



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Interview of Jennifer Scherr by Jerry Robinson Catalan Bay, Gibraltar, 13 June 2013

Track 1

JR: *I'm Jerry Robinson, on behalf of the Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project, and with me at the moment is Jennifer Scherr. We're in Gibraltar, it's the 13th of June, and Jennifer has kindly agreed to be interviewed about her father David Scherr. Hallo, Jennifer, and can I start by asking you to give a bit of background, firstly about yourself, and also your parents, both David and Mollie Scherr.*

JS: Thank you, Jerry, yes. I was born in 1947 in Croydon, my sister Susan was born in 1950 in Gibraltar, my parents were David Scherr and Mollie Spencer. David was born in 1915 in Walthamstow, Mummy was born in 1916 in Jerez de la Frontera, in Spain. I'll say more about her later I expect. Daddy's father was very interesting: he was a Russian Jewish émigré from Odessa, an active socialist, possibly even proto-communist, but anyway, definitely a refugee from Odessa and his second marriage to Mabel Westbrook, my grandmother... They had two children, David and Beatrice.

David had a very mixed sort of schooling in his [early] youth, but one thing that he did do was join a Scout group in a Congregational church in Walthamstow; and scouting was very influential, I think, on his later career. He went to the Sir George Monoux Grammar School in Walthamstow. He must have been spotted by somebody, because he had, I think, some sort of award to pay his way at the grammar school, and he ended up studying languages and English, and getting further awards to go to Queen Mary College, part of the University of London, where he did an English degree, but he also studied French and Spanish; and again Spanish language was something that was influential, I think, in his later career, or the beginning of his later career .

So he was intending to train as a teacher, well, he did train as teacher. He went to the London University Institute of Education and in 1938 or so he took a job in a school in Runcorn [Cheshire]. While he was at university and at the Institute he did a lot of editing of university journals [*i.e. student journals*]; he was the president of the Dramatic Society [*and did a lot of acting and directing*]; he also did some work with Spanish refugees, the Basque children who came over to London during the [Spanish] civil war, but he was always very involved with the scouts, even while at university.

So then when war broke out, he enlisted with the Royal Engineers, I don't know why particularly, that's how it came about, and I don't remember the date exactly, but by 1940, by the spring of 1940, or the summer of 1940, he was transferred to the Intelligence Corps, in Winchester, and it wasn't long before he was sent out to Gibraltar. I don't know why he was sent to Gibraltar particularly, whether they noted that he knew some Spanish then or not or whether it was just the chance of war, I don't know; and I don't know who spotted him and got him into the Intelligence Corps either.

But anyway, he used to tell us he was the longest serving officer on the Rock during the war, because he arrived in 1940 and he didn't leave until the autumn of 1945. Whether that's really the longest serving I don't know, but it's a good length of time And so he began his career in Gibraltar never having really been very far abroad before. I think he'd been on some cycling [*and camping or youth hostelling*] holidays to Belgium [*and*

Norway] with the scouts or with friends from university, but he hadn't been abroad very much before, as people didn't in those days

And he was ...to begin with he was part of the 24th [actually 54th] Field Security Section here and we have a few photos from that time and I know that ... two of his great friends from that time were called Markee and Pethybridge. [attached in FoG talk] I don't know what their first names were. He was in touch with 'Peth' for a long time afterwards, but I don't know what happened to him; and they did a lot patrolling on the frontier, I think, to begin with. They were checking people coming in and going out from Spain, thousands of dockyard workers and others coming in and out every day.

I know from later, from a history that he wrote at the end of the war, which has been deposited in the National Archives [attached], I know that they used to interview people who were not just workers coming in and out of Gibraltar, but also people who'd escaped from France or people who'd come down in France from the services or whatever, made their way through Spain....

JR: *So this was clearly the war years....*

JS: Sorry, yes, 1940 onwards, yes, yes, that was the beginning of the time he was in the Field Security Section, I assume that's what he was doingAlso I think they used to patrol the Rock, well perhaps not as formally as patrolling, they used to sit in a bar and listen to what was being talked about, and spot which cars were going to and fro, things like that, suspicious movements, and

JR: *... and also making sure that servicemen, if they've had too much to drink, aren't talking too loosely...*

JS: Too loosely, yes, that's true, yes.

