

Donald McPhail, Interviewed: ?

Q: Donald, could you start by saying what was happening in the beginning of the war, to you?

DM: Well, as far as I remember, I was working on a farm at [Baclybe] when the war broke out. Worked at this hill farm between [Keppen and Pentree], the [Gribloch], a kind pf Gaelic name, and it was called 'Rock Place Facing the Sun'. Well, that's what they said. It was hard. War broke out when I was working at the farm at [Baclybe]. I left that farm because it was a dairy farm and it was too early in the morning! For me to get up early! Half past four! 'Course, when I went to [the Gribloch], it was a November's day, November the twenty-eighth. That was the day you moved from farm to farm.

Q: Right.

DM: And what woke us was a great cry, looking for young men to join up. And it was Light the Country people. Light the Country men. I was brought up in the country. And of course, I said to my boss: 'I'll be joining too!' 'You'll not do anything of the kind!' [Boss Straer] said. That was my boss. 'I'm needing you here. I've got two quite big farms.' And I wasn't very old. I was thirteen years old at that date. Or I was coming up on sixteen. Fifteen, would be right. Well, when I started working at the time of the start of the war, it was just a hill farm. There were no arable ground at all. No arable work done. It was arable ground, right enough. So of course the instructions came from the department, as far as I understand, plough so many acres. And it was put to produce corn. And it wasn't a very rich ground, you know, but they could produce good corn. Oats. And of course, the oats were fed to the cattle and that saved buying cake, you know, to give to the cattle.

Q: Right.

DM: For the winter months. There were two farms. Here was the hill farm and this low ground farm worked together. It worked out quite well. The high ground farm, the [Gribloch] was a wee bit later than the low ground one. We used to go down and help that farmer. That farmer would bring his equipment up to the [Gribloch] and we cut the corn --

Q: You swapped over.

DM: --which made us and this tractor was an old horse and tractor. It was different work, but oh, yes, it was all right. []

Q: I'll ask you some questions. What time did you start in the morning? What time did you have to be up and out?

DM: Well, this farm, it was eight o'clock.

2nd Q: Oh! That's all right!

DM: And it was 'til six at night. And an hour off for your dinner. Eight to six and an hour off for your dinner. A wee break at ten o'clock tea, and three o'clock.

Q: What was your typical day? What would you do? Your first jobs?

DM: Well, first I remember it was porridge! Good oatmeal, you see. Things got rationed. Things started getting scarce. The farm was well off because with the milk and cow. You see, you had your own milk. You could make butter with milk, too. But we had just few cows. We had not very many cows, maybe twenty. Oh, aye, that was right, yes, milk cows from heifers, up at the ... ready to calve produced milk. And of course sold them in the market, and that was how the farmer made a living.

Q: So you would have your breakfast and then go out and start. What were your first jobs?

DM: First thing in the morning it was feed the animals. Yes. I think that would be. But in the lambing time, of course, in the winter you start to [] lamb and sheep. You get around, back in by ten o'clock. You had to be [] and you had to go out to hill again. I would see for my own, a bit of waiting, the lambing. [] And afternoon I went out again and wee turn my way around the sheep and well, the hill I was on was a wee hill. I went out there, after dinner time, one o'clock. I come back until eight. I had a wee stove, a wee paraffin stove. I could boil a kettle. There was a spring at the out of the way farm. And they ... These things are all coming back to me now! And more than that, I took milk. Some milk with me. And if the lamb needed to milk, I could heat it on the stove. And then of course feed it, you see, to the lamb with a bottle. Oh, aye. It was very busy! And then of course, had to plough. Lamb and sheep was the main thing at that time, at the lambing time. And after the lambing was kind of finished, we'd do the ploughing. Well, we all did a wee bit. Of course, I got stronger, you see, being on the farm, quite well fed. Oh, yes, got the best of milk, could make your own cheese! But the only thing, we couldn't get sugar! No sugar. We had saccharine. And there was a horrible taste to it, a tannic taste. So as far as I was concerned, I stopped eating sugar!

