



# Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Brian Roberts  
Interviewed by Jan Sanderson

British Library ref. C1345/14

## IMPORTANT

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## Interview Summary Sheet

**Ref no:** C1345/14

**Collection title:** Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

**Interviewee's surname:** Roberts

**Title:**

**Interviewee's forename:** Brian

**Sex:** Male

**Occupation:**

**Date and place of birth:** 1939, Cheshire

**Date(s) of recording:** 14<sup>th</sup> December 2008

**Location of interview:** The Westminster Hotel, Chester

**Name of interviewer:** Jan Sanderson

**Speech to Text reporter:** Laura Harrison

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**Interviewer's comments:**

[Track 1]

*Good morning Brian. Thank you ever so much for coming along. This is Janet Sanderson interviewing Brian Roberts at Chester on 14 December 2008; it's for the Unheard Voices, the Oral History Project. So, Brian, what I would like to do to start with is just to get a little bit of background information on you. I would like you to tell me a little bit about yourself, and perhaps a little bit about your childhood, and then we will move on to talk about your hearing loss.*

Basically my hearing loss was through military service.

*Can we come to that in a little bit because I want to know a little bit more about your background first, is that okay, Brian?*

Well, I am seventy years old. I came into the Army as a young man and, in actual fact, it was national service! That is how long ago it is, but I preferred that life so I stayed in the forces and I spent thirty years in the Army and because I spent two years in the Malay jungle, they said I had picked up an infection somewhere, and there was no problem. Then I came back to Germany, and I was walking through Denmark and my left ear suddenly went deaf.

I went back to my unit and they said, "Oh, we will have to do a bilateral Bell's Palsy on you and put grommets in". And after that, there was no problem just deafness in my left ear.

*Can I go back to before you joined the Army to when you were a child. Did you have any problems as a child?*

No.

*No problems as a child. So, if I can get a little bit of background information, and then we can talk more in depth about your hearing loss, just a little bit later in the interview if that is alright with you, Brian? Did anyone in your family actually have any hearing problems?*

Yes, all my brothers and sisters are living. I was going to say, "working" then. My mother is still living, don't ask me how old she is, she is about 95. She has had a stroke but nobody else has had any hearing losses.

*So as a child, you actually just led a normal childhood?*

Yes.

*And there was no hearing/childhood infections or anything?*

No, I had the normal ear aches, but, that is, you know, one thing and another.

*Do you mind if I ask you a little bit more your childhood and where you actually lived when you were a child?*

Yes, well, I lived in Cheshire, in Bradbury in Cheshire. That is 43 miles from here but I don't live there now; I live further out. You could say it's semi-country. As it is now, it's getting built-up. We had a heavy steel works at the top of the Street where most of the men worked. Erm, there was a wallpaper factory where I worked, started from school. I would not say it was noisy. You got noise there, but nothing that you didn't have to talk loud on. You could speak normally. The steel works, yes, it was noisy. But I never went in there. My father did; he worked there for a bit when he came out of the fire service.

*What was your father's name?*

Sorry?

*What is your father's name?*

Charles Roberts. He died of cancer, I don't know, I was in the forces and they brought me back by flight.

*Can you remember?*

About 1980, I think.

*Can you remember how old he was when he died?*

69, yes.

*And you say your Mum is still alive. What is your Mum's name? (repeated).*

Mary. She is still living. Still telling us all off!

*You mentioned earlier that you know you lost your wife. What was your wife's name, Brian?*

My wife passed away in November last year from cancer in the esophagus and she had emphysema, brought on by the cancer drugs.

*What was her name?*

Bette, as in Bette Lynch. A lot of people called her Betty, she preferred Betty by other people but to most it was Bette.

*So was she christened Elizabeth and then was it shortened to Bette?*

No, no, she was christened Betty. What is that old film actress called?

*Bette Davis.*

Gable.

*I remember her.*

Her mother was a bit of a Bette Gable fan.

*Bette Gable?*

Can you remember what your wife's maiden name was?

Sorry?

[Fire alarm]

[06:48]

*We will carry on then [laughs]. All right then. I am saying can you remember your wife's maiden name?*

My wife's..?

*What she was called before she was married?*

Booth - Betty Booth. Put it that way, that was her mother's name.

*And you mentioned having brothers and sisters, your siblings. How many brothers have you got?*

I have got two brothers, three sisters.

*And what order do they come in?*

I have got my sister, Sheila. Well, there is me, my Sheila I am the eldest, yes.

*And then?*

Fred - my brother, Fred, Barbara, Susan and Stephen, that is it.

*So quite a big family then? Quite a big family?*

Oh, yes.

*How did you all get on?*

All right. As I say I was in the forces most, after coming out of school.

*When you were young how did you get on?*

All right.

*How did you get along with each other?*

All right.

*Any special childhood memories?*

It's hard to say, because like me and Fred were in the forces. So, when the girls were growing up, we were away, and our Steve was about one year old when I went in because I came back after 30 years; he was a young man with a kid of his own then.

*When you were younger, and you went to school, did you actually, with your brothers, did you mingle together or did you create your own circle of friends?*

Well, yes. I mean we had our own friends. We more or less went out with our own friends. That was it because, erm, in most of our Street they were men, boys shall we say. So we all sort of congregated together and either played football or went into the woods; that was it. We all went to school together, so what we would do is we would all meet at the gates, and walk up to school together: the girls together and the lads together.

