection, I think he wanted company. Shall I go on?

P1: Yes, yeah! The next question I had for you was... So, I know when you were a bit older you spent some time in the army. So, do you want to tell me about your experience in the army?

P2: Well, I [chuckles] I... I should have kept a low profile. But I didn't, I saw it as a bit of a joke. It all hinges on about a half a minute of, uhhh, of what happened. There was nobody attending to us. I was in a squad of, uh, 50 guys and, uh, nobody seemed to be paying any attention to us. In a classroom we were all sitting down, so I got up and clowned about... and did a sort of Laurel and Hardy [inaudible] the blackboard. And to my horror, at the back, the door had a wee diamond shape glass window. And when I looked up, after I had taken my applause, I looked up and I was appalled to see the face of the Seargent whose job it was to pick the next generation of instructors. [Inaudible]. I was unaware of it. My shorthand was good because I could do shorthand before I went into the army. Rumour has it – the Americans call it Scuttlebug – but rumour has it that there were two cracking postings going. One was [inaudible] and the other was for the Swedish Consulate and I convinced myself that one of them was mine, and my

colleagues all got posted, all got posted... And, uhh, about a fortnight later I was looking at standing orders and one of my mates said to me "What are you doing?" and I said "I'm waiting to be posted." And he said "You've got [inaudible]. You're permanent staff here, an instructor. And I thought, Ohhh, well. And I went up to apologise to them, but they were a fortnight behind in their shorthand, but I made it up to them. I said, "I'll give you extra time in the evening if you like" and they make sure you did too. And I did! I was wide open, any one of them could've... especially the regular guys. It was more important to the regular guys than it was to the National Service. However, nobody took advantage of that and I got them through with, uhh, I wouldn't, I don't know if... flying colours. Certainly I didn't get any... Anyway, time went by and I spent two years [chuckles], two years in [inaudible]. And, uhh, I made the best of it.

P1: Yeah

P2: [inaudible] The regimental Sergeant Major at that time... they were always looking for sportsmen. I was never a sportsman, I didn't enjoy team games. But he... in particular, they were looking for boxers. So, the RSM started up a tug o' war team. Which... they weren't keen on, it wasn't the same... It didn't have the same kind of pizzazz as boxing or football or any team game. But the curious thing is that the RSM knew what he was doing and I joined in right at the very beginning. And we started to win. And, uh, to begin with we were completely ignored by the Officers, I mean the commissioned [?]officers. Later [inaudible] turned up and we continued to win. And we took on the best, we took on the air force, we took on the guards, we took on anybody who had a team. And we continued to win! [laughs].

[inaudible]

We got as high as seventh command [laughing] And would you believe somewhere in the house there's a wee medal!

P1: Oh, do you still have a medal?

P2: Ohhh, I think maybe N's put it in [inaudible] somewhere. We won the seventh command. I got devolved [?] so I missed out on the final. But the tale went on to take the Army championship, tug o war.

[inaudible section]

And the only reason I joined was because I heard after every training session, you got a steak dinner

P1: Oh, nice!

[laughter]

P1: I like the motivation, I like the motivation!

P2: [laughing] That was the only motivation. A steak dinner! And, and we did! And we did. Big plateful of steak and roast potatoes.

P1: Ohhh, it sounds lovely!

P2: Well, it was, it was better than the usual fare. Now, is that enough?

P1: Yeah. So—

P2: No! I'll go on, I'm in your hands now

P1: [chuckles] So, the next question I was gonna ask was sort of moving on to your work life. You've spoken to me previously about your experience alternating between the different newspapers.

P2: Oh, yes!

P1: So, do you want to tell me a little bit about your experience working for the different newspapers?

P2: Well, I would like you to edit what I'm about to tell you.

P1: Okay.

P2: Because it involves names.

P1: Okay. So, this recording is going to go to C so if you don't want to mention names, maybe give them a fake name or don't mention the names, just refer to he/him, or she.

P2: It wouldn't be difficult to put two and two together and when I'm finished I'm sure you'll see why.