Q: You stopped taking sugar! And with the ploughing, was that with the tractor?

DM: No, it was a pair of horse.

Q: A pair of horse. So you were behind ...

DM: Yes.

Q: With the ...

DM: Just one furrow at a time.

Q: *Right.*

DM: And ploughed it. It took a good job with the ploughing because farmers were very protective of their land and whatnot.

Q: *Right.*

DM: You took a furrow over, and leave the [] for the harnesses, leave a wee bit , and then you've got a sheet, long sheet ...

Q: *Right. Toss them in.*

DM: Spread your corn in. And you were supposed to take a [rag] at a time, that was five yards. Five yards! And then, the corn fell in between the furrows. The horse is yoked. [Hurried] the horse. To the top of the furrows and that covered the corn. The corn all come up in nice rows. The work was remarkable.

Q: *Good stuff.*

DM: Now, what that was in mind of, when it came to the harvest time, and of course that stook, the big stooks, sheaves is what we'd call them. And you set it up into stalks, six sheaves for a stook. And they left it to dry, and once it was dried, you just took it in to the ... And this was a horse, and they built it in stacks and [Willie Struthers] bought a ... I don't know how he got it, a wee threshing mill. And put it in the barn. And of course, you see, we could thresh a stack when it came to much. In the afternoon. But my brother started working on the farm. Because it was a great deal of work. But my brother stayed, oh, a day. But that was my younger brother. We could thresh the corn. We just put the sheaf in the barn, in the bowl, and through the mill. The straw would come out loose, of course, just loose straw. Separate the corn and that was ... you had nice straw for the bedding or for the wee stacks. Of course we grew our own potatoes. And of course that was a great thing, potatoes. Mrs [Struthers] made the cheeses. She made cheeses. She had a home-made press kind of thing somewhere. We had this cheese from the sheep. They were round, eighteen inches in diameter. And maybe nine inches deep. Of course, I'm working with old measurements!

Q: *So what happened in the evening? You finished work at six on the farm.*

DM: Well, I just went home and stayed with my mother.

Q: *Right.*

DM: She had a wee cottage just next to the farm, but there was not another farm.

Q: *Right, right.*

DM: And the reason she got that cottage, I'll tell you this. There was a farm

on the high side of [Printley], had this grazing and this wee cottage. And she put these sheep down there in the winter time. At New Year time. And the way that that would come up in time to do for the lambing season. And that's how my mother got the cottage. Of course, some of us would look the sheep over, give them a bit of a look.

Q: And did you listen to the radio in the evening? Did you have a wireless? Or did you read? Read the paper or...? What did you do?

DM: Well, I think we listened to the radio, and I'll tell you what ... It was a radio similar aspect to what ... Of course we started a way ... the old batteries, I don't know if you remember, but the batteries were like in a [] and charged it. At the time of the war was lasting ... Dry battery.

Q: Yeah, a dry battery.

DM: Dry battery. We were all listening to the news, of course, all interested in what the war was doing.

Q: Yeah.

DM: How the fighting was getting on.

Q: Yeah.

DM: Of course, we weren't hearing everything. They never told you. They didn't want nothing spread over the wireless too much! They kept it very secret. Not like nowadays where they tell you everything. Well, of course, the next episode I had I was commandeered to join the Home Guard. The LDV. Local Defence Volunteers. You were just like a soldier.

Q: Yeah.

DM: Kitted out with an army suit and a tunic. Greatcoat. Again, it's all ... a beret. And went down to [] twice a week, go down in the evening. To the exercises. Learn how to march. Stand to attention. Stand easy. And then of course we were left to firing a rifle at a range. Got a 303 rifle. It was just one bullet at a time. There was no repeat. I was quite good at that. I had good eyesight. I'll tell you another thing about it. The bridges going across the River Forth, they had the holes in them and they could stack very heavy things. You could stack them in that way. This was to block any attacks if the enemy happened to, if the Germans happened to invaded. This was to stop them from not being able to move their equipment, you know. Whether it would have done much good at all ... I think it would. What we've got out there now, I was put on the number one ... a special anti-tank gun. The bullet out of that could pierce though the armour of the vehicles. We were just beginning to get to know how to handle that gun and the proper way to work it when of course the war stopped, you see, and that finished that. Jimmy Petrie was the name of the man who was the number one anti-tank man.

