

Interview of CORPORAL CATHERINE "JOSÉ" JOSEPHINE JACKSON

Women's Auxiliary Air Force and World War II Veteran

Service Number: 2085183

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Interviewed by: MICHAEL GARSIDE

MG: This is an interview with Corporal Catherine Josephine Jackson, Women's Auxiliary Air Force and World War II Veteran, Service Number 2085183. The interview is being conducted at Balgowlah Heights on 13 August 2019, by Wing Commander Michael Garside from the Directorate of History Services Air Force.

This interview will be recorded –

CJJ: I can't hear. Just...

MG: - and may be transcribed, and will become the property and part of the historical collection of the Royal Australia Air Force and will be available to future researchers. It will be also offered to the Air Historical Branch of the Royal Air Force.

José, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. It's my privilege to interview you and obtain your personal account of your World War II experiences in Britain.

CJJ: *[Whispering]* a little bit louder.

MG: So, can we start off, when were you born and where?

CJJ: I was born on 24 July 1919 *[laughing]*.

MG: Which is actually over 100 years ago.

CJJ: I was 100 a week last Wednesday, yes *[chuckling]*.

MG: And where was that?

CJJ: I was born in Wigan in Lancashire in England.

MG: And did you have any brothers and sisters? And did they serve?

CJJ: Yes, I had, my eldest sister was Ena. She became a science teacher in a school.

Beatrice: But none of them served.

CJJ: Yes.

Beatrice: No. None of them served. He was asking –

CJJ: Oh? Oh, none of them served.

Beatrice: Yeah.

CJJ: No, because she was a science teacher and she wasn't allowed. She tried to volunteer. Because she was teaching science, they wouldn't let her volunteer. And my other sister, Winifred was a Norland nurse and she was looking after the children for General Peters in the Army. So, she wasn't allowed to serve either. My brother, he was in the Army for a short time but because of shoulder trouble through playing too much rugby they discharged him, because they said he couldn't use a rifle. So, he was discharged.

MG: And what occupation did your parents have? What did your parents do?

CJJ: My father had his own business, was a builder's merchant; he had his own firm. My mother never worked because her family had a very large business and she was the youngest daughter, so she sort of just stayed with her father. So, she never worked.

MG: And what was it like growing up in Wigan?

CJJ: Well, I suppose I was spoilt in a way because we had a very nice house with a large garden and it was ideal. It was actually, a nicer town than people think of it as a coal mining town. When actual fact, it was a very good, I enjoyed growing up there, yes. Yes, it was – but you know, we enjoyed it. We went to just a local school, I went to a private kindergarten; it was an old stone house, taken over, and prep school was in the same place. And then I went to the Wigan Girls – it used to be a church high school years ago, my mother went to it years ago. She had to ride on a pony to get there and it became the official Wigan Girl's High School and I stayed there until I matriculated.

MG: I guess this isn't really part of the interview, but I need to tell you now that I spent my first five years of my life in Wigan.

CJJ: Did you?

MG: In Ashton-in-Makerfield.

CJJ: Oh, I know Ashton-in- Makerfield, yes.

MG: [Laughing]

CJJ: Yes [chuckling]. Oh, yes, yes. Because my father had a big builder's merchants' firm in Wigan, he owned it and he did quite a lot. But they both did quite a lot for charity.

MG: **And what were the circumstances that led to you joining the Air Force; the WAAF?**

CJJ: Well actually, I had trained, when I left school – it sounds odd – was training for owning your own kennels – it sounds odd. Now, I went to a very exclusive sort of training school, Bell Mead, and I was actually, when war broke out, I was at a job with a retired Army officer who was breeding Airedales. When the war came, I had to leave because you couldn't feed the dogs. You know, you couldn't do any of that.

So, I came home and I was just living at home helping my father. I decided I really wanted to join the Navy but I was engaged to an Airman [chuckling]. He was from the 600 City of London Auxiliary Squadron – he used to fly as a hobby – and so, he said "No, you've got to join the Air Force. You can't join the Navy." So that's why, more or less because of my attachment, I picked the Air Force.

MG: **Good choice [chuckling].**

CJJ: [Chuckling] yeah.

MG: **And when did you join?**

CJJ: Well, I volunteered in October 1941 and they interviewed me, asked me what trade I wanted and showed me a list, and I said I'd like to do meteorology. So, they said "Have you matriculated?" and I said "Yes." And they said "What's a cirrus cloud?" – oh no, not a cloud "What's a cirrus?" I said, "It's a cloud." "right, you can do meteorology." That was it [chuckling].

CJJ: But unfortunately, there was no training immediately...they were waiting for another gap to get another batch of girls. So, I was actually officially in, in January 1942. They called me up then.

MG: **And what was your initial training, and where did that take place?**

CJJ: Yes. Well, we were called to Gloucester to get my kit and after about a few days there, I went to Morecambe – which you probably know, north of Blackpool – and of course, it was January and cold and we did what we used to call the square bashing. I did my initial, I got my training for a week there, which was very funny. Because it was snowing and all the time, you couldn't see what you were doing on the promenade, but still. I only did about a week and then – meteorology's a bit different. They're under Air Ministry not the WAAF. And so, Air Ministry said "We're starting a new course. You've got to go to London."

So, we went to Fountain's Court in London where I was in WAAF...I was a WAAF but I was only governed by Air Ministry. And there, they took over Lincoln's Inn Fields in London, the Air Ministry did. So, we had six weeks of being taught how to do the weather, how to code it, how to plot it, how to draw it and after six weeks, we had a week of exams and if you passed those, then the Air Ministry – not the

WAAF– the Air Ministry posted us to our next station and I went straight to Coastal Command at Silloth in Cumberland.

MG: Can you remember any of your teachers, instructors? Were there any –

CJJ: No, I'm afraid not.

MG: - that really stood out?

CJJ: No.

MG: No?