[I think he also used these experiences, wandering, listening and watching, in the columns that he wrote for the Rock magazine under the (apt!) pseudonym Nosey Parker. The Rock magazine, edited by Reginald Cudlipp, was written 'for the troops by the troops' and he wrote a monthly column, 'Roaming around Gibraltar', until his work became too pressing.]

So - that was the early part of his work on the Rock, and I think it was about 1942 that he was transferred to the Defence Security Office here; a section of that, the Defence Intelligence Section, or something, I think it was called, and the boss of the Defence Security Office at the time was Tito Medlam. I have from my father's records a photo of Tito's wedding, well not wedding but the reception photo afterwards, with my father saying he looks a bit tipsy, having drunk too much at this wedding [photo attached]

JR: *And this is, just to make clear, the Defence Security Office was a section from MI5...*

JS: Room 055 of the War Office, yes.

JR: *....which was involved in the overall security of Gibraltar.*

JS: Yes, yes. So - he would certainly never have talked about his work at the time or afterwards; he never did talk about his work. But fifty years on, his history, that he'd been asked to write at the end of the war, history of what happened in the office during the war (which I believe happened in all the DSOs in wartime, everybody had to write a history) his history was released to the National Archives; and my sister and I were asked if we'd like to go and see it before it was released. In fact, my mother had been asked would she like to go and see it the year before. She was already not very well (my father having died in 1981), this is 2002/3 we're talking about...

When my mother was asked would she like to go and see it, she didn't express much interest at all. Of course, after her death, and after Sue and I saw it, we realised it was probably because she had typed it! I'll come back to her story in a minute.

So what I know about his work here in Gibraltar during the war is from this history that he wrote and I understand that it's unusual, because it's not as formally official as most histories of wartime DSOs were. So it made for good reading and it's illustrated with some photographs which we have in our family album of colleagues of his that were friends: Billy Bullman, Luis Bush, who were Spanish speaking colleagues of his in the Office.

I mentioned Tito, Tito Medlam. At some point, maybe '43 I suppose it may have been, Philip Kirby Green (who was known as KG) came to take over as Defence Security Officer and he also became a good friend, and, jumping ahead, at the end of war, when my parents were married in the Anglican cathedral here in Gib, KG acted as the person who gave away my mother because her father had died the year before.

Track 2

JR: *And just completing that, am I right in saying that your father came out here as DSO himself, between '50 and '55?*

JS: Yes, between '50 and '55, yes that's right, well, jumping ahead (we may come back) at the end of the war he was asked whether he would be interested in joining the London Office rather than going back to teaching and he decided he would. So my parents went back to London for a couple of years. I was born in 1947, in '49 they were sent to Singapore. I don't know exactly what his role would have been there. They weren't there very long before this opening came up, perhaps when KG moved on, I suppose an opening appeared in Gibraltar to be Defence Security Officer himself, as you said, and so they were, I think, only too pleased to come back in 1950. I think they were only supposed to be here for 3 years' tour of duty but they managed to stay until 1955. That was a lovely period of their lives and of mine. My sister was born in 1950 here, not long after we arrived. At the time my mother's mother, Minnie Spencer, was still living in Jerez de la Frontera. I haven't explained about her yet. My mother's father [*Thomas Spencer, born in Gibraltar in 1885*] had worked for the sherry company, Williams and Humberts, for 40 years or more, ending up as the manager of Williams and Humberts, and for that reason, my mother's family (four sisters and a brother) were all brought up really bilingual.

[*After some home schooling in Jerez and sharing governesses with other English-speaking sherry families*], They went to school in Gibraltar to begin with, either to Brympton or the Loretto Convent school; I think my uncle might have gone to the Christian Brothers for a little while. They then used to come very regularly to go to school in England; they were living with relations, great aunts in Croydon. They went to and fro on I don't know how many liners. So they knew Gibraltar very well, they knew lots of Gibraltarian families here. My mother, for that reason, as I said, spoke Spanish very well, with an Andalusian accent, of course! So - her schooling was a bit mixed, she used to say. She went to a... private girls' school in Croydon [*Addiscombe School for Girls*], and then she went to Greggs shorthand school, also in Croydon, and her first job in London was with Burroughs Wellcome pharmaceutical company. She didn't like it at all; she didn't like living in London really, so she came back to Spain I think just about before the [*Spanish*] civil war started.

