

**Joyce Griffin  
Veteran**

**Sarah Wiseman  
Hudson Falls High School  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on  
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Hudson Falls, New York**

**SW:** Good afternoon. Today is December 20th, 2004. My name is Sarah Wiseman [@0:20 check spelling]. Today I am interviewing Joyce Griffin at Hudson Falls High School.

Thank you for coming. First I would like to ask you what is your place and date of birth.

**JG:** In Helsby, in the county of Cheshire, England. I was born October 6, 1922.

**SW:** Do you have any siblings?

**JG:** I have one sister who lives in Connecticut.

**SW:** Did she ever enter into the service?

**JG:** No, she was restricted because she worked in the transportation company.

**SW:** So you were the only one. Did your father enter the service?

**JG:** Not in World War II. He was a British Naval Officer in World War I.

**SW:** Were you able to finish high school?

**JG:** Yes.

**SW:** How did your family feel about you entering into the Auxiliary Territorial Service? [the women's branch of the British Army during WWII]

**JG:** They did not object to it. I wanted to go into what was called The Women's Land Army where you were assigned to farms and so forth. I had an interest in nature. But my father did not think that was appropriate for a young lady. You had to be checked out by your own doctor rather than the military doctor. So my father beat me to my doctor, they had a discussion, and I was turned down. [both laugh] So then I was conscripted into the women's services at that time that it was just the Army that had opened.

**SW:** At what age did you enter?

**JG:** I was nineteen. At age nineteen you were conscripted.

**SW:** What did you do when you were in the ATS?

**JG:** We took shorthand and did typing. I wound up being on a battery of men who were a unit who were experimenting with rockets. It was a highly secret place because rockets were unknown in those days. We would freeze some of the rockets to see how they would fire at low temperatures. And then heat some to see how they would fire in hot countries. We would fire them over the Cardigan Bay [part of the Irish Channel]

**SW:** How were you chosen to be a part of this battery?

**JG:** I don't know really. [both laugh] Well, I think I do in retrospect. I was the secretary to a Naval Commander. He was getting rather old and being phased out. His replacement was chosen and I had to replace a civilian testing the rockets.

**SW:** Were you treated any differently because you were the only woman in this battery?

**JG:** Oh no.

**SW:** Did you have any other duties in this job?

**JG:** I was also the physical education instructor.

**SW:** Were there a lot of other people where you were?

**JG:** There were different phases. I don't know, there was a unit of ATS girls, but everyone was secret from the others. Soldiers were in each place.

**SW:** Was this in England?

**JG:** South Wales [unclear @5:15] you can see that on the old map I brought.

**SW:** Was there anything you especially liked or disliked about your job?

**JG:** No, I did not dislike anything about it. It was quite fun. I used to be able to go up onto the lookout area on the roof of the building with the Captain of the unit. We would have stopwatches and time the explosion of the rockets in the air and as they splashed into the sea. Then I would have to compile the two results. Sometimes we had visiting officers from other countries.

**SW:** How long did you test the rockets?

**JG:** Three years.

**SW:** Did you ever get to leave South Wales while you lived there?

**JG:** Yes, we would be able to go on leave.

**SW:** As you said, your job was top secret, so were you able to reveal anything about what you were doing?

**JG:** Oh no, we could not talk about it.

**SW:** What are some of your most memorable experiences?

**JG:** I think number one is that I met my husband. [both laugh] He was with an American company stationed not too many miles from where we were. They were sort of experimenting with the same ideas about rockets and tanks. Another happy memory was the end of the war because of all the celebrations. And, of course, I have to remember Winston Churchill [British Prime Minister] who kept everyone's spirits up. Just to hear his voice was uplifting.

**SW:** Did you ever see him?

**JG:** No

**SW:** When did you meet your husband?

**JG:** Well the Americans did not come until 1942 I think. I met John in 1943. It's a funny story how I met him. His unit was putting on a little show for the local people and I was invited. I didn't really get to know him at that time but his part in it was up on the stage with

a top hat and cane. He sang “Who Threw the Overalls in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder?” [Sara laughs]

**SW:** That must have been fun.

**JG:** Oh yeah. Then I met him through some friends. There was a service person's canteen there in the town of Cardigan. We started going out and then became engaged before he went back to Europe. He came over on marriage leave some months later sometime in February. Of course he could not get into the establishment, when I got up there I was shocked to see him. He was here on marriage leave and I was not a bit prepared! My poor mother had a hard time gathering up stuff. She only had the C-rations, some food and clothing. But she managed to beg and borrow and maybe steal, I don't know. [both laughed] It was enough to have a wedding. Of course his parents did not approve and neither did mine. They thought we should wait until the end of the war. But you never know what is going to happen in a war.