P1: Okay

P2: The highlight of my experience, or – well not quite, not quite. When I went back into [name of newspaper], when I went back into a well-known newspaper for the second time. Now, something odd must've happened in Head Office. And when things go wrong, Head Office is usually inclined to point the finger at the branch office. And what happened was... we had a chief reporter, who really was the, uh West Coast [chuckles]... oh, I'm giving the location – was the local editor. And, on the Monday morning he got a note on his desk which had said, briefly, "clear your desk and go." Shortly after that my own boss on the advertising side got the same note – "clear your desk and go." I had, uh, one colleague at the time – so you can imagine that... there was a feeling of insecurity right across the branch office. What happened thereafter was I got three bosses in succession that came through. One was a middle management from head office. The second one was – I remember his name and appearance – I think he was an ex-policeman, he struck me as being an ex-policeman, but he was also very high up in [inaudible]. The first one from head office disappeared after two or three weeks, because working in a branch office he didn't have the same [inaudible] as working in main office. The second one... just was a bit foolish. He took a client out and it transpired that the expenses were more than the revenue he had generated in [inaudible]. Now, the third one... is something else. And you'll realise why I don't want to mention names. He was a former shark fisherman. What he did was he had a boat and harpooned. And off the west coast of Scotland there is a shark called the basking shark. It is completely harmless. It feeds on plankton. It skims the surface with its mouth wide open. But, the thing about them is it can weigh up to 4 tonnes. And in that 4 tonnes it has a liver that can weigh up to 3/4s of a tonne. And when you take this liver and boil it down it produces a very, very fine oil. And at that particular time the oil was in great demand by, Sweden, for example. It was used in special treatment of making fine steel articles. Like ball

bearings. And... to look at it now, and even then [inaudible]. Because they hauled the sharks up on the unpopulated parts of the western islands and set up the boilers and, as far as I understand it, you could smell the [inaudible] of their endeavours from a long way off. Now, the bottom fell out the market because the Swedes created a, uhh, substitute... I don't know. The oil was no longer required. So, this chap came in and uhhh... we became friends. As well as being my boss, we became drinking companions. There was no doubt about it, I enjoyed his company and he enjoyed mine. Things went well, I'll miss out a lot of details. He wrote a book!

P1: Ahhh okay.

P2: And I've got a copy in the house somewhere. You can look it up [laughs] electronically. It's caled Sharko.

P1: Sharko? Okay

P2: And when he came into the office I kind of recognised him right away because prior to that he had the full front page, would you believe, of [name of newspaper]. Oh [laughs]

P1: Oh, were you not meant to mention that?

P2: But no, but anyway we became friends. We drank and we shared a degree of humour. He didn't like any kind of criticism. [inaudible]. In order to create a kind of menace... he used a bird... called the great black-backed gull as part of his imagery. Now, it's a big bird, it's got about a 5ft wingspan. It's a bit of a villain out on the western isles but it's not menacing. [inaudible] He used an illustration of a gannet, head-on, which looks far more [inaudible 28:37]. And, uh, I asked him about it. I said, your copier refers to the great black-backed gull and yet you've illustrated it in your book with a head on view of a gannet. Well... uh... you know, you're not supposed to do that. Uh.... I suppose there is a... a kind of... freedom of expressing... Anyway, that came and went. But there were other wee... episodes. And... uhh, on one occasion when we were both, uh, both of us had been drinking too much and with... uhh, an audience there, he turned on me. [inaudible] I, to this day I have no idea why. I don't think about it anymore.

[inaudible] Actually, we had handbags at dusk [laughs]. Anyway, I gave my notice immediately

the following morning. And Head Office refused it! [inaudible 30:30]. They fired him! And they offered me the, uhh, uh, management of the Branch Office. I was [sighs] I was very uncomfortable. I didn't like their attitude, I thought it [inaudible 31:00]. So, I, I declined. I said, no, I don't think so. I think I left at that time... [mumbles] I think I'd seen enough. Now, on that note of enough! Is that enough?

P1: That's perfect! The next thing that I was going to ask you, and this is something we've spoken about before B, is you have a great story to share about the Cowal Gathering.