During the civil war, the family were evacuated by a [*British*] naval vessel, I don't know which, possibly from Huelva or maybe from Cadiz, to Gibraltar. [But I think then they took a house back in Croydon for the duration of the civil war, [*actually earlier in the '30s*] except that my grandfather stayed on with Williams & Humbert throughout. So because my mother didn't like working in London she came back here and was sort of frittering away her time doing translations and things; and then, when war broke out, she definitely wanted to join the Army: to follow, first of all, her brother (my uncle) Tom, Thomas Spencer, but also to follow her grandfather (another branch I haven't talked about yet, with Gibraltar links - she wanted to follow her grandfather George Spinks,

who was a major in the Royal Artillery [*stationed in Gibraltar before and after WW1*]) she wanted to follow the family tradition of joining the army.

So she went back to England and joined the ATS and had a variety of different experiences in England; but in about 1943 (towards the end of '43) she was called for an interview at some secret location (which she wouldn't tell me where it was exactly) and she was interviewed by some mysterious people, who wanted to offer her some interesting work and it would mean using her Spanish. There was somebody there at the interview who brought her greetings from her father in Jerez – and later she discovered that that was KG, Philip Kirby Green, who was in on the interview, from the DSO in Gibraltar.

JR: *All very mysterious...*

JS: Yes. But of course, the chance to come back to Gibraltar with maybe other interesting things going on, she couldn't refuse that.I think when she arrived, it was the autumn of '43, would that be right? [*I think she sailed from Greenock near Glasgow in Scotland, in a convoy, a long journey always under threat of German attack*].

JR: *She came with two others?*

JS: They might have been here already, yes, that's right [*Nan Elder, Betty Durnford*].... She used to say there were only 4 ATS on the Rock, there were nurses, there were Wrens, but only 4 ATS on the Rock. At the end of the war, she was very proud that she had insisted that the ATS should join the Victory parade. Nobody had thought to invite them. So she led them out because by then, as Junior Commander Mollie Spencer, she was the senior ATS on the Rock. And, jumping about a bit, as senior ATS on the Rock, she was often called upon by the governor, who I think by then was Macfarlane, Mason Mac [*Noel Mason Macfarlane*]...

JR: It would have been Macfarlane ...

JS: ... or maybe Eastwood, yes, I think it was Eastwood, she was called upon by him to make up female numbers at dinner tables and things and she also used to say, much later on, that she had been asked at the end of the war whether she would stay on to work with the governor, but by then, she had decided she was going to marry my father, so she said no, so, that's jumping about...

JR: *OK, that's a nice run through. Can we go, skip back a bit now and pick up from the point that your father had done some basic security work for the army and so pick up from that with a bit more detail and then go back into the point of him working for the DSO...*

JS: Yes, well everything I know about what he did in the Security Section and the DSO is from his history, that is now available. Because, well, he wouldn't have talked about it at all. I just have a few extra things added by my mother, who used to say she'd never been debriefed, so she wouldn't really talk about it. She didn't want to be interviewed when the archive was released ...they offered to interview her...

JR: *But you can give an angle because you know what he was like as a person.*

JS: Yes, yes, well he wasI said scouting was a great influence on him. He was a trained observer, he liked sketching, so he would make little sketches of people that he was interested in I think; he was also interested in drama, I mentioned that, so I think he enjoyed the fact that they would sometimes go across into La Linea to hear what they could hear in the bars or to visit potential agents or just to pick up information. I think, I'm not saying they went in disguise, I think they pretended to be ordinary army chaps getting drunk...