Q: *And this was in Stirling?*

DM: No, it was in [Kippin].

Q: *So you did the training, did you go out and guard anything? What were you supposed to go and ... Or just be ready to...*

DM: More or less just kind of ... stand to attention and things like that. Because we started in ... maybe go out at night and kind of mock ... We split up to two lots. One lot would go in and supposed to hide, you see.

Q: *Yeah.*

DM: The other lot was to come along to see if they could find them. Some of these kind of things. In the dark! A hard demand. I remember I was going home from the Home Guard one night in the dark, and this was two and a half miles, it was actually two and a half miles, two nine-tenths of a miles, probably, to [Kippin] and the reason I know that was that we didn't get up into school because it wasn't three miles. I remember coming up the road and I could hear the convoy coming up ahead, down the road and the light shone bright enough but they had the special shades of the headlights to keep it low, you see, and I got off the road! You couldn't see! It was a very dim ... And didn't blame the soldiers, they were proper soldiers, but they could have been killed.

Q: *So you were in the Home Guard all the way though the war then.*

DM: Yes.

Q: *You had Home Guard duties all the way through.*

DM: Yes. I went in after the war began because I came in as a new recruit. Had to catch up with the rest of them. Well, I forgot to tell you what I was trained to do. Throw the hand grenades.

Q: *Oh, yeah.*

DM: Oh, aye. And I remember the first test we got, the whole platoon was to go and have a wee examination on how the members were doing. I was just new joined. And I remember, how would you go about throwing the hand grenade? Well, I hadn't got a clue, but I knew you lobbed it over somewhere and then clapped down! That was all I ... Oh, I failed on that end! 'Cause I did something wrong!

Q: *They were live? They were live hand grenades?*

DM: No, no. But to throw it, the pin would, oh, they were mock. It was fatal, as soon as you let it go it went out and the thing opened out, a wee lever on the side opened out and it would go off. You had a second or two, four or five seconds. But I don't know how I knew that. Must have been paying

attention to the ... I don't remember who led the [].

Q: *No.*

DM: Night? The cottage my mother stayed in ... No electric light. It really wasn't a very great chance to do much reading. Do you remember, did we get a paper?

2nd voice: Just a weekly paper.

DM: A weekly paper?

2nd voice: Aye.

DM: Every week?

2nd voice: Aye. Just a weekly paper. We didn't get a daily paper.

DM: I thought it was a great use to see what was happening in the war.

Q: *Yeah.*

DM: Of course, we heard all about the Dunkirk capture. The soldiers at Dunkirk. Which was great, which even relations ... were in the army.

Q: *Did you always think that Britain would win? Even though things were bad? You know, at the beginning. Were you always confident that, somehow ...*

DM: Seemed to be, yes. We thought that the Germans came out in an area, the local men would come out and beat them.

Q: *Kind of guerilla ...*

DM: Aye. Of course that was only a small thought, but ... There was something else I wanted to mention. We were always pleased to see our relations who were ... My two cousins went into the army. They were twins. One joined the Light Infantry and the other one the Royal Engineers. Were they taken prisoners? No.

2nd voice: No.

DM: No. Abroad, too?

2nd voice: Willie was in [Dunbar]. And he landed in Italy somewhere.

Q: *In Italy?*

DM: Willie could play the bagpipes. He was the head leader of the bagpipes because they had a band. He was quite good. He's quite ill now, he's in

hospital.

Q: Did you get letters? Did you hear from them? Did letters come from them or did you hear from them?

DM: No.