CJJ: No, I'm afraid I can't; it's very difficult. But most of the – when you're on a station, the Met officers are normally, they're under Air Ministry too and the majority of them were ex-science Masters from schools. But they were given the rank of officers, wore Air Force uniform. But I wasn't there very long, only a few months because I was recommended for NCO. So, I went to Cranwell and I did my initial training – which is very funny. Can I tell you?

MG: Yes, please.

CJJ: Yes, it was really quite funny because they did a mixed course. So, I was five-foot-one and a half and we had a six-foot-two man on my course. So, when we were marching that way, I was practically running; when we were going that way, he was falling over himself, and I thought it was rather funny.

But it was very good, I enjoyed it and I qualified and got my NCO. And then at the end, – I married my husband the week after I qualified as a Met's assistant. He'd been an air gunner in the 600 Squadron. He'd done two tours and now he asked to be a pilot with the war, so he went back to Cranwell as a sergeant air gunner to be trained as a pilot.

So, Air Ministry – after I qualified at Cranwell – I said "Is there any chance of me staying at Cranwell as an NCO?" and they said, they looked into things, said "Yes. The corporal there said she doesn't like being at a training unit. She'd rather go to a more interesting one. You can stay at Cranwell as the NCO." And they only have one NCO in a Met office, so it's as high as you can go. And so, I went to Cranwell Met office, and my husband qualified as a pilot. Yes.

MG: What was life like at Cranwell?

CJJ: Well, I enjoyed it to be honest. A lot of people don't but I suppose my husband being a trainee pilot gave me another side to it and we were allowed to live out in civilian quarters, provided I wore civilian clothes, and I liked it. It was the old Tiger Moths and Ansons, I loved it but I got struck by lightning when I was there [chuckling].

We had a most terrible storm once and I was in the Met office and the wind was blowing the poor Tiger Moths over and they wouldn't let the ones that were up

come down. They said it's too dangerous, they've got to stay up. And I was in the Met office and I had an anemometer – you know, on the left, to the side – and a flash came through, went through my hand – because I had a metal pen. But luckily, it blew the anemometer up. We were very impressed. It blew the needle off the chart, blew it up, and my hand went white and I just rubbed it and it came back.

But that saved me. They said if the anemometer hadn't been there – mind you, all the officers are all outside [*chuckling*]. But I liked it there. It was all you know, circuits and bumps but it was quite interesting. But I wouldn't like to have done it permanently. I preferred to be as I was, with an actual active squadron. That's what I really wanted.

MG: Where did you go from Cranwell then?

CJJ: Well, after Cranwell, I stayed there for a time and then I went to Coniston for just a few months because Tim had then qualified as a pilot and he was doing his conversion and did some various things. So, for a temporary measure, I went to Coniston. I think it was 617 there, weren't they I think? Yeah. And then when he was finally posted – see, Air Ministry were very good about that – when he was finally given a squadron to go to, which was 158 Lissett, he said "Well, the best office we will post you" – this was Air Ministry – "You can go to Driffield." And that's where my connection became. They said "You can go to Driffield" – because Lissett and Leconfield are subsidiaries, in a way, to Driffield – "and you can be NCO at Driffield." So, that's where I went to – and that was 462 and 466 squadrons. And it was lovely; I loved it. I was there 'til 1946. I spent all the rest of my time there. But my husband was shot down and killed in November 1943.

MG: You would have been aware of casualties and loss while you were there –

CJJ: Oh, while we were there –

MG: - and you had to go through it yourself.

CJJ: - it was – we were there –

MG: How did you cope with that?

CJJ: - I think it was the worst period for casualties, I think. November is when they started the 1,000 bomber raids and we were losing one or two planes a night at one stage. It was really very, very bad. He was only there a short time when he, he was coming back from a raid at Berlin and he was shot down in Germany.

But one of the nice things, I think people should remember is that we heard, after the war, that the German village where the crew were shot down and killed were given a full funeral by the German people in the village. And I always thought people should recognise that –

MG: Yes.

CJJ: - you know, the German people themselves, they gave him a full funeral; proper funeral. But it was a very bad time really for them. But we, as WAAF, we lived about two miles from the aerodrome in a WAAF site and we were shot once *[chuckling]*. We had Nissen huts, not the best really. Ten to a hut and we were five Mets and five wireless operators, and I think what happened was the Germans came in behind one of our planes, it looked like an airman's quarters. They're all just Nissen huts in the field and I suppose they thought that they stick their air crew in there. But you see, it was a WAAF site. So, we were, in the middle of the night, lying there and suddenly there was machine gun bullets tearing down either side. Fortunately, - we got under the bed. Too late to go to an air raid shelter, so we just got under our beds. It was a bit frightening but luckily nobody was hurt. But it's quite frightening, yeah.

MG: Did you manage to sleep after that?

CJJ: *[Chuckling]*

MG: *[Chuckling]*

CJJ: We certainly didn't. But it was two miles away from the aerodrome, so we cycled from there. I did. There was a truck to take those on normal shifts but - being shift workers, we did the same shifts as the wireless operators, we cycled. So, that's why we shared a hut. There were five wireless operators and five meteorologists and we - we only had five meteorologists on the station. You know, we'd had long hours

MG: José, what did your job entail as a meteorologist?

CJJ: Well, every three hours we had to produce a weather forecast. And so, what we had to do, the girl on, the only one girl on duty at a time, you had to work out what the cloud was, estimate its height. We had a Stevenson screen, which was a white wooden screen with louvre doors and inside was a minimum thermometer, a maximum thermometer, an anemometer that goes up and down, and an atmospheric gadget.

And so, every three hours, we had to do the cloud. We had to write down what those were, we had to estimate visibility, we had to do - we had the anemometer on the roof - oh, the Met offices, by the way are always on the ground floor of flying control. There's flying control on top of us; we have the ground floor. So, we're on the airfield. So, we did all that. Then once you've done it in your mind and worked it out, you put it into code. Five numbers in code and you have your own air force number, so they know it's Driffield - which was 279. And then we had to put it into code, that's what we were trained to do.