JR: *They kept a low profile...*

JS: ... and from the history I know that he went and interviewed people who were making bombs or potential bombs for use on the Rock and that sometimes they would arrange to bring bombs back and then pretend to explode them somewhere; or maybe explode them, but not in the right place, so that the... German agents and indeed Germans who were across the Bay with their binoculars, from the hotel in Algeciras the Reina Cristina or from the villas all round the Bay, they were watching what was going on here....

[Much later my mother mentioned that Victor Rothschild had something to do with Daddy's work; and I've read since that he was an explosives expert. One of my aunts (Betty) told me that Daddy had carried bombs over the frontier - before I'd read his history.]

Track 3

JR: *I think it's worthwhile our saying at this point that though Spain was officially neutral, ...there were certain sectors of the Spanish authorities that would be pro-British but equally certain sectors would be anti-British, pro-German or pro-Nazi, and allow certain activities to happen at La Linea...*

JS: Yes and Gibraltar being.... the key to the Mediterranean really, and at that point, or indeed from the beginning of the war, for quite a while, there was no way of knowing whether Spain was going to join the war or allow Germany to come through, so I'm sure the situation was incredibly serious...

JR: *...and so there was a fair amount of equally people who were either pro-British in the local region in La Linea and Algeciras or anti; and there was a ...fair amount of German and also Italian presence which was used in spying and trying to sabotage and mount attacks here.....that's the area your father...*

JS: Yes, although I'm not sure that the Italian attacks from the *Oltterra*, that's the underwater little manned submarines that attached limpets to ships in the harbour and so on, as far as I understand it, that went on for a long time and nobody really solved that for a long time and I'm not sure how much my father was involved in that, although his history does touch on it; but the comment that KG wrote at the beginning of the history, as a covering note, sending it back to London, was that the Office was very successful in its counter-espionage and counter-sabotage work - I can't remember the numbers now exactly...of 40-odd instances, 30-odd were neutralised....

JR: *Yes, I think the vast majority, there were 50 or 60 of which something like 45 were successfully defeated, largely because of some of the work which your father did.*

JS: Well, that's the inference I have to draw from the history, yes. As I say, my father never would talk about this, of course, but also maybe if he had lived long enough to retire and think that there were things he could tell in an anecdotal way, we might have heard, but we never did; he died in '81. But my mother occasionally afterwards would say "Well of course I used to go into La Linea with your father - I once had to hide in the loo while he was meeting an agent in a bar somewhere"; but I don't really know what her contribution in the field, shall we say, was, at all. I know that she was brought out to... Well, they had enormous files. This being the days before computers, they had thousands and thousands of names and photos to cross check and so on. There was one of the ATS who was involved in that [*Betty Durnford?*]; what *she* was involved in, I think, was writing up reports of what had been going on operationally to send to London and so on. I know Daddy had to go back to London sometimes during his long stay on

the Rock. He also, for work, was sent to Algiers once in '43. I don't know what he was doing but he wrote a letter to his parents, which we've still got, in which he says how fantastic it was to be in a big clean city with a lot of beautiful women ...because it was obviously very, very confined on the Rock. [*letter extracts attached in FOG talk*] I mean he was lucky that he could get away sometimes; most people who were here couldn't, and there weren't that many, well, English speaking women about, shall we say? Obviously his stories would have been very exciting, but we don't know the details of them as a family at all....

JR: *Which is very much a thing that people that had that sensitive work would never talk about it and often take it to their graves. Essentially what we're saying is that your father would identify enemy agents and turn them to make them double agents, to inform the British of the attacks that they were doing.*

JS: Yes. Well, there is an agent NAG.... And that's another thing, when Sue and I read this history we thought, I wonder if it was him who made up all these names for all the agents because that would be another thing that would amuse him, to think of them... well somebody's got to think of it, obviously, but whether it was him; and how much involved he was in running NAG or not, I don't know, but he talks about NAG...

JR: *What did NAG do, from your reading of the files?*

JS: Was it NAG who identified one of the traitors in the dockyard, who was then hung?

JR: *Trying to place bombs on some of the boats....the naval boats....*

JS: There were also a couple of Spaniards (or maybe they were Gibraltarians)..., based in the vicinity, who were called the FRUITIES, and I don't know who they were, but we have a list of wedding presents at the wedding in August 1945,... and it says who gave what and there's an inlaid wooden box from Granada, a present from the FRUITIES, says my father, and I've still got that box!