2nd voice: Jimmy used to send letters to Mother. He was in North Africa, but I don't think he sent letters when he was in North Africa.

DM: Isn't much news in letters.

2nd voice: No. They couldn't say much.

DM: They were censored.

Q: Yeah.

DM: You couldn't just write anything in the letters.

Q: No.

DM: I can remember we had an older brother over there, a half-brother, and he alive yet, too. He's ninety-two.

2nd voice: Ninety-three.

DM: Ninety-three.

2nd voice: He was born in 1912.

DM: And when he come home last time, off on leave, because he hadn't seen me for awhile: 'You grown up awful fast,' he said. 'You've been working the farm and got stronger.' Quite a kind of ...

Q: At the end of the war, when the war ended, you had D-Day and you had ... Did you feel that things were going to be better after the war? What did you think?

DM: I think we were a bit better.

Q: Yeah.

DM: Well, I don't know whether to carry on or no, but this is after the war. After the war, my half-brother who is ninety-two, he decided to ... [] draining with [], heavy work. And he decided to get a machine. To till the land. Of course you needed good able men to go along with the machine. So he enticed us to go to the machine. Of course we made big money. Hard work. But I tell you, that's how I was able to save to come to this farm.

Q: *Right.*

DM: Income tax wondered where did we get the money, but we saved it. Not being married, you know, there weren't expenses in that light!

Q: *You got paid for your work?*

DM: Oh yes!

Q: *How much? Can you remember how much you earned in the war? A week?*

DM: We got our food. I was going to [] and if you got good farmhouse food, the farmer's wife was a good cook, you had a life to the place. And twelve and six. Right? Ten bob a week? When I started at first, I was just a little boy. Five shillings a week I got, and my food, on the farm. When it came lambing time you were supposed to work harder, ten shillings a week. When I went to this dairy farm, I thought this was great, this. I was getting twelve and six. Of course I just jumped at that! Money! But this ... always got a rise. A wee bit added on. Done well. Six month. You've got to stay on this next six month. It was just a place for six months.

Q: *Oh, right.*

DM: From May tenth to November tenth.

Q: *Oh right.*

DM: Whitsunday to Martinmas. And that was how it progressed.

Q: *And the farm you were on had electricity.*

DM: No. I'll tell you what they got. They got an automatic, this was the farmer, he was quite a good head, he was a clever man. Engine. And he got the whole farm wired, lights and etc. And when you switched on the first light, it started up the engine. Built up to give you the light, you see. And of course, then you could switch on all the lights. It wouldn't cost you any more, it was just a wee pot of diesel. I think it was diesel, when I think of it. A diesel engine.

Q: *And you said you had a tractor on the farm.*

DM: No. Not at first, no.

Q: *Not at first.*

DM: No, no. The tractor appeared on the farm. He was a neighbour farmer, with a tractor. A wee ... The farmer who had the first tractor was an old Fordson, a terrible thing. An old one. And if you stopped it, you would get stuck again.

Q: *And then you got another one. A new, a Massey?*

DM: A Ferguson. Just a standard Ferguson. This farmer came up and gave a wee bit of demonstration. Three furrows at a time. Three furrows. Of course, this was great, this is different from one furrow a time with a horse, don't you see? He must have made money, the farmer, to afford this. This was a standard Ferguson.

Q: *Yeah, yeah.*

DM: A standard Ferguson was the same as a Massey Ferguson but at that time he started a way, but they got on to the diesel, diesel Ferguson. He seemed to get a hold of a diesel Ferguson. I'm not sure if it was quite new or not. What I could do was I could drive it. I could drive it. Aye.

2nd Q: *Was there a celebration when the war ended?*

DM: There was something.

2nd voice: There was a dance at the Cross in [Kippin]. I can remember you saying some fellow spoke to you. [Fell saying the feet, thus?] Dancing in the wood. At the Cross.

DM: There was a wee bit open at The Cross at [Kippin], you see.

Q: *Oh, right.*

2nd voice: That's all that I can remember.