Then at ten to the hour, Air Ministry -Four Group was us at Driffield - centred at York. They used to ring the teleprinter bell to tell me the line was open between York and me and then we typed those, the codes, and then that was it. And then at about ten past the hour, the bell would ring and say the line is open the other way now, from York to us, and sheets and sheets of numbers - they're all different

Met offices all over England and Wales. So then, we had a big chart and a map of England and little circles with the numbers according to them, and we had to turn the numbers into symbols. Then we drew them all over, and then we drew the lines you see on the weather charts, joining all the atmospheric pressures together.

And once we'd done all that, the forecaster came in [*chuckling*] – when he was there – and he read the charts. And from that, he had to estimate take-off weather, weather over target and ETA weather the best he could with the information we all gave him; all the Met students. And some of the pilots were very good because let's face it, they were being bombed. They would write on the back of their little cards what the weather over target was, to sort of help us but they didn't all do that. But they were very good, some of them. The pilot and the navigator, one or the other, would come to our office before their briefing and the forecaster would give them a card and they would take that with them and hopefully – and so, that's our job and that had to happen every three hours. Day and night. Even if there was no flying, the Met office had to be functional.

MG: Mm-hmm.

CJJ: So, sometimes I'd be in a Met office in the middle of the night on the airfield and the only person there. Flying controllers sleeping upstairs [*chuckling*]. And the Met office was under Air Ministry and we had to work the whole time.

So, it was very interesting.

MG: **How did you cope with the pressure of such a critical job? Because getting a met forecast right or observation is critical to missions.**

CJJ: It was, a pressured, a very pressured job. The Air Ministry were very, very short of staff. For some reason, very. We only had five girls and that we had three shifts a day and it was from 8:00 'til 5:00, 5:00 'til 11:00 and 11:00 all night 'til 8:00 the next morning. And there was only one girl on duty. I was the NCO and I was supposed to double up and do the roster thing, but because we'd only five, I did exactly the same for four years as the girls. I took a day, complete shift and did exactly the same and put the extra work I had to do in whenever I could.

And we kept applying but I don't know why they were very short of Met people. So, it was – if one was ill or away, the pressure was quite bad. I have, on occasions done two complete days on a row. So, it was quite a high pressure, but I liked it there. They were all very nice. They were wonderful squadrons; they were very nice. They used to tease us, of course being met. I had a person brought me a little straw donkey back with a tail. He said "It falls out when it's going to rain, I thought it would help you." I mean, it was an atmosphere that the squadron had. You know, that was the sort of thing. It sounds silly really but it showed you know, the rapport between the air crew and the Met office was very good. Yes, it was –

MG: So you must have met a number of different nationalities while you were doing this job?

CJJ: Well no, we didn't really. Because they were Australian squadrons and my husband's squadron 158 were mostly the English. The most foreign – well, different ones – were the ground crew. We had quite a few Canadian ground crew and there were a few New Zealanders. But there was a French station near Pocklington, I think was all station... Because that was interesting. Have you heard of FIDO?

MG: Yes.

CJJ: Mm. Well, we were responsible for it at Driffield. So, when we thought the weather was going to be a bit difficult for landing, we would give them permission to light their FIDO. It only happened; I can only remember about half a dozen times. But Driffield, our Met office had to tell them when to do it and it was a fascinating thing. I never saw it myself, unfortunately. And I believe – I'm not sure about this – but I think Pocklington was a French station. I think so.

MG: Were you aware of what was going on in the wider war at the time, when you were there –

CJJ: Not really. Actually, I felt very cut off in a way because it was a case of going on duty, doing a chart, going back to the Nissen hut and sleeping, go back on duty. So, to be honest, I knew very little. A lot of the things that happened, I was absolutely amazed because really, we were almost in Driffield, up in Yorkshire, cut off. And so, really, we didn't get much of what was going on outside. Except we knew that roughly, because of the quantity of aircraft taking off and landing, we knew you know, of what was going on in the Air Force, sort of thing.

But where we did get information was some of the Army were good of letting us know, privately; secretly what the weather was where the Army was at the front. So, we sort of could estimate where they, what they're up to by the fact we were getting weather secretly back from some of the Army to us, so we could get – because otherwise, it was very difficult for the forecasters to give an idea of weather over target. And so, you know, people didn't realise because it had to be kept quiet of course, but the Army used to sneak information to us sometime as to what the weather was, where the frontline was more or less. Yes.

So, you were a little bit isolated really because we didn't meet any other WAAF's really, either. Because we never went into any of the social side of Driffield, we were too busy.

MG: Mm.

CJJ: You know, coz we were a 24-hour, regardless of flying or not and only five of us; five Met girls. So, you know, we were busy [chuckling].

MG: Did you maintain contact with your family? Did you see them? Did you correspond with them at all?

CJJ: Well, my parents, my parents were actually at the time were in Cornwall and I couldn't get from Driffield to Cornwall for 48-hour leaves. But one of the wireless operators in the hut – because I was NCO in charge of their hut as well, poor girls – she was very good. She lived at Eastbourne on the east coast, so she could get down from Driffield fairly quickly and her family sort of adopted me. So, when she had leave and I went with her, I went too – if we had a weekend, I could go down to her family and they were very good. Yes.

And I had some, a family; a very well-known family who lived in Driffield were very good to me. They kept some civilian clothes there. I used to go off duty, I could go to her place to have a bath at night. They sort of adopted me. They were a wonderful couple. They had a lot of property there. He was an antique dealer and they had an estate, and they sort of took me on.

So, you know, that was my free time. If I'd any, was spent purely with them and they kept some civilian clothes if I wanted them, and they were marvellous for me and I could go there if I needed anything, you know. But my parents you see, I couldn't get hold of. They were down in Cornwall.