*Was it an all boys' school or mixed school?*

The first school was mixed, the primary school, and then secondary school was just boys; a boys' school. The girls' school was separate. So, it was like that, you know.

*What was your favourite...*

Our Sheila I would say, yes, I was more close to her than the rest of them because there was about 18 months between us. But because my Dad was in the fire service, during the war, he was away and, I mean, it was just me and our Sheila. Then, when he came back, they had the other kiddies so there was a big gap between us.



*Like the older ones and the younger ones?*

Didn't bond as much, yes. I mean, as far as I was concerned it was a proper thing, you know. The boys went out together and the girls went out together, but our Barbara and Sue - Steve was a lot longer - and our Fred, as I say was older, but because I was military, sort of thing, even at school, you know there was the Army cadets and things like that.

[11:19]

*You joined the Army cadets while you were at school?*

Sorry?

*Did you join the Army cadets when you were at school?*

Yes, and Saint John's ambulance brigade.

*How old were you when you joined the army cadets?*

11.

*You were in the Army cadets until you actually left?*

Until I left school and then work took over from there, but because I've always kept up with my first aid and Saint John's ambulance brigade, I kept up with that until I went into the Army proper. I am an advanced combat medic and worked with casualties for...what we did if we were not away doing anything I worked in a casualty department to keep my knowledge and techniques up.

*When you were at home, before you actually went in the Army, did you always grow up in the same house or did you move areas, did your parents move home?*

I was in the same house but we used to, you know, go with lads from school; some of them used to live sort of the opposite way from the school than what I did, so always disappearing.

*Was it a big house what you lived in?*

Sorry?

*Was it a large house what you lived in?*

No, I would not say it was a big house, no. It was just properly built!

*Did you have to share rooms with your brothers?*

Yes eventually, you know. I think this is why I and our Fred went in the Army so young, you know, get out of the house and leave them to it!

*Between leaving school and actually going in the Army, did you say you went in for national service, is that when you joined up?*

Yes that is right.

*When you left school, how old were you when you left school?*

When I left school, as I say I worked at Crown wall papers.

*How old were you?*

I left school at 15 then national service came in at 18, well 18/19.

[13:37]

*What was the first job you did when you actually left school then?*

I was doing Crown wall papering, well, it was apprentice printer, you could put it that, but basically all you were doing was labouring, do you know what I mean?

*That was the official title was it? [laughs]. Did you stay there until you joined the Army, until you went into the Army?*

Yes. I knew I was going in for national service, so basically it was just somewhere to work, earn money until I knew that my papers would come into the national service.

*And what year?*

Because I was an untied worker, an official apprentice, they called us up early.

At the time Korea was just about fifty/fifty; it had not finished but, erm, they were getting all the national service men in, in particular my type who wanted to be in a medical services because that is what they were short of. So I got called up early which I am glad of, you know, and when I was in, I enjoyed myself so much.

*Did you actually, when you got called up into national service, did you actually volunteer for the medical services or did you get allocated?*

Yes I wanted medical services. Then I progressed from there.

*What year did you actually go into national service then? What year? Can you remember?*

'58!

1958

21 April 1958. It's stamped up here that date is!

*Did they train you in the medical services? As well as your recruitment training, did you actually receive medical services training as well?*

What you do is you do normal military training as a recruit and then you go for your specialist training which in my case, was army medical core training depot, and from there, you decided what you were going to do. Funnily enough, I started out as a mental nurse. But after two

years, I realised that the staff were worse than the patients [laughs] so I got out and I went into combat medicine.

*Where were you actually based at then?*

Germany.

*When you initially went in?*

I went into Ashvale in Aldershot, that is the recruiting centre, training depot as was, but it's gone now.

*Is that where you did your medical training there?*

Yes, I don't know but I think it was about 3 months that you were in the depot doing your training and then I was posted to Germany.

*What year were you posted to Germany?*

At the end of '58, after my training and I stayed there until '61. Then I went to London to the Millbank military hospital [Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital] and that is when I started my mental nursing training. But, as I say, after two years, I realised that the staff were worse than the patients. So I volunteered for combat medicine.

[17:35]

*That would be, what, 1960?*

Well about '64, when I transferred over to combat medicine.

*And did that involve some more training?*

Oh yes, I went over to America because England in those times didn't have any gun stabbings as much as they do now. In America they always had a lot of gun shot wounds and blast

injuries in their hospitals so the Army sent me to a military hospital in Chicago and I learned about traumatic treatment of gunshot wounds, blast injuries, penetrating wounds of the body i.e. knife wounds, and then I came back...

*How long did that training last?*

I was over there 6 months, and then I went to Malaya, because the Malay-Brunei conflict was on. I went over there and as I say spent 2 years in the jungle treating servicemen but a lot of the times I was treating the locals. I used to set up a medical centre and I would treat their ailments, their injuries; anything they wanted, and if they wanted anything I would liaise with say the Engineers who could build them a new bridge. So it's hearts and minds as well as a medical thing. I came back.

*There was practical support for the locals?*

Yes, everybody.

*As well as the medical help?*

Yes.

*Can you remember what year you actually went to Malaya?*

'67, yes.

*And you were there 2 years, did you say?*

Yes about two years. Then I went to Hong Kong.