**SW:** Were his parents in the United States?

**JG:** Yes, but they were in contact with him. They wrote and sent him packages. When John was leaving the States for Europe his father had told him “don't be bringing home any of those Limies!” And of course he did, he called me his life's souvenir.

**SW:** What was it like being a “war bride”?

**JG:** It was scary because of the reports we were getting that the American people were against us. They said we were taking up spaces that their soldiers coming home should have. They were told the soldiers were sleeping on park benches because of us. So it was not too great in New York. I said I wanted to get out of here. I don't like this place. We went back to Connecticut the next day.

**SW:** Is that where he grew up, in Connecticut?

**JG:** Yes

**SW:** Did any of your friends from England treat you any differently because you married an American? Or had they as well?

**JG:** Oh no, not my friends. My sister did have a falling out with the local vicar [clergy leader] because he was against it and saying things about the American soldiers. My sister was in the church youth group and stood up for me saying “that is my sister and she is married to an American. I wish you would not talk that way.” And she never went back to the youth center. There were reservations about it. Some had horror stories, other brides. I was lucky.

**SW:** And you had heard about all these things, how you would be treated before you went to the United States?

**JG:** Yes, we were warned about how there were mixed feelings about it.

**SW:** Did you and your husband travel back to the U.S. together?

**JG:** No, he was sent back by an Army hospital because he had developed an allergy while he was in Belgium. They did not know what it was and shipped him to an Army hospital in Paris where he was stationed. It all turned out related to a stray dog that John had taken in, because he had asthma. He was assigned to a group that was called French [12:40 unclear] those that had Nazi leanings. Of course John did not speak French, they did not speak

English and they worked on an x-ray machine. He was testing it out and leaned against it with his knee not knowing that the current was on and got X-ray burns. So he was finally shipped back to an Army hospital in the United States for treatment which lasted a year. He came back in November of 1945. I came here in April of 1946.

**SW:** How did you arrive here, by ship?

**JG:** Yes, it was a Red Cross ship [13:42 ship name unclear] full of brides and babies of American soldiers. It was a very rough crossing. A lot of Red Cross Nurses and mothers with babies and infants. We who were able to keep standing would crawl in and the smell of that nursery in the mornings was awful because so many babies were sea sick. John met me in New York on crutches.

**SW:** You only stayed in New York that one day?

**JG:** Yep.

**SW:** Where were you when the bombing of London occurred?

**JG:** I was in South Wales mostly. The bombing had started before I was in the Army. My mother, my sister and I used to sleep under the stairs every night. We could hear the hum of the German planes coming. They had a very distinctive sound. I don't know how my poor mother ever slept since there was not very much room with the three of us there. My father worked nights then. But we survived. We did not have too many bombs around us that did kill some cows and made a few craters in the ground.

It was scary though because you would get the impression your name could be on that bomb coming down. I was not in London, but I was in Liverpool during a bad bombing raid. We were two stories underground. We were fine, but when we came out in the morning the stores had been bombed, the goods were all over the street and you heard people calling out that had been buried under the rubble. It was a horrible experience.

**SW:** Were you with your family in Liverpool?

**JG:** No, I was with a friend actually. I don't recall what we were doing. That was before I was in the Army. I was probably just visiting and shopping.

**SW:** Was the bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii a big deal to the British people?

**JG:** I don't really think so. Just like the bombing of London did not mean much to the American people because it was so far away. Pearl Harbor was the same story.

**SW:** Do you remember where you were when you heard about how the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor? Was it talked about much?

**JG:** No, we were still going through the war ourselves in England. We talked of invasions and so forth while we were battling over there, we had landed on the beaches. That is what we were more interested in I guess.

**SW:** How did you feel about the war, looking back while it was occurring?

**JG:** Well, it was alarming because we did not know if we were going to be overrun at any time. The bombs kept falling. We had the Ac-Ack [anti-aircraft] guns going off all time shooting at the German planes. We witnessed a few Spitfire [fighter aircraft used by the Royal Air Force] fights in the sky. Those were marvelous machines. I can't say it was a good feeling, we were

at war and it was kind of scary at times.

**SW:** How do you feel about the German people today?

**JG:** Oh gosh, that was then and this is now. I have no bad feelings about the Germans, it wasn't the German people, it was the Nazism that we were against.