MG: Could you communicate with them at all?

CJJ: Pardon?

MG: Could you communicate with them at all?

CJJ: Oh yes. Well, we wrote to each other. Oh, my father would, used to contact with me; he used to write to me and I didn't do much letter writing back, I'm afraid.

MG: [Chuckling]

CJJ: But we did keep in contact, but I didn't go and stay there. Not until I got compassionate leave for a week when Tim was killed and I went to Cornwall for that as my parents were in Cornwall and I stayed with my parents for a week when that happened. But otherwise, no. No, it was too difficult to travel really. Yes.

MG: Did you ever go for a fly? Did you ever go flying? Were you ever taken up for a flight?

CJJ: Well, that's interesting. Officially, in 1945 when the war with Europe was over but the rest was still on, they said because I – they call me off [chuckling] – coz I was on an official – a word I wanted. Trying to think of the word – I was considered – anyway – one of the working ones, you know? And they said, "We can give you, if you want, to go in a Halifax; a trip over Germany to see" – or down to places and coming back and they said "Would you like it?" and I said "I would love it!"

And of course – it's really quite funny, because I'm so small – they literally, I had to...with all my palaver on, throw me into the aircraft as I couldn't get in. More or

less, picked me up and threw me in. And I lay down at the front and I'm facing the nose, and we went all the way over to ...Cologne, and all around and the pilot was so enjoying all this, we got back half an hour late and there was such a rumpus, they cancelled them. So, I was the only one that ever got it. They said "No. If you can't stick to the rules, that's it." So, nobody else got the chance. So, I think I was about the only one who got a trip in a Halifax, all the way to...It was fascinating. I loved it.

I went lying down for outgoing. Coming back, they clipped me up into the upper air, mid-upper gunner turret, not the seat [*chuckling*] and they gave me a whole lot of tissues in case I was air sick coming back. They said "We can't let you out."

And when I got back, they said "How did you go?" I said "Oh, I was fine." "Oh" he said "the co-pilot was air sick coming back" [*chuckling*], so I felt quite complimented.

MG: What was your impression of what you saw on that flight?

CJJ: Hm?

MG: What was your impression of what you saw on that flight?

CJJ: Horrified, really.

MG: Yeah...

CJJ: I had very mixed feelings because you see, my husband was a bomber pilot. I had very mixed feelings when I came back. I almost hated it, if you know what I mean, that it had to happen. But I agreed with it because of what had happened to London and then Coventry in England and that. So, I had to look at it, what good it did for the war. But I must say, it upset me a little bit.

Yes, you know? You had to try and forget that really, you know? But the first impression was "Oh, no", you know? And then you realise and you think about it, and of course you realise it was essential.

MG: How did you find out that the war had ended? Particularly the war in Europe.

CJJ: I suppose, you see, then we'd all have wirelesses. Well, I didn't personally but the forecasters had a wireless and that, so we just heard it I suppose on the news. But it didn't make any difference to us coz we still went on. You know, even though there wasn't much flying, the Met office still went on plotting charts for quite a while. I didn't come out, because although I was under Air Ministry, all the married girls were given their discharge first. Anybody that had other reasons for compassion, they got theirs. Well, I had no reasons really, so I was left 'til everybody else had gone and then they put me in [*chuckling*] one of the Barracks rooms, because the Nissen; the WAAF site closed down and I was put in Barracks for a while. So, I finished up; left the Air Force in January '46. Yes.

So, it was interesting. I'm glad I did meteorology, and I think it was a valuable part of the service, you know?

Actually, I was offered at the end of 1944, they wanted to open a Met office in Cairo and Air Ministry said "We'll give you sergeant rank and will you go and open it?" and I said "Well, are there any snags to it?" He said "You've got to sign for two years." And I stopped and thought, and it was '44 and I thought "The war is nearly over, I've had enough." I regret it bitterly. I said "Do I have to?" He said "No. It's optional but we'd like you to." I said "Well, to be quite honest if it's two years, I don't really want to do two more years." The maddening thing was, I came out in January '46. I wish it; I regret it very much.

MG: *[Chuckling]*

CJJ: And I wish I'd done it. Yeah.

MG: **While you were at Driffield, do you have any memories of the squadron commanders, of the base commander? Of the leadership group?**

CJJ: No. We had very little time – I made hardly any personal friends at all because I wasn't a sergeant, so I wouldn't have gone to the sergeant's mess anyway. I was only a Corporal, and I spent any free time I had with this family who lived in Driffield and they more or less adopted me, and any free time was spent with them. I had meals with them and I spent all my time with them. And a lot of my evening free times, I went to the WVS (Womens Voluntary Service) canteen and helped them to – you know, because a lot of the boys used to go there and the girls, and they were short of women volunteers. So, we used to go make cheese sandwiches for the boys. So, I spent a lot of my free time down at the WVS canteen, helping the volunteers do things for the Army boys. There were a lot of Army transport went through Driffield, and they used to go to this WVS canteen. So, one of the wireless ops and myself, we used to go regularly down there and help them to do things down there. So, most of my free time was very narrow; very narrow.

So, I knew hardly any – I don't think I made any personal friends with any of the Australians at all coz I never really saw them very much. Only when they came into the Met office because – no.

MG: **Did you stay in touch with any of your service friends after the war?**

CJJ: Yes! This one I went to Eastbourne with and there was one of the other wireless operators from my hut. The three of us kept in touch. In fact, one night we went, we were taken to Scarborough – because one of the girls was engaged to an Army officer – and he took me to a hotel for dinner - it was a highlight. It was gorgeous! And we stayed friends until well, until they died. And they were married, have children, they used to come and stay with me – and I lived down in Dorset for a time – and they used to come and spend holidays with their children when I was, and I was a widow then, so I was looking after my mother. So, we kept in touch. So as to, the two wireless ops but none of the Met officers for some reason. They, we were never very close. Well you see, we never really met because one was

getting to bed, one was sleeping and one was on duty. So, to be quite honest, we never went out together because we'd only five on the station and we had to keep the Met office 24 hours a day. We literally worked hard, you know?