P2: Oh, yes! [laughs]

P1: So, do you want to tell me about that?

P2: That was good fun! Well, I thought I had told you most of it. Uh... Dunoon was a *dump*. Oh, it was... even during the day, you could feel it.

[mic crackling]

P1: That's okay.

P2: Yeah, you could feel it. It was just, uhh... uhhh, unpleasant. There was an American depot ship around the corner... to supply, and... the... uh, atomic submarines... [inaudible]

The big depot ship was parked in the Holy Loch which was about 3 miles, and no more than that, round the corner from Dunoon. And, the local traders didn't like them at all, because they had what I think they called the PX? Like a kind of [inaudible 33:09]. For their domestic needs, and food, and even for presents and, uhh, they were far superior to anything, I think, that the local traders... so, according to what I heard the Americans didn't go into Dunoon.

P1: Yeah.

P2: In spite of that, I went for a pub in the evening and, ohhh, it was excruciating! The lights were on only behind the bar. And the rest of the pub was in total darkness. Needless to say, I chose the darkness. There were, uhh, about half a, no more than half a dozen [inaudible] up at the bar, chatting away and laughing. But, uhmm, and a couple of guys, but the guys were local. They were there to invite the Americans, but I didn't see an American sailor in the two days I

spent in there. So, it was a dump! And the traders weren't happy because according to the publicity manager, the folks on the high street, who refused to contribute to any kind of publicity, were on the backs of the people on the main street and vice versa. So, there was a bit of... uhhh... dispute, between the high street and the main street... the usual sort of thing, everybody thought somebody else was getting more [inaudible]. And that was the reason why the publicity guy said to me "you're wasting your time." And, again, I was a fresh start in another newspaper, another national newspaper, and I didn't want to go home empty-handed. So, I persevered. You'll smile when I say my [inaudible 35:46] was to start in the local pub!

P1: Okay, yeah. Interesting.

P2: [Laughs] I picked up, uhh, couple of inches here and couple of inches there. [inaudible] I'm not going to obviously make a page out of it. But I began to think about a [inaudible 36:21] and an expanded caption underneath. And I thought I could do that, and the folks would be happy. And I started to make out a bit of a plan on a sheet of paper and I became aware of standing beside me. And it was the publicity guy and he said, "How are you getting on?" and I said "Well you were quite right when you said it would be hard-going!" I said, but I might be able to persuade them of a [inaudible 37:05], a photograph blah, blah, blah. And he said [laughs] he must've just taken pity on me! And he said "put me down for my usual [inaudible] and pick it up before you get home". And he spurred me into action. Do you know who I remember most out of the people I called on?

P1: Who?

P2: Two old ladies! Who ran what they call "The Sewing Bee". And they were so charming! They twittered away [titters]. You know I wouldn't say they were straight out of Dickens, but they belonged to a different age! And they [inaudible]. They stick in my memory because, uhh, they were great! Two old sisters, I think they were. Oh, my goodness. The Sewing Bee in Dunoon... Anyway, I came back with the page plans and the revenue, what it amounted to, revenue. And the answer came back, "Nice try — but." Nice try - but. I thought well, well, I can't complain.

Apparently, Dunoon, it was then I was told, Dunoon had never been done because it was a [inaudible 39:08]. So, I was happy enough with what I'd done but disappointed that it was never going to appear. And then minutes later they came back and said "They're going ahead with it!"

P1: Wow.

P2: The circulation manager had, uhh, he said he would put... incidentally, to put a page in a paper at that time, just before [inaudible 39:40] and I wrote about 120 shorts. Or something like that.

P1: Amazing!

P2: So the circulatory manager said I'll contribute, run the page, and I'll [inaudible 40:02] in Dunoon and the area at the same time. So, I got brownie points I tell you! All the way down the line. And the weather was favourable, and the day trippers started coming across and everybody was happy. And three old guys called up my boss and said 'can you send the same chap down here; I'd like him to do the same for the Cowal Gathering.' But when I heard about it I said... "It's only a two-day event!" I remember complaining and saying, "It's only a two-day event! What does he expect?" But, I was wrong! It was already well-established. But, you could never count on it. So, I did the same thing again. And it was a real success. That was the, uhhh... The Cowal Gathering, the first time, I believe, that they had gathered a crowd in this kind of... not hundreds... all the pipe bands and... So, they had these bands marching down the High Street. And a lot of them marched down the main Street, as well! Well, there you are...