JR: *That's worthy of a bit of research really, isn't it?*

JS: Yes, yes....I can't remember the other names.... What more can I tell you about the time during the war?.... I should explain a bit more about my mother. I was saying that the ATS spotted she spoke Spanish, but I forgot to say that on her way out from Spain to join the army (she had to wait for a ship...) while she was waiting, someone spotted her and asked her to work in the Contraband Control office, which was a naval office, I think, with Commander Singer, Paris Singer (who was either a son or a relation of Isadora Duncan, the singer [*in fact the dancer*], who married somebody ... Singer....). [*Paris Graham Singer, R.N. was the son of the Paris Singer who had a relationship with Isadora Duncan and who was heir to the Singer sewing machine empire*]. She worked in the Contraband Control office in Gib until the Italians joined the war; and there's a photo in *The Times* of her in this office typing, with Commander Singer disguised behind a pillar, so you can't see him.... She was very pleased to have her photo in the *Times* that she could send to her family [*attached, in FoG talk*]

JR: *The impression I get though is that your father, David and Mollie, very much acted as a team, as a pair, as a team ...*

JS: Well, I would think so....

JR: *Not only did she write and type his reports....*

JS: Probably she did go out with him more often than we know, but she wouldn't talk about it either even to us, so we just have these little snippets...

[For example, she could tell us that she saw "Monty's double" going into the Convent in 1944, and hint that she and Daddy knew about this deception plan – because the story had been made into a well-known film after the war. The DS Office was so close to the Convent that they would be well placed to see his arrival. I think it is touched on in Daddy's history.

And maybe they did know about "The man who never was" (Operation Mincemeat) – perhaps at the time the DSO was in on the plot; in the early '50s I know Daddy had to take a writer sometime then [I think it was Ian Colvin, who wrote The Unknown Courier in 1953] to talk to the various English vice-consuls who would have known about it, including Guy Williams, my grandfather's former boss in Jerez. Tantalisingly, my grandfather Thomas Spencer, a great fisherman, is said to have reported on shipping movements along the Spanish coast near Cadiz during the war. Guy Williams, known as Mr Guy or Don Guido, had a house near the beach at La Barrosa, where according to Ben Macintyre's book Operation Mincemeat, the body of a real naval courier carrying secret letters washed ashore in 1942: it is very likely that my grandfather knew of this, so he may well also have heard of the other body a year later, found near Huelva.]

Another snippet, which is not to do with my father, but to do with her time in Contraband Control, is that Noel Coward came through and she was asked to take a cup of tea to Noel Coward, but she only saw his legs because she wasn't allowed to go any further into the room, his mission was so secret, apparently.

JR: *Wow. What other long-term friendships.....was the relation between your father's office and the rest of the establishment in Gibraltar - were they kept separate?*

JS: I don't know - I'm sure they liaised with a lot with the police I think because... the first office that I know about was near the old police station....

JR: *which was where?*

JS: ... at the bottom of John Mackintosh Square, it's that Victorian police station with arches

JR: *...in Irish Town*

JS: Yes, I think that their office was across the way from that at the bottom of Irish Town, possibly upstairs because we have a photo of my mother on the flat roof which is supposed to be the flat roof of that office, but it's difficult to identify exactly where.... By the end of the war it moved to 10 Governor's Lane, which is a beautiful house, round the back of the Convent, opposite the back door into the Convent; and we have a photo of the Office, relaxed and smiling, work all done at the end of war, in the patio there *[attached with names; also in FOG talk]*

My parents used to go drinking and courting in the old Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club and I think the Office used that as a place to relax, because again there are several photos of friends in the office there drinking and so on; and one day, it might have been my father's birthday, August '44, it might have been then, my mother said they were sitting drinking and doing nothing much because there wasn't much to do at that moment, when there was an alarm, or an explosion or a fire or something and they all had to suddenly disband, but what the event was I don't know. They thought they were relaxing, but they were suddenly called back on duty....So, yes, ...neither of my parents would really talk about what my father did.