*When did you go to Hong Kong?*

I don't know. With those, you sort of got posted over: the years blended. I am just trying to think when I went to Hong Kong because from Hong Kong a grenade went off and I had to be casevaced back to England: I was diving and looking for things. A grenade was thrown into the

water and it took my diving partner out of water but I was blasted, you know, with a thing and it didn't do any damage as such, but I got tinnitus and that is when I got Bell's Palsy, from the effect of it.

*Is that when your ear problems actually started?*

As such, yes. But once I got back to England, and I was treated, they did, what is it called? Erm, a radical mastoidectomy. And then, after that, my hearing was okay.

*Can I just ask you, can you remember what year that actually happened, that diving accident/incident?*

I'm trying to think when it was.

*Or, when it was you came back to England?*

Must have been about 1970, because I got married in '74, so I was in England then. So, about 1970. As I say, after that I was all right and I was posted back to Germany again just after I got married, so that would be '75: we used to drive to Denmark at weekends for camping.

[22:17]

*You got married in the interim from coming back from Malaya to England? Did you know your wife before you actually got posted abroad, or did you meet her while you were over in England for treatment?*

No I just met her; she was living next door to my cousin so I had gone to see my cousin and she was there and that was it.

*Did you have a long courtship?*

Her son was already in the forces, from her previous marriage, so that was more or less the interest she wanted to know from my side of the Army, in case he was telling her something!  
[laughs].

*So you actually got chatting about her son?*

Oh, yes.

*Is that how your relationship developed from there?*

I got married because I asked her to come down to Aldershot for the weekend but she didn't know she was getting married that weekend!

*How long did you know each other before you got married, Brian?*

She had three children before we got married.

*How long had you known each other before you got married?*

I don't know. Julie is 50 now, so Martin will be 52, so Ros must be about 55.

So work back from there! I have never really bothered about their ages.

*Did you know each other, had you known your wife very long from meeting to getting married?*

About 6 months. I asked her if she fancied a nomadic life in the Army and she said she was happy with it, so when I went back to Aldershot. I arranged for us to get married but I didn't tell her. I said to her, "Can you come down for the weekend because people want to see you for a party?" And she got down and she found it was her party, she was getting married!

*So it was actually a wedding reception she came for the, not a party? And how did she react to that then, Brian? (repeated).*

No problem, she was used to it! She was used to me coming out with different things.

*Were you quite spontaneous?*

I would say, yes, in a way, because of working in casualty departments and things like that, you tended to act on the moment because you never knew what was coming in.

*Yes.*

And in your normal life you tended to do that. Last month, I didn't want to do with myself. I was in Hyde, Cheshire, and I said "Come on put the dogs in the car". We had two at the time. We drove up to Scotland and rented a cottage for two weeks and I go up there regular now.

*You said she had three children from her first marriage?*

*Yes.*

*And was she a widow?*

No, she got divorced, mainly because he was, well, I don't know. I get on with him now, since she passed away, but before, we didn't bother sort of thing. He walked out and that was it.

*What about the children? Did they adapt to life with you as step father?*

They treat me as their Dad. The two girls say anybody can be a father, but it takes a man to be a Dad. They always call me Dad, you know.

*That is sweet.*

The grand children have never known me by any other.

*Did you have children between you and your wife?*

No, I was always away. Plus, she had cancer of the bladder, yes. She had to have a hysterectomy and radio therapy so when I met her she could not have any more children.

*You were quite content with the situation obviously.*



Yes.

*You just accepted it?*

Oh, yes. I mean, I had those three, and not long after, I had grand children as well, so I had had my fill, you know.

*A ready-made family more or less?*

Now I have got great grandchildren and grandchildren.

*How old are your great grandchildren?*

I have two: one has started school now and the other one is about three, I think, no, two. I have just sent a birthday card, she is two.

*How many grand children?*

All the grand children are working and so they are all over 18, except one: Anastasia - she is, must be about 16 or 17 now.

*How many grand children are there?*

You are asking me now - from Ros there is three. From Martin there are two. There's Six.

*Six grand children and two great grand children?*

Four great grand children. The son and the youngest daughter live in Germany and they have married Germans. Martin, because he was already in Germany as I was there, so he got a flat just down the road from us and he met a German girl and they got married and had two kids. Julie stayed over in Germany because she preferred that life and she got married to a German lad. So they are all over there now. Ros is living up Scotland and has just moved from Derbyshire up to Scotland, and this is what made me think of going up there for the trips.

[29:18]

*Wherabouts in Scotland?*

Helmsdale, right in the Highlands. There are five houses in their village and the cottage I rent is sixteen miles down the road, right the on the beach: Helmsdale Beach.

*What is the name of the village where the cottage is? [repeated].*

Navidale. I have got to think what the name of that place is; it's sort of Helmsdale and three houses and that is classed as Navidale. The nearest house to me is the cottage is about three hundred yards away. There is just a road in front of it, so it's nice and quiet and I can watch the shipping, and I can watch the cars going past on the motor way further down the dip. So, I am happy up there; I am going up there Boxing Day for three weeks, so you were looking catching me now!

*Yes very lucky, aren't we? When you married your wife, when you got married to Bette and you got the children, you said you actually married her while you were back in England and then you went back to Germany?*

Yes.

*And the children, the family, went with you?*

They were all over there. As I say Martin I was in the Army and in Germany at Hummel. Julie was already over there, and she went over there for some reason and she decided, that is it, I am staying.