P1: Brilliant, what an achievement!

P2: Oh, well it's nothing now! It is nothing! Really, it's nothing. But at the time I thought, "I like this job!"

P1: Good!

P2: [inaudible, mumbling] But, I was part of it. And it wasn't a question of feeling important, it was feeling part of it.

P1: Yeah.

P2: Are you not tired of listening?

P1: No, not at all! Not at all. I only have one more question anyway and I know H is gonna find them very interesting, and C will find them very interesting when they listen to them. So I've got one last question for you if that's okay and if you've still got time?

P2: Yes.

P1: So, my last question is, for as long as I've known you now I know how much you love nature and how much you used to love being out in nature, so I was gonna ask you where your favourite place has been to visit? Favourite place you've ever been to. It could be in Glasgow or outside of Glasgow.

P2: My favourite place? [sighing] I'll tell you the place I went to most often—

P1: Yeah.

P2: —was the Linn Park. During the week there was nobody there. There was a flat part of it at my end and the same at the

[inaudible]

Oh, my goodness, how lucky. It was outside Eaglesham – I'll tell you it. My favourite place was the Fenwick moor.

P1: Whereabouts is that?

P2: It's on the far side of Eaglesham

P1: Okay, yes.

P2: Uhhh... there is virtually nothing between Eaglesham and Fenwick. Fenwick is halfway to Kilmarnock but on either side, on the right-hand side there were lochs. On the right-hand side, the land just stretched away. Wild heather on grass. And... no trees! No trees, all the way.

Fenwick Moor, the whole area up there... [inaudible]

P1: Wow, that sounds beautiful

P2: We collected eggs[?]. And I'm ashamed to say it now, I destroyed them all about 5 years ago, I just put them all in the bin. It was a kind of tail end to the Victorian era where people shot

everything in sight and women were decorated in rare bird feathers and that sort of thing... A feather boa... and uhhh, I remember... fox furs, with the glass eyes. And they all had them, my mum had them too! But, she was actually way ahead of her time, she was a member of, ironically enough, the RSPB. But she never knew that we were combing the district for birds that nobody was aware of. But, anyway... I'm thoroughly ashamed of that.

[talking about time spent as an evacuee in Port Patrick] I'll tell you another thing I'm thoroughly ashamed of. And that was when I arrived, because I was unsupervised, when I opened the shed next to the cottage and the first thing I encountered was half a dozen gin traps hanging up. And, everybody in the countryside had them, traps. [inaudible] and rabbits out there constituted a fair amount of... anyway, I quickly, and I hope I'm telling it correctly, I quickly switched to snares. But, you know, snares were really cruel... really cruel. I don't want to think about that too much.

P1: Yeah. Well, your favourite place sounds lovely though! Definitely a recommendation for me as well. I might have to go and have a little visit because it doesn't sound like it's too far away. So, I'll definitely have to have a little look there.

P2: Oh, really?

P1: Definitely!

P2: Oh [laughs] keep me up to date!

P1: I will do.

P2: Oh, how I miss not being able to get out and about! The Linn Park... really the whole area, on the Southside, we thought it belonged to us!

P1: I've never been there either, so I'll have to have a look there, in Linn Park as well

P2: I have stories about the Linn Park, all very different now. They had a wee rockery. There was, at that time, a big house, a state house that had... I don't know what they used it for. A tea room? Even at my time. [inaudible] And on the north side of it there was a golf course, and the golf course merged into a marsh. And there was a lane they called Lovers Lane and it ran alongside what they call wetlands. And it was inhabited by red shank and lapwings... you never

see that... anyway, I get nostalgic... Oh yes, the rockery! If you stood quietly, with a bit of luck, it was the home of a family of weasels.