Track 4

JR: *And then at the end of the war they both came back.*

JR: Yes, he took up the offer to work for the Office in London, civil assistant in the War Office, was how later we were allowed to describe what he did...

JR: *....which was basically a continuation of the wartime MI5....*

JS: Yes, but I didn't know it was MI5, until I worked it out in the '70s.They came back to London, and as I said they were sent to Singapore. I know my mother didn't like it very much in Singapore. I think then he was working with Chinese Communist insurgencies or whatever, but... they were only there 6 months, maybe 8 months, and when the opportunity to come back to Gibraltar occurred, that was absolutely fantastic ...

JR: *...so they came back in....*

JS: In 1950... I was born in '47, so I was already there. I had my 2nd birthday party in Singapore. They came back by sea, of course, as everybody did in those days. They came back on various different ships, working their way back from Singapore. They had to stop in Madras; they had to stop in Genoa and wait for the last bit to get to Gibraltar, but my mother of course was really pleased to come back to Gibraltar, because her mother was still living in Jerez at the time, so that was lovely for us, we had a grandmother just up the road.

JR: *So he actually came back in 1950 as the head of the DSO Office himself?*

JS: Yes, and we lived then in the house in 10 Governor's Lane. As far as I remember, his office was in College Lane. I only remember seeing it towards the end of our time here and I haven't really been able to identify where it was, because everything's changed so much. But I remember in '55, when we were packing up, we went into this office where there was a sort of counter and we went behind and there was a big cupboard full of posters of the Queen, the Coronation, the Commonwealth tour, so we took some of those home. So when we were here in 1950-55, I don't know what his work actually entailed at the time, until the Queen's visit [*in 1954. But I do know that after Sue was born, we were visiting Nana in Jerez, when my father was recalled suddenly because of an explosion – the Bedenham explosion – presumably at first they didn't know whether this might be an act of sabotage. I realise now that there was loss of life and a great deal of damage – my mother said that some windows in our house blew in and that the cathedral was also affected, so that my sister had later to be christened in a bowl instead of the font.*

I also remember that my father had a secretary called Miss Discombe and I had a teacher – her sister I presume – also called Miss Discombe – from a Gibraltarian family. Later I think he had a secretary called Molly Rimington and we went to her wedding in London in 1955 or 6].

JR: *Well of course in 1950-55, the main event there was The Royal Visit after the Coronation. Can you remember anything around that?*

JS: Yes, I remember it pretty well because of course it was very exciting. [*I remember that Charles and Anne were given presents by the 'people of Gibraltar' and we went to see these, before they arrived on the Royal Yacht. Anne had a doll's house, but I thought Charles' present of a model of the Rock, with a railway running round it, was more exciting!].*

The schools all gathered to watch the Queen and Prince Philip driving around. I was in the Brownies at the time, but I don't think I was part of the Brownies that was on display then, as I was too young; but my father was of course incredibly involved with

the security for the Queen's visit and liaising with police and who knows else. And so I think it was only two days in May 1954 that they were here, but it was a lot of work for him. ...After the visit, we went for a holiday to Torremolinos, which was completely undeveloped then, it was a lovely spot, for him to relax and recover from the stresses and strains [*in a house which I think my mother told me later belonged to Courtney Young, an office colleague - from London*].

Relations with Franco, I think, were possibly his main concern really, because after the war, otherwise, I don't know what the security problems would have been here, except that everybody had to keep an eye on Spain all the timecertainly I'm sure there were potentially.... serious threats from Spain on the Queen's visit; and so I imagine that there were a lot of precautionary measures taken. I think the thousands of workers who used to come in every day were not allowed in for the visit. There were special arrangements made for maids and so on to stay overnight, so that they didn't have to go to and fro and perhaps not be allowed in again...

JR: *And is that whyyour father stayed here 5 years?*

JS: Ah well, I don't know, I hadn't thought of that. I just thought that they were asked if they would stay on. But perhaps you're right with the knowledge that the Queen might be...

JS: So... I know that my parents were invited to the dinner and reception [*in fact just the reception*] in the Convent and my mother wrote a memoir of what she thought about being introduced to the Queen and so on, which I must do something with...