*And what about Ros.?*

Of course what I did is I applied for a posting to her, where she was, because I knew there was a field ambulance and I would be doing feed medical work there; I didn't think I'd get it but I did. So, in some ways, it was good see was she was just down the road from us; she could see her mother and see me and we could nip up the road to see the lad at weekends when he

wanted us. We used to collect them and all go to Denmark for the weekend camping and then we would come back.

*And did Bette feel more at ease because she was actually closer to her family?*

Yes, probably.

*I know most mums don't like the idea of children...*

She was glad to see them because she had not seen them for a few years and she suddenly realised we could see them when we want. Ros had kiddies. What I did is I applied for flights and the grand children used to come over to Germany in the school holidays so they got a different environment than all the rest of the friends that were just hanging around the streets. Taking them over to Germany, they went all over Europe with me, I applied for holidays at the same time: they were coming over and we used to say, "right, where do you want to go this time?"

*What kind of places did you visit on holiday? (repeated). You mentioned Denmark. What other places did you used to go on holiday?*

Well, we used to go to Holland: I mean Holland was just down the road from us basically. We used to go up to up to Austria and around Germany and the Black Forest and up in the Hartz mountains. One of my trades, by then, was to teach people cross-country skiing and survival in the mountains.

*It sounds really interesting.*

One Christmas they all came over, and we had a chalet up in the Hartz mountains, and we spent Christmas and Boxing Day and new year there. So the kids even from that size [indicates] got on skis and went skiing for Christmas, and they didn't want their Christmas presents.

[34:03]

*Sounds really interesting this cross country skiing. Is it something you actually trained for and then became an instructor?*

Yes because I got posted to Norway on a six month detachment because the bloke that should have gone didn't want to go; he thought Norway was a barren country. So I said "yeah, I'll go". Whilst I was there he said, "You are responsible for all the canoeists in the summer, and in the winter you will move up to the main towns and you will be in the medical centre on the ski resort." I said that would do me, so I asked them if I could learn canoeing. I got up to white-water canoeing instructor skill. So if any canoeists were going out one day and there was an instructor short, I used to get somebody to stand in at the med centre, because nobody was in the camp - everybody goes out during the day and I used to go out with them. When that finished, as I say, they asked me if I wanted to go back for the winter and I went up to the winter resort and I learned cross-country skiing. From there, I progressed to be an instructor in the Artic and Mountain Welfare Training Corps and what we did is when the troops came from the UK/Germany, we used to take them up in the mountains and take them cross-country skiing and teach them how to survive: dig a snow hole; make sure it's the right size to get in, and it will not collapse on you, and how to make your meals in the cold. Things like that. So basically...

*Can you remember what year that was?*

No because I was...I tell you for eight years, I saw my wife for six months. I would sort of go one place, come back. I'd back on a Friday. I would have gone in to the unit and met with "Sorry can you pack your bags for Ireland?" "When I am going?" "You are on the first flight out Monday". So I would go home and say, "hello love, I am home, but I am away again: I am going to Ireland on Monday". So I went to Northern Ireland for three/four months, and that depended on who I was going with and I would them come back. So the years just sort of rolled through. I didn't realise that I had done eight years like that before.

*And during all this time, you had had the diving accident earlier, had you not? And so this was after the diving accident was it?*

No I had the diving accident before I went back to Germany, like '70.

*Yes, did you know this happened after you had had the diving incident? And, then you went back to England, met your wife, and then went back to Germany?*

Yes that is right.

*And then the cross-country skiing and the survival course and the survival training, that all came after the accident?*

Yes basically from '70 to '84 all this happened.

[37:45]

*So it all happened during that period. Can I ask you, Brian, you know having had the accident and then you went back to Germany, you actually did the cross-country skiing and survival and the canoeing, at any point during this period had you become aware of any problems with your ears at that time?*

No. I think when I spoke to the consultant advisor in ENT he said what probably had happened did because I was in Norway in the cold, it caused an infection that I had. It was dormant. I had no problems at all. It was when I came back to England in about '85, came back to England on promotion, and, from then, it was more or less a desk job. But I worked at casualty at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in London.

*When did you work there?*

Sorry?

*When did you work there, can you remember the year?*

As I say, I came back about 1984 and I went working as the out-patients' manager. I still did a lot of hands-on, but it was more clerical work. But I started doing marathon running to keep myself fit because I had always been skiing or canoeing. I used to be sat there and somebody would say, "oh, we are doing a London marathon this year", and I thought that was an idea so I started marathon running. I did one marathon about every three months: London marathon

Manchester marathon, Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris - I did those. So it worked out about every three months. Then in '89, I had just come home to do the Tour of Tameside Road Race which is 56 miles and on the second day I just don't know why or what it was, but I just felt as though I could not go any further. I just had to drop out of the race. I come home, and at the time I had two Great Danes, and I was taking them out for a walk. I said I would take the dogs out and about ten yards from the house I just dropped. I managed to get up but because they were Great Danes I put one hand either side of them and said, "There, come on home". That was it; my balance process had burst and my hearing process had burst. I got back to London and saw the consultant and he said, "Oh it's your age, don't worry about it". But it went worse. So I asked to be seen by the consultant advisor in otolaryngology in Aldershot. He took one look at me and said "in". "When did you last eat"? He said I was to go in theatre that afternoon. I had 18 hours in the theatre; they had to go in both sides for the balance and the hearing process. I stayed in hospital learning to walk, well, to sit up first, for my balance. I could not get up again, but I learned to walk. Then, from there on, that was it. I spent four months there, and they sent me back to London and I just went straight into a desk job.