MG: Yeah.

CJJ: So we never got time to have a social life really. Apart from with this civilian family. But we kept in touch after the war, the one from each side because of the hut. We'd slept in the same Nissen hut for years. But yes.

MG: **What did you do after the war? Did you work after the war?**

CJJ: Well, when the war was over of course, and I was a young widow, my father unfortunately was – before he was ill – when I came out first, the one, my sister was a nurse. The one that was the Norland nurse to General Peters, eventually they took her away from that. They said it's not a war work and she was put in charge of some evacuated children in Wales.

Well then, she decided being just a Norland nurse – that's the same as Prince Charles has got actually, is a Norlander – she went to St. Thomas' Hospital to become a state registered nurse. So, when I was out, I said to her "What do I do now? I've got to get a job" because I'm a widow, you know. She said "The up and coming thing is physiotherapy."

So, to cut a long story short, I got to Guy's Hospital in London to do physiotherapy. But just before I got towards the end of the training, my father got cancer.

MG: Oh.

CJJ: And it was terminal. They reckon he had it for about 20 years. St. Thomas' Hospital said they can't do anything. He came home and I asked for six months leave from Guys to nurse him. So, I nursed my father for six months with cancer. At the end of the six months, they were very good – they wrote to me and said "We think you could follow on where you are with the same group." Very foolishly, I said I did not want to go back.

So virtually, my mother was financially independent. I came back to mother, lived with mother, looked after her, and I got a job as a bookkeeper. Because I'd learnt from my father, because he had his own firm. Bookkeeping was just so easy to me and so, that's why I just did – had various jobs as bookkeeping for companies, you know?

MG: Mm-hmm.

CJJ: And I enjoyed it actually. I love it now. Yes, so that was why I had to do bookkeeping. But I should have gone back and done my physio, but hindsight is a wonderful thing. Mm.

Unknown: José, when did you go to Africa?

CJJ: Is that of any interest?

MG: It's very interesting. We just got a question here – when did you go to Africa?

CJJ: Oh. It was 1952, I had my husband's; first husband who was killed, his sister lived in Rhodesia as it was then, in Salisbury. She was secretary to a tobacco auctioneer, and I was getting a bit run down at this stage and a bit depressed and I didn't know what to do, and she said "Come to Africa." So, I said, I thought about it and thought "Yes!" So, I got rid of all the *[chuckling]* money I had and I went on my own– when I think about it, I was crazy. I booked to go one way to Salisbury. So, and I went by boat. It was wonderful. It went all the way up the east coast, got to Salisbury and I stayed there for a short time but unfortunately got malaria and wasn't too happy and had a rough time. I loved it, and then I travelled you know, around. I flew over, day trips over Livingstone and I sailed on the Zambezi and all this on my own. I was crazy. You wouldn't do it now.

And then I went to Johannesburg where I had an aunt. I wish she'd written her life story. She was an incredible person. She'd been a missionary in Africa for years and she was in her 80s, and she'd done all sorts of things. She'd nursed the *[Dowager]* Empress of China at one stage, and she'd been in prisons in Siberia for nursing someone where she shouldn't have been, and she was fascinating. So, I headed to Johannesburg.

Then I finished up at Knysna, which is a holiday place in Northern Province, and I spent six weeks with him and my cousin there and went all over the place. And then I went to stay with friends on a tobacco farm and I stayed on there for a week or two. I'm afraid I was a bit of a loose cannon for – and then I came back in – of course, when I was in Durban going out, King George VI died. So, of course, everybody was going to try and book for the coronation that would come for the Queen. So, I'd only booked a one-way ticket.

And I was at Knysna and fortunately for me, I'd been made an honorary guest at the local tennis club *[chuckling]* for a month and Mrs Thyssen, who owns the Thyssen shipping line, you know? She got me into the club and she said "Oh, don't worry. I'll get you on a boat" and I was given the choice of the Edinburgh Castle or another one. She said "You go on the Edinburgh Castle. It's the flagship. Everybody's got to hooty! So, I came back on the – and so I came back then. After six months, I came back to England. And it was the answer. I was nowhere; in the air. I was in a mess before I went, and it was fascinating. I loved that. It was a happy country then. Rhodesia was a very, very happy country. Yes.

MG: What led you to move to Australia?

CJJ: Pardon?

MG: What led you to move to Australia?

CJJ: Well, I'd always had bronchitis— when I lived – when I married Maurice, my second husband – who, we met in Italy [*chuckling*] – and went to live in Leicester, in the Midlands. And after a while, it's a very damp sort of climate in Leicester and I kept getting bronchitis. Because of that, the doctor eventually said "This is ridiculous. You've got to go to a warm climate." He said "You can't go on."

So, at the time – this was 1968 – they were sort of pushing migrations too.

MG: Mm-hmm.

CJJ: So, we studied where to go; which country, to go where and Australia was pushing very much. And so, that's why – my daughter then was five years old – and so that's why we came. And we studied temperature, and being a meteorologist and decided your best climate in Australia is Western Australia [*chuckling*]. Yes, it's drier. For bronchial people, it's perfect. I never had an attack of bronchitis afterwards.

Well, hardly. Now, this I find different because it's humid here, but WA was perfect for us. So, that's why we moved there, purely for my health. Because my husband at the time worked at an engineering firm but we decided that that was the answer. And we don't regret it, of course.

MG: Do you have contact with the Department of Veteran's Affairs at all?

CJJ: With Air Force people?

MG: With the Department of Veteran's Affairs?

CJJ: Yes!

MG: Yes?