**SW:** Why do you think that England, and the rest of Europe did not know about the Holocaust for so long?

**JG:** I don't know, but it still disturbs me that we did not know what was going on. It was a horror.

**SW:** Do you remember when you did find out about the camps?

**JG:** Not really, but I do know my husband was responsible with a bunch that released at least one of the camps. I don't remember if that was in the Netherlands or Belgium. I should have paid more attention at the time. You just go along with whatever is happening, there was nothing you could do about it.

**SW:** Right. Do you see World War II as a defining moment in your life?

**JG:** Well yes. I met my husband, of course. It brought people closer together. There was more sharing and caring when we had strict rationing. I was in South Wales. It wasn't as bad as the disturbances and invasion in London.

**SW:** Was it difficult for families to ration during the war? Was it very strict?

**JG:** It was very strict. For example, you would have only two ounces of butter, two ounces of margarine, and four ounces of cheese. Everything was rationed like that. It was very difficult. I was lucky because I was raised on a poultry farm. We had all those supplies, even though I did not like any of those products and still don't! At least we could exchange them on the black market.

**SW:** Did that occur often?

**JG:** Oh yeah.

**SW:** I see in my notes that one of your memorable experiences happened on D-Day. You raided all the local pubs? [both laugh]

**JG:** Oh yes, we were free to do that and had a great time. It was such a glorious moment meaning the war was over. There was dancing in the street and overall mayhem.

**SW:** did you hear the news that the war was officially over?

**JG:** Let's see, I have to think about that. I think Churchill announced it on the radio, I guess we were all called to gather around a radio so we could hear his speech. He was such a great man and really held the country together. It was wonderful just to hear his voice.

**SW:** That is important.

**JG:** Yes.

**SW:** In what ways did the war change your any of your activities and your habits?

**JG:** Well, I had to leave home. But I don't think it changed any of my habits.

**SW:** During the war, what did you do for entertainment?

**JG:** We had movies and dances in the local areas. We had Army transports to take us there. We had church parade [marching in uniform to church services] if you wanted to go. Nothing much else. They did have gatherings in the local servicemen building in a place called Cardigan, where they served mostly tea and sandwiches. It was provided by the NAFFI people [Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes an organization created by British government to run recreational establishments]. I don't know what it means but it was something like the Red Cross service group. We would have music there and dancing. Just get together.

**SW:** And that is where you met your husband?

**JG:** Yes, at the service men's club.

**SW:** Were you able to go there often? Was it far from where you were?

**JG:** Only when transportation was available to take us there. At least once a week. It was about ten or twelve miles to the town of Cardigan. There wasn't much to do there, but they did have a movie theater and a lot of pubs.

**SW:** How often were you able to see your family during the war?

**JG:** We would get a leave every so often. About six months or so. My mother and my sister came down to visit once. They stayed in Cardigan. Otherwise I was given transportation, mostly by train and spend time at home.

**SW:** Did you ever visit London during the war?

**JG:** Not during the war, no. It was just after the war where we stayed on my honeymoon.

**SW:** Were people still celebrating the end of the war as much?

**JG:** No, not as much then. This was several months later, but there was still a lot of rationing. We went to a restaurant and one of the main meals was still baked beans or sardines on toast. [both laugh] We just had a few days there then he had to leave and go back to work. And I needed to leave also.

**SW:** How long after the war ended did you leave for the United States?

**JG:** About ten months after the war ended.

**SW:** How was your life different after the war, before you left for the U.S.?

**JG:** Not much. Life resumed, we had our dances and entertainment. I worked while I waited in an educational library. They used to package boxes of books at this library and send them out to schools in the different counties that could not make it in to the library.

**SW:** After the war, did you go back home?

**JG:** Oh yes and then took the job.

**SW:** Was your husband able to visit you at your home?

**JG:** Yes, he was there before our wedding but was booted out [29:11 unclear] to stay at a room in town. He came home on leave, for my birthday in October of 1945. He went back to the States in November and I went the following April.

**SW:** Are there any additional wartime experiences you would like to share?

**JG:** Of course the boys liked the pubs there. I wasn't there for this but while my husband was visiting me my brother-in-law (who was discharged, living in the U.S. and married my sister who followed me two years later). My husband introduced her to his Army buddy. John and his other buddies were on a drunken spree in one of the villages down there. I don't know what they did that was wrong, but there were some lanterns by a construction site. And they were running away from the cops, picked up one of these lanterns as they ran, but the cops could see and follow them wherever they went! [both laugh] That was Tony Hunkle [@31:15 confirm name/spelling]. Then they decided to take a swim in their underwear, they got booted out for that! They were just having a gay old time. It was the drink that did it. They were celebrating.