[Break in recording]

[42:10]

*We will start again then. So, just before we had that short break, you were telling me about when you went to London and you actually got a job in London at the hospital in London.*

Yes.

*And you actually touched on the onset of your hearing loss. You had to learn to walk again?*

Yes, when I was in Aldershot, yes, because my balance process burst. I was told it was a severe infection that had lay dormant from Malaya, Hong Kong. From what they reckon, that is when I was in Malaya because we slept in the jungle on the ground or in bashes: it was always damp. Sometimes it was 90% humidity so of course that was one of the problems of being in that country; either foot rot or your ears, you know, the dampness. He said that I probably picked up an infection there. Then when I came back to Hong Kong, sort of half way, Hong Kong was warmer but not as humid, it was sort of held at bay. Then, when I was diving the

blast didn't help it they just decided to do a bilateral Bell's Palsy. They put grommets in and then flew me back to England because with grommets it was unhealthy to be in Hong Kong.

*How long after they put the grommets in, how long after did they fly you back to England?*

*What year was that, can you remember?*

It was about 1970 when they put the grommets in for the first time. He sent me back to England and I was in hospital.

*How long after did they send you back to England?*

It would have been about a week after. They kept me in hospital until then and then straight back to England.

*And did you go into hospital in England?*

Yes I went into Aldershot hospital, the military hospital in Aldershot. They sort of kept me in just to see how things were going.

*How long were you in there in Aldershot?*

About two weeks, I think, not long. Then I was posted to a field hospital in Aldershot, so I got a job and I was working but I was close to the hospital if they wanted to see me or if anything happened. So I was doing the field hospital...what it was basically was a 50-bedded mobile hospital that could be built-up to 250 beds, if required. A 50-bed element went to Northern Ireland when the troubles started, then come back and then we went to Cyprus on the Turkish-Greek war in Cyprus. We set up a 200-bed hospital with all facilities: x-rays, pathology and operating theatres, everything a normal hospital had but under canvass, and this is what our job was. Where there was any catastrophe we could go there within 5 hour's notice and be away. We could have set up, as I say, from a 50-bedded hospital complex to 250 beds.

From there, I went back to Germany. As I say, I asked to go over again, and, I was all right then. I went up to Denmark for a weekend and that is when my left ear went, and I have never had any hearing in there since.

*Did it go suddenly overnight or gradually?*

No I just was walking through...just been somewhere, and we called in the shop and it was just like that - somebody had switched the light off but it was my hearing. The hearing in my left ear just went, and I have never had any back since. But there is no infection. He said, "Well, we can't see any infection in there". So that was it. I went on reduced jobs, shall we say, because obviously I could not do any combat duty because I could not hear with both ears; you need both ears if anything happened to be able to use the radio or...

*When your hearing went, did you actually seek medical help?*

Yes, as soon as the left ear went.

*What did they say?*

I just went back to the military hospital in Germany and, as I say, they said, "We can't see any infection or anything as to reason why it did it, it could be just something from the previous time when you had the grommets in and you had bilateral Bell's Palsy; it could be from that, we don't know. But we don't want to start operating on you to find out why, for no reason". I can understand it if they started operating, it could have made it worse. So, I just stayed like that until I say '89 when I went. I was at home after doing the Tameside run for 2 days: it's a 5-day race. On the second day, I don't know, I just felt as though I could not run any further and I could not even walk any further: I just felt completely shattered. I went home and just started to walk the dogs and that was it - my balance just blew and my hearing process had blown. From five days then it had deteriorated, the hearing, to nothing. I had no hearing whatsoever. That is when I asked to see the consultant advisor and he operated on me, and he kept me in the hospital for 4 months mainly to learn to walk again because even now in the dark, I have to be careful how I walk. I have to fix a point and that is my point to walk towards in the dark. If I start going like that [indicates] I just go over.

[49:47]

*When your hearing just went altogether and you went back in and they operated again, what did they actually do with the operation? What was it? Can you remember?*



Basically, from what I can work out, he said they had to take both my ears off and go in through the mastoid process. And they found that the balance process was completely eroded. So they built-up a new one; I don't know what they used, plastic or...they just repaired the old skin and joined it up, and my hearing process, the cochlea and everything else was just, as I say, it took him 8 hours to clean the infection out and then they sewed it back up again with drains and I had inter-muscular antibiotics every 4 hours for 2 weeks. Then I went on to oral antibiotics. I stayed on antibiotic tablets for the 4 months I was in hospital, and he said they didn't have anything strong enough to kill the infection although they would have liked to straight away, and kill it. This is why I have had to build my balance process up. If I lifted my head up, I was projectile vomiting, unfortunately for the nurses, and I had to process from there. When I went to the toilet I had to get two nurses to hold me and walk down the ward to the toilet, otherwise I would just fall over.

*So did you have some physiotherapy or..?*

No.

*Some balance retraining exercises?*

No. I just basically learned to walk, gradually, sit up in bed and, from there, swing my legs out of bed, and let the spinning settle. I could stand up and if that was spinning, I would stand there. I did that every day just to really sort get back to standing up. Then I had to learn to walk from the bed. I was alright on the bed: I could walk around the bed but I could not let go of it, so I had to get two nurses to take me to the toilet; wait there and bring me back again, that was it. The Army brought my wife down from Hyde in Cheshire to Aldershot and she was there when I came round from the operation; that is how serious it was because they said, "We do not know what is going to happen to him". She used to come down every weekend. I used my Army travel permits and she used to travel down from home every weekend. So, for me, it was a lot better; a lot of other patients don't get that chance. It's just that I knew the system, and a consultant advisor said, "Look he's worked with me I'll work with him".

