



Jack's Story

Jack S. was born in March 1925 in South Yorkshire. He lived in a two bedroomed terraced house with his parents, his eight brothers and four sisters.

Jack's father was a miner and his sons were expected to work at the Dearne Valley Colliery. Jack started work as a miner as soon as he left school in 1939.

At the age of 14, he became a 'motty carrier'. A mott was a small numbered disc which miners used to identify the tubs of coal they had 'pulled'. He later worked as a 'door trapper', responsible for opening the heavy air doors which circulated air throughout the pit. The coal mined was flaky and used in heavy industry, ships, trains and power stations.

Jack tried to join the Royal Navy when he was 16. He applied in Sheffield and passed his medical examination, but when it was discovered he was a miner, he had to return to the pit. Six months later he ran away from home with the intention of joining the Merchant Navy in Liverpool. He and two friends slept in an air raid shelter where they had their money and luggage stolen. They applied to all the Star Lines but couldn't get work on any boat until they had Merchant Union membership.

[in Liverpool] we could see all these shells bursting and there were buildings and stones flying all over the place, and these police were giving me some hammer for being there... I should have been in shelter... they were taking me through this bombed area... it was really flattened... to this shelter [and] they were still bombing.

Jack was sent home. He was fined at a tribunal at the colliery and was later tried at the local Magistrates Court.

... because it was essential work... it was like desertion... and I was bound over for two years for that. "I still don't want to go down the pit", I told the judge, I said, "if you put me in the Army I don't want no training - send me overseas because I am that eager to go into the forces!" and they said "No, you can't go in the forces. You work in the pit and you stay in the pit." So that flattened me, like, and I had to stay in the pit then which I didn't like at all.

Back at the pit, Jack worked as a pony driver for a while. He then became a 'trammer', filling tubs with coal and moving them from the coalface to lay-bys ready for the ponies to take away.

The family house overlooked Sheffield and the German bombers seemed to turn overhead before diving towards the City. Jack can remember seeing hundreds of bombers circling the skies on some nights. Miners underground were unaware of any air raids and most of the people in the area ignored the warnings.

With so many to cook for, Jack's mother served meals in two sittings. She kept plenty of hot water in a set pot by the fire and the miners in the family would wash their hands, eat, and rush into the kitchen hoping to be the first to use the bath water. While they were working down the pit, they would strip down to shorts and socks, but their clothes became filthy with coal dust.



Jack still hoped to join the Army. Because of this he refused to join the Home Guard, which had become mandatory, and found himself summoned to the Magistrates Court again. He was sentenced to two months imprisonment and spent the next six weeks sewing mailbags, which he found a very difficult experience.

Jack returned to mining and never did join the Home Guard.

There were no conscientious objectors working at Jack's colliery:

No, we wouldn't have them. Miners are clannish you know... They brought some Italian miners over here and we were supposed to work with them [we] refused. Back end [of the war] we had some displaced persons came... there were about ten Poles. They used to have hostels for them... some had these numbers tattooed on their arms... we didn't mind working with them, oh no.

Towards the close of the war, Jack moved to another colliery with one of his brothers.

When Jack was asked what he particularly remembers about the war years, he replied:

Just being rebellious against the pit. ... If they had said, "Yes, you can go in the Army", which is what they ought to have done, or "Yes - you go in the Navy," I think that would have made my day.

Jack continued to work in the mining industry until 1960. He worked on the coal face and became a chargehand, responsible for the welfare of 32 miners.