**SW:** How far was your job from your home? Was it a long distance?

**JG:** Oh yes, from Cheshire in England all the way down to South Wales. It was quite a long way we traveled by train.

**SW:** Well, I thank you for coming. .

**Off-camera male voice:** Yes, you did a great job. How old are you now?

**JG:** Eighty-two.

**SW:** I would love to look at your mementos and pictures from the war. Tell me about this, piece of paper called a Victory Diary. [They look at a narrow paper which appears to be from a newspaper article. It was not shown to camera]

**JG:** It's mostly self-explanatory.

**SW:** It says "the crowded events of the tremendous week". So was this the week the war ended?

**JG:** Yes, the victory time. Evidently it happened on a Monday, May 7th.

**Off-camera male voice:** That sounds right because the next day, May 8th was VE Day. [Victory in Europe].

**SW:** It shows different times of when events happened. Were there many of these sort of things in the newspapers?

**JG:** Probably, I am amazed I still have this!

**SW:** And then you have this... [Seems to be a magazine or map of some type, not shown to the camera]

**JG:** This is where I was stationed in [@35:27 name unclear] and we would be up on the cliffs here and fire the rockets out over the Irish Sea in the Cardigan Bay. This is the town of Cardigan where I told you about where I met my husband and we went for our entertainment. This is South Wales [Joyce continues to point to various spots on her map] which goes up into North Wales and further up into Cheshire where I lived. So you can see, it is quite a long way off.

**SW:** Tell me what this is..[seems to be a small card, not shown to camera]

**JG:** Well, you had to have that in order to get paid. [@36:20 unclear] there is a recommendation somewhere and shows my discharge.

**SW:** You served until the end of the war?

**JG:** Yes, I was still in the Army when the end of the war was announced. Still stationed at

the same place. I was in the South Wales Regiment. I had a Welsh Dragon as our insignia. I wore crossed swords which indicated I was a Physical Education instructor. I had kept that patch for some time, but can't find it now.

**SW:** Did you keep your uniform?

**JG:** No, I came over to the U.S. and then in later years my mother and father came over. She disposed of it along with a lot of stuff of mine. She had no sentiment for that stuff. [both laugh]

**SW:** And this was about the celebrations? [They read what appears to be a newspaper article. Not shown to camera]

**JG:** Oh yes the celebrations, the way we were. The whole country went crazy! It was a very uplifting time, hard to believe we were finally free from fear. [Joyce turns the page and we presume they are looking at pictures] We were dancing in the streets and we danced all year!

**SW:** Here is a picture of the Royal Family and Churchill.

**JG:** Oh yes with Winston there. Look at the picture of the Queen, the present Queen and how young she was then. She was in the Army too, she was a truck driver.

**SW:** It looks like she is wearing her uniform in this photo.

**JG:** Yes, it looks so. I don't have my magnifying glass!

**SW:** The article states "Times were still hard however, and the long ration cues remained."

**JG:** Yes, I stood in those lines too. In those days, before I entered the Army, I smoked. You would hear about a store that got a shipment of cigarettes. They were little five-in-a pack sizes. You stood in line for hours trying to get five cigarettes. And it is such a horrible habit! I'm glad I don't do it anymore.

**SW:** This photo caption says "General MacArthur accepts the Japanese surrender." Here is a picture of Field Marshall Montgomery who accepted the German surrender. It is dated May 5th. We'll make copies of these.

**Man off camera asks:** What did you think of Montgomery? Was he popular?

**JG:** Well, we thought he was pretty great. We didn't know much about him really, but we thought he was a savior in many ways along with Winston.

**SW:** Oh here are some good pictures from your daughter. Both are dated 1944. [Sarah seems to be holding up some personal photographs not shown to camera]

**JG:** Where did you get those? I don't see my insignia on this one. This one was taken in Paris.

**Man off camera asks:** What did your husband do?

**JG:** He worked with tanks. In fact he belonged to a club they called "The Tank Turner-Overs Club". He was rescued by his buddy. They were trying to figure out how to shoot rockets from a tank. That is why we were in the same area, studying those rockets.

**Man off camera asks:** Did he go over in the invasion?

**JG:** No, they had sent him back to the Paris hospital because he had such bad allergies. And as I explained, they put him to work with some of the French Quislings repairing the hospital equipment. That is where he got his x-ray burns. There was some cross-signals so he did

not know the power was on as he was checking the machine. He leaned on it with his knee and his hand and got x-ray burns. He was in a hospital for over a year. It was pretty bad. They shipped him back to the United States for skin grafting. He was back here when the war ended. John was in a group that released some prisoners from a concentration camp. I don't recall which one.

**SW:** Thank you very much for coming.

**JG:** You are welcome.