2nd Q: *It's just about these people's dinner time.*

Q: *It is, isn't it. That was about thirty minutes you've spoken for.*

DM: Aye.

Q: *That's not bad!*

DM: Interesting, do you think?

Q: *Oh, very. Very interesting!*

2nd Q: *It reminded me of my great uncle who was an air raid warden in a tiny village, miles away from any towns. But he used to bang on the windows and shout at them. And they had to change all the sign posts.*

DM: Oh, aye --

2nd Q: *And then the army came through --*

DM: I forgot about that!

Q: *Did you do that?*

DM: Yes. They took them down.

Q: *They took them down.*

DM: They took them down, that's all they left.

2nd Q: *But then apparently the army came through and asked Mike, because he had his helmet on the back of his bike, my great uncle, they had to ask him where they were, because it was the British Army, and they'd got no idea. And it was supposed to stop the Germans, but the British Army didn't know where they were.*

Q: *They got lost!*

2nd Q: *So they had to be told how to get back to Dumfries.*

Q: *And did you have the blackout? You must have had the blackout.*

DM: Yes! Oh, yes. And another thing, if you want to record it. The first farm I worked at, this dairy farm, the huge bombers, German bombers were coming over. You'd hear them and you'd just ... Whenever you heard them you knew it was a German bomber [makes noise of bomber's engine], the particular beat, and of course, listening to this German as he went past, then the next thing, this terrible explosion. We thought: 'Ooh, God. This is it now!' But no. The thing didn't go all the way on. He had dropped a land mine. He was in a hurry to get away from [Craig Burn], it was [Craig Burn] they were after, he wanted to bomb [Craig Burn] --

2nd Q: *But they'd be getting shot at, presumably.*

DM: Oh, aye!

2nd Q: *So they want to run quick.*

DM: And to get more speed and drop this land mine and just let it go. It seemed to float down in a parachute.

Q: *Yeah.*

DM: How did you know that?

Q: *I've seen them.*

2nd Q: *I haven't.*

Q: *In the museum.*

DM: I remember the next day, we were out, little shepherd and me said: 'Where was that bang last night?' 'Somewhere up here somewhere.' 'Would you come up a way?' It was scary. There was a great big hole. And there was a good bit of silk. This is the parachute! Quite nicely woven stuff. And that was it. There was another one dropped in the [Gribloch]. And I was going to ask to plough the field where this bomb had been dropped that day. I started with the horse and [Willie Struthers] himself, he started from the bomb hole! There was three days when we were steady, where this man dropped this bomb, it usually took more than a week. He just did it in two shakes. What had happened was the bomb start in the [] to give us time to get us both!

[Break, unconnected conversation]

DM: I was out on the hill one day. It was during the war right enough. It was a dull, misty day. I heard this airplane above the cloud and then it gave a crackle. And the next thing I hear, it appeared down through the cloud and it's spiralling. Down, bang! Hit the ground. And of course, there was an explosion and it went on fire. And the next thing, here ducking down out of the cloud was the fabric of one of the wings of the airplane. Fabric, drifting down slowly, down on the ground. Well, all these men were killed. I think it was a [Whitley] bomber.

Q: *Oh, really.*

DM: There was six or seven crew in it. They never got a chance.

Q: *They didn't get out.*

DM: They didn't get time. I think it was late, now. I don't know right. It certainly wasn't ... just one or two years on. Another wee airplane crash landed.

2nd voice: Aye, but it was in the clearing. That didn't come down to the ground.

DM: No. This pilot was in a small airplane. I'm not sure what it was. I don't think it was a Hurricane.

2nd voice: I think it was a Spitfire.

DM: Aye. But he crashed and he slid kind of along the road, just slid off, right into the field. And I think that was supposed to do if they could manage. Keep it near a roadside. If they were going to have a crash. Keep it away from houses. Of course, this was all right. But I never, I don't think the pilot, it was just the one pilot, I think, I don't think he was hurt. Seriously hurt.