*Once you started to learn to walk again, what happened after that? What was the next stage for you? Did they allocate you hearing-aids at that point?*

Basically, I just got back to the world of living sort of thing. They sent me back to the Queen Elizabeth hospital in London and, as I say, I would go into the medical resupply depot at the hospital, because I knew I couldn't treat patients again. You know, with patients, they speak very low, and they never look at you, so I was having difficulty treating patients. I said, "Right, I don't want to be sat here telling other people to do the job that should be doing". So I went in to medical resupply and I worked up there. If anybody came in from the wards or theatre, like the surgeon was going to do a hip replacement, he would come in and he would liaise with me, "Right, I want this ball socket and this joint, I am operating tomorrow, can you get it for me?" It was "yes, fine". I picked the phone up and I would use the phone, well, by then I had enough hearing, you know, the solid thing you put on the end of a phone, I would use that, and they would send it to me by red star parcel which gets there in 3 hours from anywhere. This is what I did for about 12 months until the consultant adviser said, "Look, you have two choices now: you can stay in the Army doing that job but when you go out, you will only go out with a retired pension, or you are going out now, as a war disabled pensioner, ex-service man and you will get your war pension which you deserve because you got it whilst you were in a war in Malaya! So I said, "Right, fine". I spent about 6 months on resettlement courses and I came back to Hyde in Cheshire. Funnily enough I did a heavy HGV class one driving course. I was driving 'artics' for a while but that was on work experience. As soon as I tried to apply for a job to do it permanently nobody wanted to know because of my hearing.

*Had you already got your hearing-aid at this point? [Repeated].*

Yes I started off...

*When did they give you your hearing aid, at what point?*

They gave me a hearing-aid while I was in the Aldershot hospital. They sent me down to Guildford civilian hospital because the Army do not deal with hearing-aids. I went to the Guildford city hospital and their ENT department there provided me with hearing-aids.

*And did you find that, initially, when they first gave you a hearing-aid, did it actually help you to continue, not exactly the same as before the hearing loss, but you said that you actually went back to work? So did your hearing-aid actually help you enough for you to return to work?*

Oh, yes.

[57:32]

*Although not the same job that you actually had been doing?*

Well to me it felt as though my hearing had been back to normal but, it was not, but because I had been so long without any hearing at all, I suddenly got a hearing-aid in and, in effect, I was back to normal, but then I realised there were certain words I weren't picking up or somebody stood over was speaking to me, because my hearing-aid was on this side (indicates) but I started to learn to work around it, shall we say.

*What kind of things did you do to work around it?*

I asked people I was working with, "if you want to speak to me, can you wave", or, "If I am sat at my desk tap me on the shoulder". It was, "Yes, fine". If they wanted anything, that was it.

*Were both ears equally as bad?*

There is still nothing in it at all [indicates]. They have tried giving a hearing aid for this side (indicates) but all I hear...well, from my point of view I am hearing the same sound twice at a different time. This seems as though it's a split second behind this ear (indicates) in hearing and picking it up.

*So you find it easier to just try and get by with the one hearing-aid in your right ear?*

Yes, I have always just had a hearing-aid in my right ear. Funnily enough, this was the serious ear: they said this was the worst. But, it was the one that sort of got itself back; I got a bit of hearing in it. It still is a bone of contention. If the original ENT consultant had operated on me when I went back inside of the hospital he kept on saying, "Oh it's your age; it's too much running" and this was the reason he said I would not have perfect hearing, but I would have had 75% of my hearing restored.

*Can I just ask you was it your consultant that said that? Can I just clarify which hospital that was actually at?*

A consultant in the Queen Elizabeth in London that said that. It was me that said, "Right I want to see the consultant advisor in Aldershot". As soon as I got down there he played hell he says, "Right you are going on theatre now". We worked the four hour limit out, you know from eating to operating...

[01:00:16]

*How did your wife react to the situation you were in with your health?*

It's hard to say with her. She would always not show any emotion of how she felt about it.

*Did she ever talk to you about how she felt?*

She was upset at first because they had already told her. You know, there was a car that suddenly pulled up outside the house at home: "Can you pack up a bag for the weekend we're taking you to Aldershot, because your husband is being operated on at the weekend". She didn't know for what at the time; it was a bit like that at the time, but when she had been to see me in hospital for a couple of weeks she realised I was not going to hear again, but I was getting myself back to normal then. I think a lot of it was because of how fit I was: I was able to respond better to treatment than other people; I was running hundred miles a week in marathon training. I am not like I am now know, nearly 11 stone - I was 9 and half stone then! The consultants and anaesthetist said my fitness had stood me in good stead. He said to me "We have had no problem with you as we thought we would have". I asked to go into the gym, remedial gym at the hospital as soon as I could learn to walk, get up, and I knew the physiotherapist down there as I had worked with them before in out-patients in London. And I started walking on a tread mill, first with my hands on the bar. I learned to walk, just walking. A lot, for me, was the fact that I was getting exercise, and this is what helped me. I knew I was getting exercise, so I was losing a bit of weight. I went from 9 and a half stone to 14 stone whilst I was in hospital because I was just sat there: they were feeding me and that was it.