CJJ: Yes, I've always had a, we've always been in contact with them. We get English pensions and they come through Veteran's Affairs as well. They've been wonderful, I must admit. We've done everything through them. Because we joined the RAF Association too when we came here. I was a member in Western Australia and then we went to live on an RAF estate at WA, you see. At Merriwa. That was run by the RAF. So, we've been in contact.

And then at one stage, I had 462 and 466 squadron invited me for lunch with one year here, when I was on holiday with my daughter from WA. We came here on holiday regularly, and I kept in touch with them and they used to get in touch with me. But I was still a member of the English Air Force Association and so, they used to keep in contact. But then eventually, I separated from them and stayed with the RAF Association here.

So, I've always been in touch and with Veteran's – Veteran's Affairs have been marvellous. Yeah.

Oh, your tea, you'll let your tea go cold.

MG: It's gone *[chuckling]*.

CJJ: *[Chuckling]*

Unknown: José –

CJJ: Oh, you've had it. I didn't notice.

Unknown: Say about the letter you got from Veteran's Affairs for your –

CJJ: I can't hear what –

MG: Can you tell us about the letter you got from Veteran's Affairs for your 100th?

CJJ: Oh yes, it was very nice. I got a letter from the Defence Minister. Yes, that was nice. Yes, I got – because I got one from the Queen, I got one from the Prime Minister, one from the Premier of New South Wales, a letter and then I got this one, which I was more thrilled than any I think, in a way. Because it was the Defence Minister sent me a letter. So, I don't know how he found out. And it was wonderful. I got so many cards, everybody was marvellous and they gave me a wonderful do; 100th birthday do here. We had it here. Beatrice, she's a brilliant organiser, my daughter.

Beatrice: Oh, it was a just family one.

CJJ: You did. You did a wonderful do with balloons and cakes and – wonderful. Yes, so it was marvellous – well, Veteran's Affairs have always – but I think with two very small English pensions, for the short time we worked in England and it comes through Veteran's Affairs. And then they deal with our Australian pension, because we're on the Australian pension.

MG: Mm-hmm.

CJJ: And that comes from Veteran's Affairs, so we've always been in touch with Veteran's Affairs and they've always been very helpful. Yes. They're very good.

MG: Excellent. Do you have any other stories you would like to tell? Or any other experiences you'd like to relate?

CJJ: I don't really know of other experiences, much than – it's funny though. In Africa, when I was travelling on my own, I wanted to go by train to see more places and they said "Oh, you don't do that. You're white, you don't do that. You go by air or by car." And I said "But you know, I don't think I'll see anything otherwise." So, they used to lock me in the cabin *[chuckling]* the coach, at night because they said "We can't trust the people in the other places." He said "It's risky to have you", and the person doing it was a Cockney from London and he was working on the railways. And when I was going down from Rhodesia down to Johannesburg and it was really funny, and I felt – well, I got through Mafeking. Because of course it's world famous and I stopped them, I said "Well, where's Mafeking?" They said "This is it!" I said "I can't see much", and a lot of lovely – the native people who

living there had the little huts homes and she said "This is it!" and she said "We always stop here coz we fill the train with water here." [Chuckling] I laughed. I'd come all that way to see Mafeking and that's all there was.

Beatrice: Mum, what about when, you know how – what about when, you know how when... I think it's interesting when Tim was killed, how the locals –

CJJ: I've just told him that.

Beatrice: You've just told him that?

CJJ: Yes, I told him that.

Beatrice: Oh, I wasn't – oh, okay.

CJJ: They were wonderful.

Beatrice: Yeah.

CJJ: Because apparently how we found out about that was because one of the relatives of one of the crew who'd been killed was a friend of an army officer, and he happened to go to Germany and she said "Can you find out anything for us?" So, he went to the area and the villagers told him "Oh yes", they can. One survived; a mid-upper gunner survived but he was Canadian, so he was a prisoner of war and went. He never contacted me, I never got hold of him. He went back to Canada and that was it.

But this person, they now wrote to me and said "Look, we've found out that they gave them a good funeral", they were marvellous to them. Because the rest of them – there were seven, of course in a Halifax. So, there was six because my husband was the pilot. He was a Pilot Officer. And it was a shame really because he was due to be promoted to Flight Officer that day but they never gave it to him because he was killed that night. So, he never got it. But he was a – but he was very proud of how he'd been an auxiliary squadron. And he was with the 600 City of London, which is a very well-known squadron. He used to fly before the war for fun, sort of thing.

So, but that was interesting to find out that how they; Germans really looked after them. But you know, the aerodrome was rather a shame in a way. We didn't really get the chance to get to know any Australians because you were working all the time. As I say, Air Ministry was so short of staff, we just couldn't – we kept asking for more help and more help. Well, they just – why, I don't know. And so, it was a case you're on duty, sleeping or visiting the village to friends, or helping at the WVS Canteen, you know?

It's a very narrow life really. Well, crew had a – my husband had a very interesting life because he was in the 600 City of London squadron and called up a month before World War broke out. So, as soon as they started blitzes on London, he was in night fighters on Defiants, and they were having a terrible time. They were flying over London when it was blazing. He said it's the most terrible thing he'd

ever seen, and he did two tours with the 600 as a night flyer. And when he qualified, they said "Well, you can be an instructor", you see on air gunners. He said "Well, I've always wanted to be a pilot." "Right, you can go to Cranwell and you re-master." And so, it must have been a bit of a pull, and so that is what happened. He went to Cranwell and became a pilot and then went to, was posted to Halifax's.

So, I've been connected with service sort of all the time, you know? And I've kept in touch because I've always found that the friendship between it was always so good, you know? But you know, I don't know of anything really that happened, in my life.

