**The Great War- Remembering Home**

(Music)

(Male speaker)

It’s estimated at the height of the First World War, in both the victualling and ammunition depots, up to 12 thousand women worked on shift work basis 7 days a week.

(Singing - Keep the Home Fires burning)

It was a boom time for women really. They took on all sorts of skills. They learned engineering; they learned how to use lathes. In the victualling depot they learned how to cut meat; how to pack it. There were seamstresses they made uniforms, repaired uniforms.

They were particularly good working in the ammunition depots because women generally had small hands. Then, when they came on duty, they used to have to go into a place called a shifting house where they would put on long smocks and cover as much of their skin as possible. They wore clogs, most of the time, or nothing because in the ammunition depots you couldn’t make a spark, so they were making detonators. They mixed up the chemicals to make the different explosives. You always knew somebody that worked in the Priddy’s Hard depot. It was after working in there for a few weeks the colour of their skin would change. Just about every family in Gosport had a member who was yellow, where the sulphur had got into the pores of your skin. It took weeks and weeks and weeks to come out. You always gave way and help to “Canary Girl”, that’s what they were known as.

(Female speaker)

The information we have on my grandmother, Alice Rebecca Penfold, at the time she was in the Women’s Royal Airforce. She was part of a team based at RAF Grange that had the job of bringing the communications backwards and forwards. And one of the tasks that she had to do was bring the official paperwork to RAF Grange that was talking about the very end of the First World War and how it ended. All that documentation was actually brought back to the site that they were based on. There was an article published in the newspaper that she was quite a rebel, if you like, on the motorbike and was picked up for speeding because she was exceeding the limit of 20 mph on a piece of machinery nothing better than a lawn mower, basically. I think with the communications that she was carrying at the time, I think she could be forgiven.

She went on to marry a man called George Waterfield and he was one of the casualties in the ill-fated submarine, the L24, which was sunk by a battleship. And that was a disaster when all lives were lost on that submarine.

She then went on. She married Arthur Woods. Arthur Woods joined the army when he was 14 years old but he actually went on to serve in the First World War. He certainly received all the medals that were given out: the renowned “Pip, Squeak and Wilfred” medals which was the Campaign Star, the Victory Medal and the Imperial War Medal.

(Lively music and background singing)

(Male speaker)

We had thousands of troops, thousands of sailors and you had to keep them entertained so people would open up a theatre. This might be somebody’s front room, no more than that or they’d open up a pub. These people know they were going to France, knowing that a lot of them were not going to come back. We gave them shows, concerts and this would go out of the town into places like Elson, where there was huge tent cities of soldiers and Camp Road further up the A32, Browndown. And the tents would go up and these theatres would go out and do shows in there. The musical was the thing of the time but mostly it was just bawdy entertainment. Cheeky lady singers, comedians and they definitely had magic maybe even trapeze artists. In fact, the bawdier the better. This is what you need to keep your morale up. And you would have had sing songs and you’d have naval songs as well as army songs and each trying to outdo each other.

People from the recruiting office would turn up at every show and especially when the ladies come on they would egg civilian men to join up: make a fuss of them and recruiting officer would be at the door. I know humiliation was used in certain circumstances to get men to join up.

“Why you down here drinking and messing about while your next-door neighbour is out fighting the war?”

I’m sure most of the men that volunteered, they didn’t want to go but because all their mates from school had gone and their friends from work had gone, they would feel obliged to as well. Even though they didn’t know what they were going into.

(Music and singing)

(Sombre music followed by new male speaker)

There was a tremendous upheaval of understanding of these young boys who wanted to do something. A lot of them didn’t have jobs. What else could we do? Join the army. My mates have gone in; so-and-so has gone in. Why shouldn’t I do my duty? It was just purely to go out and do something that really was worth doing. But, unfortunately, a lot of them didn’t get the chance to do it properly and Percy was one of those that did a year and that was it.

I think the posters that went around Britain asking people to join in was a tremendous effort and I’m sure if they hadn’t done that many of the boys would have stayed at home keeping out of the way.

There were two types of posters. There was *asking* people to join and then there were the conscription posters as well. Which were basically saying, “You will join the Army and you will go abroad and you will fight for your country.” I think Percy, he was one of these that actually joined up when the posters came out and he obviously realised he had nothing much to do where he was and did his duty.

We’ve seen at first hand the trenches, the battlefields, the memorials and it’s only when you do go and see these things you realise just exactly how big and huge that horrendous four years must have been because you just look at the fatalities. It was a huge loss and, well, you just hope it never happens again.

(Sombre music playing in background over new male speaker)

Initially, you came back and you get campaign medals and things like that and you don’t think of yourself as heroic but you do acknowledge people telling you how brave you were and so on. You feel good about what you’ve done. Really, what you’re feeling good about is that you managed to get home again.

It's strange really because the General staff and the politicians and so on are all, generally, a lot older and you would think that they would know better and that there would be a better way of solving problems in this world rather than killing people.

(Sombre music plays to finish)