JR: *And what did she think?*

JS: She thought the queen was very beautiful, very small, smaller than you would expect,No, I think she was very impressed. I should say that my father and mother used to vote in opposite directions all their lives. I mentioned that my father had a sort of socialist background, he used to read the Guardian, he always voted Labour. My mother always voted Conservative, was a monarchist through and through ...I don't know what.... but anyway, my father worked for the Crown, so there we are... And they were both verysort of principled people, very loyal, and committed to their work.

JR: *They must have been, because they lived through a pretty tumultuous, horrendous, you knowreally unsettling period...*

JS: Yes, well, indeed, being in Gibraltar during the war, I mean, you couldn't know which way the war was going to turn. So looking back on it afterwards, of course, they had a wonderful war: they met each other, my mother being my father's secretary; they had to keep their relationship semi -quiet, because I remember my mother saying one of the other ATS women was sent back for canoodling... I'm sure they kept their relationship very proper, but I guess that everyone in the Office knew that they were an item and that they were engaged...

JR: *....but operationally in '40-'45 they acted very much as a pair, she worked typing up his notes and then accompanied him sometimes.*

JS: We don't know how much she accompanied him in Spain, but she certainly did sometimes, yes. ... I don't how soon it was after they met, before they decided that they would carry on and see if they could develop some sort of relationship, but I know that my mother used to complain that when she arrived, she was supposed to have been met by my father (as she was going to work for him as his secretary...) but he was out on somebody's yacht! Which is quite amusing really, because neither of them were really boating people; and although they did their courting, as I may have said before, in the

Yacht Club, it was more socialising than going out on boats. I think they must have actually 'clicked', as we would say nowadays, quite early on, because we have a few lettersfrom my father where he's writing back to his parents saying that his new secretary, Mollie Spencer....no it's the letters from *his* parents to him commenting, saying that she sounds a lovely girl and, you know, they're very pleased for him and all the rest of it; and the sad thing was, that once they'd decided they were going to be married, they decided they would marry here, as soon as possible, I suppose, after the end of the war in August '45, and that meant his parents couldn't attend..... and so that's quite poignant to read the letters from my grandparents wishing him well and thanking him for the letters they'd had from Mollie andshe sounds lovely and all the rest of it and so...

Her mother was able to attend the wedding and as I said before, KG gave her away. Her sisters, her younger sisters, who were still in Spain, that's Joey, Betty and Sylvia [*in fact, all her sisters were still in Spain and came to the wedding: Diana, Sylvia, Joey, Betty*] came to the wedding; and hundreds of other people: everybody from about I don't about three different security sections; people from different messes; people from old Gibraltar families that my mother knew

JR: *Do you have any lists of those?*

JS: I have got a list of the wedding guests and I will include that [*attached*] . The only person alive that I'm aware of who was at the wedding was Marjorie Hoare, who was a teenager at the time. She's still alive in Gibraltar. She's a patron of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust. I met her last year, but this year she's in Madeira, which she tries to do every year because she was evacuated to Madeira and she fell in love with it, so she goes back a lot....

Track 5

JR: *There is something fascinatingsocial life in Gibraltar continued during the war, but also it was very much alive and thriving in 1950-55: it would have been central to the career...*

JS: Yes, and before. There was a lot of invitations to dinner and having people to dinner: my parents didn't really like that sort of socialising, but they went along with the traditions, you know ...

JR: *Were they on the diplomatic... military social scene?*

JS: Sort of.

JR: *And how much did they meet the local people?*

JS: Bit of both, because of my mother's links here, they had a lot of friends who were old Gibraltar families

JR: *.....local leading old-established traditional Gibraltar families*

JS: Yes, mostly the sort of English Gibraltar, but not only, they knew a lot of Gibraltarian Gibraltarians as well.