And we laugh – talking about the human side of the Air Force. When I was at Coniston – I was only there a few months – I said "I've got to get to Driffield but I've got a very special bicycle because I have to go on and off work with a bicycle. How do I get my bicycle to Driffield?" you see, and the pilot said "Oh, you forget about that." so, I forgot about it. And when I arrived at Driffield, the Air Force officer in charge of the Met office said "Hmm, you must be rather special. We got a bicycle delivered personally by plane. It's standing outside the Met office." [Chuckling] I felt terrible. He said "Yeah, I don't know who brought it or what plane, but apparently they flew it all the way from Coniston, Lincolnshire up to Driffield. Even delivered it to the Met office and it was standing outside the Met office door when I arrived. And the forecaster laughed, he said "You've got a bit of priority", he said [chuckling]. Yeah, so it was my bicycle and I used it to go on – because our shifts weren't the same as – only the wireless operators and us had the same shifts. That's why we shared accommodation. And so, it was easier for me to have a bicycle than to rely on the transport truck because the hours were different. And we were two miles away from the aerodrome and all fields are farms.

And I said to Beatrice, one of the things I remember is the security. We never had... all those WAAFs were in this camp two miles from the aerodrome and we were traveling by ourselves through the county during the war. What a difference. No problems at all. You never worried about being escorted or anybody meeting you. We just sidled on duty, sidled off duty.

And the boys from the fire brigade, they always park outside the Met office when there's flying, you see. They repainted my bicycle for me and they used to clean it for me, and they painted my number 2085183 all down the bar in big white letters, to say "Nobody's going to steal this bicycle", and the fire department painted it for me. I think I was a bit spoilt by the fire department because they – when there was flying, the fire jeep was always outside our door. We were on the Air Force, being in flying control, you see. And it was funny, yes. It was very – they sort of look after us. They used to take our laundry from my hut particularly, said "How do you take your laundry to Driffield?" I said "It's very difficult." "Right" he said, "I go and check the fire extinguishers when we're off camp." So, every time he checked the fire extinguishers, he collected our laundry [chuckling]–

MG: [Chuckling]

CJJ: - and took it in the fire jeeps, in the laundry and then he collected it. I think our fire department was well looked after on the WAAF camp.

Beatrice: There mustn't have been many fires to deal with then.

CJJ: Never, I never – thank goodness – I never, ever saw a fire at Driffield. Now, when I was at Coastal Command at Silloth, they christened it The Hudson River – it is so sad – the Hudson aircraft stalled so quickly that so many Hudson's came down in there. It was terrible. And they'd had a couple of Hudson's actually crash on land with crew and burn. I was really glad to leave Silloth. I didn't like it at all. It was a Coastal Command and it had a lot of bad time with those Hudson planes. But when we were at Driffield, thank goodness I never, ever saw a fire.

Now, Driffield was bombed before the war, I think. I have an idea it was and I think the hangers we got were brand new. They were new when we were there. I think it had been bombed before the war; the beginning of the war.

There were new hangers and we were all Halifaxes. We don't get as much credit as the Lancasters, yet we flew more flights. Halifaxes more than the Lancasters but we never seem to get the credit. You know?

MG: Mm.

CJJ: I played sport a lot, I must say that. Because we had a badminton team which we won the cup. We had a tennis team and we won the cup. We didn't do very well with hockey because they'd all trained in India and they were brutal, the boys who played hockey [chuckling].

So, playing badminton in a hanger is probably the perfect place to play it.

MG: Yes.

CJJ: So, when I came off night duty, I'd have an hours of badminton with one of the fire crew, actually. We'd play badminton with me singles and that's how I kept fit during the war, was playing ball. We had a, not a lot but if you could sneak it for an hour after you came off night duty before you settled down, you could play badminton in a hanger. [Chuckling] they have their uses. Yes.

MG: A good way to wind down after work, as well.

Beatrice: What about counting the planes back in? Did you know, you used to –

CJJ: No, the wireless – no, the, we didn't have to do that, no. The wireless ops got more information like that. But the night –

Beatrice: But couldn't you hear them come in at night and count –

CJJ: Oh gosh, yes.

Beatrice: Yeah – count them coming back?

CJJ: Oh yeah. Oh yes, and it was awful because what you hated; you went on duty and you know which ones had not returned. But the morning that Tim went out on to Berlin, I was going to go on duty and the wireless op; girl who was on duty; the corporal, she came to meet me. And of course, as soon as I saw her coming to me, I knew there was – and there's a blackboard in there and it had T.Wood-Brown (Tim) listed as missing. And she stopped me on the way to tell me. And I went, I went on duty and started to plot a chart and the Padre came and was absolutely furious that they let me you know, do a job. So, he had me sorting underwear somewhere [chuckling]. He had a department of some of these socks – and I don't know what they were. Anyway, he dragged me off to this place to help him sort these things out and one of the young forecasters, he was marvellous. He was furious. He rang up and said "She's got to have immediate leave" and oh, he really kicked up about it. He said "It's ridiculous. She's trying to plot a chart and her husband's just been killed!" And he got me seven days leave, and I went down to Cornwall to stay with my parents. But they didn't bother, you know? It's just oh, it's on a board, you know? Just too bad, sort of thing. But it was happening so much, it was awful.

MG: Mm.

CJJ: But the wireless ops suffered that the most because they'd go on duty and see what happened. We didn't really – unless you knew anybody particularly, it didn't sort of affect you as much. And a lot of the crew I didn't really know. Only the navigators or the pilot might come into our office before a flight, pick up their card–

MG: Mm.

CJJ: - to take with them during the flight, and the forecaster fill that in. But they'd only come in, pick it up and go. And then the forecaster would go to debriefing and he would give them a briefing on the weather. But we didn't really get much contact with them, which is a shame in a way.

But as I say, I met this family in the village and they sort of adopted me, and I had meals there. I even had a Christmas dinner there and all sorts of things, you know? They looked after me. I think because of Tim having been killed. They sort of took me under their wing and they were very good. And we kept in touch for years and years and years, until they both died. But I kept in touch with them. Yep.

MG: Mm-hmm.