*You weren't active.*

Yes.

*During all this time, obviously, your career in the Army span quite a long time and you had to be very, very active and very involved in various events. There were times where you say you didn't see your wife for months on end. Can I just ask, did your wife used to work? Did she work or how did she pass her time?*

Yes she was a PA, personal assistant, to a Managing Director and then, when she moved to Aldershot with me, she worked. Where did she work there? She was doing a PA's job down there.

*Was that in an office or in a factory?*

No, when she went to Aldershot she was doing PA work in the Army and when we went to Germany she got a job as the PA's guide commander. A lot of people were a bit upset about that because he was a dog lover, and at the time I had a Great Dane and a German Sheppard and she used to take them both into work and they used to sit under the desk whilst she was working but if anybody came in, in civilian clothes, they were not allowed to go any further than that corridor. And her boss was like that because he knew if anybody was coming up the corridor, because he would see out of the guy's eye and the table would lift, because she was a Great Dane, and would walk across saying, "You are in civilian clothes and not going any further" and she would stop anyway.

*So built-in security.*

She worked there.

*Did your wife have any hobbies? (Repeated).*

Erm, yes I don't know what you call it. But you know nylon stockings, she would get them, cut them, and bend them over wire, and she would make flowers. She would make other

things with it. Floral decorations. But they were made out of nylon stockings, cloth and anything you could wrap over wire, screw it around and made little dots for the petals...

*Did she sell them or give them as presents?*

She used to make them and give them to other people. A lot of the time she would make one specifically for one person and give it them for their birthday or for Christmas. Then, while I was in hospital, sort of occupational therapy, I started making toys, cuddly toys with felt and things and cut it out and sew it up and fill it with padding and fill it out and I made [laughs] I must have made about 20 of them. I just gave them away.

[01:06:28]

*Just a hobby and interest and something you enjoyed. Can I just ask you, you know during all this period of time, and being in the military, what were your religious views were? Did you go to church, chapel?*

As a medic you don't have any. I mean, why are people being ill and killed? I mean I am Church of England but, as medics, you never let religion interfere with anything because, I mean, if you thought religion was going to interfere then people would not be ill and we would be out of a job. It's one of those things. You are not agnostic but you are not seriously religious. I found that with all medical nursing staff. You get some that are very religious, but I don't think they... like the casualty side of it, you never see people in casualty that are deeply religious because you see so many hurts. There were a number of times I had been called out to pick up a child on the road that is seriously ill, lost their leg or lost their arm. Northern Ireland was a good example. We would go out to a bombing and you could guarantee that 90% of those casualties would be children or women who had nothing whatsoever to do with it. They just were there at the wrong time, wrong place. I got a back injury through that because I was treating a woman who traumatically lost her leg and I was putting an intravenous drip in to give her fluids and some bloke came up to me and said, "Hey, come and treat my girlfriend". I said, "Yes, hang on, I am just dealing with this one". And it was, "Oh come on, let that 'prod' stay there, I want you to treat my girl friend". I said, "Hang on, hang on what are you on about?" "My girlfriend is over there and she has a nose bleed. Come and treat it". I told him in a short few words where to put himself, and I said to one of the lads "just get rid of him for me

a minute will you?", and the next I knew I got a bar, hit across all my back. It smashed all the muscles in my lower back and I had two spinal vertebrae that are loose, and they have never been able to remove them. And that was religion. That is because I was treating a Protestant on the floor that had lost a leg and I presumed he was Catholic, the way he spoke. This is why, you know, religion is out of way.

*You don't dwell on that.*

If people can do that for religion, what are they going to do for...?

*Yes, not in the name of religion. Yes, I understand where they are coming from.*

Yes, this is one of the reasons as well that I am no longer running because, with running, your back is the place that suffers.

*Yes.*

So I just keep fit now in the gym.

[01:10:07]

*Everything you have told me has been so interesting and I dare say that we could sit here all afternoon and actually continue this conversation but unfortunately I will have to close it down a little now. But, there just one thing I wanted to actually ask you before I close.*

I would like to say one thing with this [indicates] - the boss sent me to Link while I was in the Army. As soon as I could get about, they sent me to Eastbourne to Link and that was the best thing that ever happened to me being deaf and I have been back three times. The second time was with my wife so that she could understand other things about deafness that I could not exactly tell her. Rosemary McCall, and Gillian is it, Gill? She is now the Director.

*I don't know: probably before my time.*

She came as sort of helping people at Link and she worked her way up. She virtually took Rosemary's McCall's job over since she passed away and Bette said it helped her to understand a lot of the problems. When I went back there was a young lad who lost his hearing through meningitis, and he was a lad that used to run about and go about as being very out-going: he went very introvert. He asked me if I would go with him to Link because he trusted me, sort of thing. "Oh, you are deaf as well" so, you know. I went with him to Link and we did the course again together. The fourth time I asked to go because things were not going the way I thought they should be going, plus I had already met somebody at Link and he had two cochlear implants. While we were there he collapsed and he said had got, erm, I should know it, and I have forgotten. But, any way, he collapsed and his balance was going so he was taken home to the Northumbria area. But, as I say, I have been back and it's helped me a lot at Link. This is why I agreed to come down here when they said, "It was Link based", sort of thing.

