

# Veterans' Voices

## Mary Sim

### Transcription & Glossary



My name is Mary Ann Day Sim, well it was Simpson, that was my maiden name and I was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 1922 in Kirkcaldy.

#### **Early Years: 41secs**

My father worked in the linoleum industry because that was Kirkcaldy, it was all linoleum works. Very good Christian man my father, every Sunday we were marched to church then from church onto Sunday school then back at church at the evening for the evening service.

Monday night was Christian Endeavour, Wednesday night was Brownies or Guides and Friday night was the Band of Hope, that was your week.

*When you were old enough to go to school did you enjoy it?*

Yes, thoroughly enjoyed it, I liked every subject and I was good at school except I wasn't very keen on sport. On the Tuesday we were marched to the Beveridge Park in Kirkcaldy for sports and it was netball and I was always so small; I couldn't get the ball into the net and I used to go hide behind a tree.

#### **War Comes: 1 min 47 secs**

My brother and mummy and my sister, we were all in church when the war was announced. We knew the year before that there was going to be a war in 1938.

I worked in a department store and it was the office I was in and my mother took me away from there to a factory. She thought if I was in there, I wouldn't be conscripted you see, I hated this job, I absolutely hated it and of course whenever the war was declared I volunteered.

I wanted to go defend my country, don't get me wrong but I knew that I just had to get away from this awful job you know?

#### **Barrage Balloons: 2 min 38 secs**

When I joined up, I was 17, very naïve, of course we were all naïve in these days. When I went for my interview the officer said, 'are you any good at sewing?' and I said, 'oh yes, I'm very good at sewing,' my mother had seen to that. He said 'Oh well we're looking for fabric workers' and that was to repair the barrage balloons that were all over the country by this time and over the sea as well.

When I was posted to Bishopbriggs, I was posted to 18 BC and I thought oh that's great, that's Bomber Command and I got up to Bishopbriggs I found out it was a

Balloon Centre. The balloons that were inland were called Mark 5 and the ones flying from ships, they were much smaller, and they were called M6s, but the big ones were M5s.

If they were brought down over the sea, they were brought into Bishopbriggs into the centre and they were inflated in huge hangers and you had to go in with your bucket and bring out all the dead fish. So, you had to inflate them and go inside and stick patches on the tears and there was somebody outside the balloons sticking a patch on the outside and you were inside sticking a patch on.

*Did you feel like you and the other girls were making a difference?*

Oh yes! Oh, we were winning the war, absolutely!

### **Life in Uniform: 4 min 20 secs**

The first meal I had when I went to Bishopbriggs, when I went to Bridge North to do my basic training, the first meal I had, it was an evening meal and in my plate of soup there was a caterpillar crawling across my plate of soup! And I thought if this is the food I'm not having anymore and for months all I had was the NAAFI, that was the Navy, Army, Air Force Institute they came round with a van and sold buttered rolls and things like that. I lived on that, I thought if that's the meals, I'm not going to have anymore.

*So, who have you got sitting next to you? (Mary is sitting next to a knitted doll)*

Well this is Muriel. My mother knitted this for me when I joined up and this is how we were dressed, not like how the WAAFs are dressed nowadays. Their hats are different for a start and they're allowed to wear short skirts which we weren't allowed to have. She is named after one of my WAAF colleagues who had been in the FANYS in the First World War, she was an older woman and she had orange hair, Muriel had this orange coloured dyed hair. The original Muriel – I don't know what happened to her hair but she's bald now!

### **The Everyday: 5 min 52 secs**

*What was the atmosphere like during the war? Were people worried?*

No...it was just a way of life, the air raids worried us quite a lot. The first night I arrived in Newcastle, we didn't seem to have raids when we were in Bishopbriggs, I don't know why but the first night I was in Newcastle there was a raid over the River Tyne and that was rather frightening. It was just a way of life, we just thought we were defending our country and doing our bit for the war effort.

*What were some of the good times you remember from the war?*

Oh, they were all good times, you only remember the bad times. If someone had misbehaved and you were all confined to billets and you couldn't get out, maybe just got to go to the cinema in the evening – you thought that was, times war was ended. That was when you got a bit fed up but that didn't happen very often and then of course you always had chores to do.

You had your ironing to do – you had to wait for your turn of the iron but my mother gave me an electric iron and I used to hire it out to the girls – tuppence an

hour and this money was all put in a tin and my special friend Cathy and I and when there was maybe a pound in a tin we would take two soldiers out for a meal, wounded soldiers.

They didn't wear khaki they wore light blue uniforms and a red tie, so people knew they had been wounded at the front, in France. They were brought home to recuperate and a lot of them, they were just boys, they weren't men, they were just young boys and they were terrified they would be sent back to the front; they didn't want to be sent back to the front.

### **The Night War Ended: 8 min 10 secs**

The night that war finished we never went to bed that night and we were out partying all night. The officers invited us into the Officers Mess, now that was the holiest of holies if you were non-commissioned you were never invited into the Officers Mess, but we were all invited. I've got a photograph there showing me and some of my colleagues the night that war ended.

We were so fortunate with Churchill; Churchill saved this country and we don't seem as if we have anybody of that calibre now to get us through this mess that we're going through now. Nothing was the same after that. Nothing was the same.

### **GLOSSARY**

**Linoleum** – a type of floor covering

**Conscription** – compulsory enlistment into the armed forces

**Naïve** – term used to describe someone who shows a lack of experience or judgement

**Barrage balloon** – a large kite balloon that is tied to the ground by a wire cable and is used to defend ground targets from enemy air attack.

**Bomber Command** – a unit of the Royal Air Force (RAF) that controlled the RAF's bomber forces.

**Hangar** – a large building used to house aircraft

**NAAFI** – Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (<http://www.naafi.co.uk/>) – provides recreational facilities for the British Armed Forces such as clubs, bars, restaurants, canteens and cafes well as shops and supermarkets specifically for service personnel and their families.

**WAAF** – the Women's Auxiliary Air Force

**FANYS** – First Aid Nursing Yeomanry

**Khaki** – a tough cotton or wool fabric of a dull brown-yellow colour used in military clothing.

**Mess** – the mess (or mess deck on ships) is where military personnel eat and socialise. There are separate messes for officers, and upper and lower ranks of enlisted personnel.

**Non-commissioned** – non-commissioned military personnel are those who enlist. These are lower ranked than officers who have been commissioned. A military commission is an official government document that gives the rank of officer to a person and the right to command lower ranks.

**Link to interview:** <http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk/veday75/vv-marysim/>