CJJ: Yeah, yeah. No, but –

MG: **José, finally, what do you think, what would you like people like me and my generation to pass onto the next generation about your wartime experiences and what you learnt from your wartime experiences?**

CJJ: Yes. Well, I think the thing that you've got to be sort of tolerant, you know? You have things that you wouldn't agree with and you don't like and what happened,

and I think really find out what works, you know? What people are trying to get through to you. You know what I mean? I think I learnt a lot of that. That there's a lot more to people than the surface, you know? I shared a hut with nine people for about three or four years, and you learn different sides of life. And I think you learn a lot about that, there's the tolerance of people.

Really think about it, you know? How deep feelings go with people. I learnt a lot from that, I think from the experiences. And I loved it. I mean, to be quite honest, it sounds silly to say in a war you loved it, but the help you got from each other in a way, often it was quite silent but you knew it was there and that sort of thing. And I think I learnt that much from the Air Force, definitely. I think you know; we work together as a people and it was marvellous.

MG: Yes.

CJJ: It really was. Although we were technically under Air Ministry, I was in WAAF uniform and I was sleeping in their quarters; the WAAF quarters and I don't think people realise so much –

Beatrice: What was that, what was the incident where – that you were bombed or something and that girl –

CJJ: Pardon?

Beatrice: What about the, what was the incident where the girl died who was in the cupboard? Was that on your base or not?

CJJ: I don't know – no. Well, the girl it happened to was on our base.

Beatrice: This was a bombing – go back again.

CJJ: It was a WAAF I met; one of the WAAF. I'm not certain if she was a wireless operator or not, and we were talking about things – this was the morning after I think we'd been shot up – and she said her sister had been in some of the services somewhere, and she said she was in a sort of small; little annex room sort of thing and they'd been bombed. And she said they couldn't believe it. When they went, they opened the door and there wasn't a mark on her. She fell out, dead and they said what had happened, they think the blast had burst her lung. And yet, the sister said it was the most appalling thing. Said there wasn't a mark on her. She said she looked perfectly alright but she just fell out.

MG: Wow!

CJJ: And it was, she was trying to explain the effects of bombs can have. That you don't have to be hit.

That blasts can do it, and it was her sister was killed. And I don't know what the sister was at the time, but this girl was on the WAAF with me and yes, we couldn't believe it. And I think that's why we were so scared about being machine gunned [*chuckling*]. But the ack-ack was almost more frightening than the bullets because

the shrapnel noise that was made, that was awful! You know, and the ack-ack you know, it was.

Really, we weren't, Driffield was lucky. It wasn't bombed while we were there. But Hull was. If we'd time to go – I think I only went a couple of times – we could go to Driffield to Hull by train. But Hull was bombed of course during the war, you know? It was bombed and I'd have to – well, I'd been on night it was bombed but we weren't where it happened [*chuckling*] fortunately.

But one of my – talk about interesting lives – one of my Met girls, her job before the war – you won't believe – she used to be on an organ in a cinema, she used to come on and play the organ. In the old days, they had these in a cinema.

Beatrice: Well, they've got one at the Orpheum in Cremorne, haven't they?

CJJ: Pardon?

Beatrice: They've got the Wurlitzer at Cremorne Orpheum, it comes out.

CJJ: Have they? Well, she used to, that was her job. We thought she was teasing us at first, but then we found out she was quite right. In Hull, she was in a big cinema and she used to go up on this Wurlitzer organ and play before the film came on.

And one had been a ballet dancer. She married a forecaster, actually. And there were quite a variety of people, but they'd all had to have a certain education at Met. That's why we were put together. The wireless ops and the Mets were paid the same rate; same grade, top grade. We were top grade paid, which I disagree with. I think everybody should be paid the same in the airforce but they weren't. You were paid according to trade and we were listed as grade two – there wasn't a grade one then. There is now. I think radars are grade one. But grade two was the highest grade and the wireless ops and the Mets, so that's why we were put in the same huts together.

And I always thought it wrong because the sergeant cooks were getting less pay than our Met girls and to me, that was always an injustice, to me. I think everybody was doing the best that they could anyway.

But on the whole, I suppose you didn't realise how much of a war was going on. Because we were sort of opinionated together to planes going off, planes coming back, forecasting, drawing it. My only regret is I never took a chart away with me when I left. Because they're really quite a work of art. They're really quite beautiful.

Beatrice: And you were saying you weren't allowed to keep diaries.

CJJ: No. Now, that's another big regret. I wanted to keep a diary and we were told you are not allowed to have anything written. You can't write it down. After the war, all these people are publishing diaries like mad and yet, we were told we couldn't write a diary because it anti-security. And you weren't allowed to do lots of things like that. You couldn't –

Beatrice: And not photos.

CJJ: Yes! No, you couldn't do that – I've got not hardly any photos – have you got my book?

Beatrice: Yeah.

CJJ: Show him my book. No! That's, to me was – well, no, so I don't – very few photographs. But the squadron asked me to write this –

Beatrice: You've seen this?

MG: I'm aware of that one, yep.

Beatrice: Yeah, because mum did a thing in that.

CJJ: That's me *[chuckling]*

MG: *[Chuckling]* fabulous.

CJJ: That's me.

Beatrice: Yeah.

CJJ: And that's me. That's me there. And those are my forecasters and those are my girls. That's the entire crew and we worked 24 hours a day for four years, and that's all of us.

MG: Wow!

CJJ: *[Chuckling]* yeah.

MG: We'll look at this in just a sec.

Beatrice: Yep.

MG: But José, it's been fascinating listening to your wartime story.

CJJ: Pardon?

MG: It's been fascinating listening to your wartime story. I thank you very much for your time and for sharing your memories.

CJJ: No.

MG: It really has been a privilege to interview you. Thank you.

CJJ: Well, as long as it's been of any use to you.

MG: Absolutely it is, yes.

CJJ: Has it? Well, that's good.

MG: Yes, thank you.