*It's very important that we get people's history about the feelings and the memories, and as much as they can remember about the impact as well of the hearing loss. Also, what we are interested to know as well is you had the support from Link, did you have any other support? Is there is support network around you, where you live?*

I would not say that, no. I mean I go back to the hearing-aid centre but they have changed staff now so the people that are there now, I feel, are not as helpful as they were. Such as this [indicates] when I got this hearing-aid, I still say I went in to tell him that my other hearing-aid was not as good and they said they would give me a digital one. I said that was great and I went in to get a digital and the time, from him leaving me to picking it up and coming back, there is no way he could have calibrated it yet he had given it me to put in so I had difficulties. I went back and I said, "I don't think it's been calibrated" and it was, "Oh no, we would not let you go home without it being calibrated". I said "it took him two minutes, from me to the store and back again". I walked out again and he said it was because he was busy, and that was it. And, that was the sort of help I was getting after the staff had changed you know, they'd moved on.

[01:15:09]

*Is the situation still the same? Are you getting any benefit at all from your hearing-aid?*



Yes, now I have been back and got it calibrated. I have just got it fixed. I went to see the ENT consultant at Tameside hospital; he was doing the vacuum, evacuation of the wax, I don't know what he did, but when I got home my ear was bleeding, it was pouring with blood and I went back to the hospital and, believe it or not, I was seen by a orthopedic consultant and not a hearing consultant. They forgot I knew everybody in the hospital and they said, "Yes, we will have a look". Over the 24 hours it went back, you know, it stopped bleeding but I had lost my hearing. I had no hearing in this ear (indicates) and also they said they would put one in my left ear. And I said, "Look, I have got nothing in my left ear". "Oh, they will try it; see how you go on". And, that was the sort of thing I have been putting up with for the last three years.

*What have you done about it? Have you actually taken any action about it?*

Yes, but, we will leave that out [laughs].

*Oh right, we will leave that then.*

What I did is I went and saw the girl who runs the hearing-aid centre and I spoke to her. I said, "Look this is what is happening, and you and I know it should not be doing; we have to work together as a patient and as a hospital worker". I said "I have done thirty years of it and I know the situation". She knew me any way and she knew exactly my job. She said, "Right, come on, let us sort out what we can do". So, I went in and got it calibrated to what I was then; slowly getting back, slowly getting a bit of hearing back. What it probably was is that it was settling itself. What he did was he pressed the ear trumpet in too far, and he must have just touched the tympanic membrane. Over about two weeks it slowly started coming back. I don't think I've got the same amount of hearing back now as I did prior to that, but I have got enough.

*When did that happen? [Repeated]. Was it three years ago did you say?*

I would say about two years ago in actual fact.

*About 2006?*

My wife had just gone into hospital and they found she had cancer and they said it was cancer of the liver, and then they changed it to cancer of the lungs, and then in the end it was the

oesophagus that was cancer-ridden, but it was in the oesophagus going down the bronchials. They treated her and she got, as I say, emphysema so she was in hospital trying to drain the fluid out of her lung and trying to help her to breathe again. It was like that. It was sort of, "Here is an appointment at the hospital: whose is it today? Yours or mine?!" I was going back to sort things out and she was going in as a day case, going in for a week. In the end, it was said, "right, you can go into a Hospice or you can go home; we can't do any more for you". So she came home and she spent five days at home and that was it. So, for the two years prior to her passing away everything was a cloud, you know. Basically, I was a 100% carer for her.

[01:19:42]

*Have you moved on a little with your life since you lost your wife? You know, have you reconstructed your life without your wife?*

Well, yes and no. As I say, it has been 13 months now since she passed away.

*Still quite recent.*

21 November last year that she passed away, so, I've got back to living on my own; it was strange at first. I still do it, actually, if I am going out with the dogs or anything. I think, "Oh, I must tell Bette that when I get home and what has happened". Then I think, hang on, I can't tell her. I've still got that. I suppose I will have it for years.

*So, all in all how long were you married?*

About 35 years, I think.

*I know men are not very good at remembering dates, not when it comes to wedding anniversaries.*

I am a typical husband: I can't tell you how long I have been married. I have always remembered the date, I have always bought her anniversary present and she has forgotten and everybody else has! I can't tell you how many years. I am sure it was about 35.

*I am sure we can work it out from when you got married.*

It's the 14th or the 16th her birthday: one is our anniversary. It was 14<sup>th</sup> December when we got married. So, I always remember the date.

*That is today then. It would have been your anniversary today then.*

Yes, that is right.

*Yes, thank you very much for that. I think we could sit here all day and go on and on.*

In actual fact I nearly got her an anniversary present this year. I was getting Christmas cards for my sister as her birthday is New Year's Eve and one of the grand daughters is Boxing Day, and so I was getting birthday and Christmas cards and I was thinking there was something else I wanted: anniversary card, and that is it. I thought "hang on, I don't need this now".

*Yes, you put it back*

You know, it's just one of those things.

*Habit of a life time. (Repeated).*

Yes it is.

*I am going to have to close it down there now, Brian. I will have to close it down now, Brian, because time is getting on.*

No problem.

*The lunch has arrived because I can smell it.*

I could talk about my life forever! I still do to different people: I have been to more reunions with lads out of the Army.

*I can imagine! Well, thank you ever so much for what you have shared with us; it's been really, really interesting, Brian.*

[End of recording]