[*Names I recall are Ellicott, Russo, Posso, Hoare, Capurro, Ryan, Giraldi, Imossi, Isola, Triay, Hassan, Norton-Amor....*]

One thing I remember from when we lived in 10 Governor's Lane – there was a lovely dining room upstairs with a flat, a terrace roof garden, that my father grew succulents on (that's gone now, unfortunately, the Citizens Advice Bureau have built over it); but anyway, there was a lovely dining room with this garden next door upstairs, where they used to have their friends and... people to dinner; and afterwards, something very

typical, I think now, they played Cluedo – which is sort of typical of the '50s, but also typical of what my father was doing, trying to work out who was responsible for what....

JR: *And you were, when you left, 7, in '55, when you returned to London, so do you in your own right have recollections of Gibraltar during that period...?*

JS: Very happy recollections, yes.

[I remember sitting with Nana (my mother's mother) on Line Wall, from where she told me her father (that's Major George Spinks) used to be able to fish, as the harbour was so close then. She also said that her father (Grandpa) used to parade in Casemates when they lived in Irish Town, which is where her future husband (Tom Spencer of Williams and Humbert) also lived as a teenager. She also told me that Grandpa was in charge at one time of feeding the Apes (possibly after WW1).

I remember we used to go for walks in the Alameda Gardens and sit on the guns. We used to go shopping at the Emporium and have tea in the Imperial Tea Rooms – I used to confuse the names! I have very fond memories of my first library – the Garrison Library, which had a children's section then – where Nana and I would sit on the terrace and have hot buttered toast. We used to go to the beach quite a lot and I learnt to swim here – usually Sandy Bay, which we reached through a damp dark tunnel – sometimes Eastern Beach, and sometimes a beach in Spain, (with a view of Gibraltar across the Bay), where we had to cross a river on a little ferry boat. When we drove to Jerez, we would picnic in the cork woods sometimes. The best times in Jerez were when we children could dress up in flamenco costume and ride to the Feria in the hood of a horse-drawn carriage! I do remember that my father seemed to be on very friendly terms with the border police on both sides of the Frontier and with the Spanish 'Guardia Cciviles' (policemen) that we met en route.

*I once had to have my eyes tested at a hospital, where I watched a film of Micky Mouse – the ophthalmologist was a friend of my parents' called Lizzie Cass, who (much later) wrote a best-selling Spanish cookery book. Thinking of films, I remember going to see my first film ever in Gibraltar – in a naval cinema (below King's Bastion I think) – it was a children's film, set on the Rock and involved a lot of chasing around the town! [This was probably **The Clue of the Missing Ape**, 1953, though in my mind it is mixed up with a later film, **Operation Snatch**, 1962, starring Terry Thomas and also about the apes!]]*

I went to nursery school up some steps, which I tried to work out where it was afterwards. It was a nursery school run by Mrs Coelho - so I used to call her Mrs Necklace, because I sort of thought I knew Spanish at the time! Up some steps, to the right into a garden - and I had a lovely time time at the nursery school [*possibly 40 Steps or Hargrave's Court??*]

JS: Then I went to Brympton, which a lot of Gibraltar families know, which was run by Mr and Mrs Prosser. remember doing my first art classes there - we were taught about the Battle of Thermopylae, aged 6; so one of my earliest drawings ...is all these little stick people defending the Pass at the Battle of Thermopylae!

We were also taught French, which I didn't learn again for another 5 years ... I enjoyed going to Brympton. We used to go on a bus, now whether it was the ordinary bus or the school bus I don't know, but one of our maids (because we had two maids normally) who my parents were always very friendly with. We used to have two, one who was a cook and someone who looked after the children; and latterly we had a lady called Nieves who was a lovely lady; she used to take me to the bus and meet me from the bus stop ... I remember also that she got involved with an English soldier that she wanted to marry and my parents were very concerned because they thought he was a bit of a drunken ne'er do well. She did marry him and came to England and ...the marriage didn't succeed.... Anyway, that's by the way ... but they were always, well, because my mother had been brought up in Spain with maids, who were part of the family, they were always very close to the people who were working for them; it was a family relationship....

JR: *....and we've picked this up time and time again about how families and particularly service and official families would always have live in maids, Spanish maids...*

JS: I think there were two, one who mostly did the cooking and the other who looked after us I don't know who did the cleaning, or the laundryin 10 Governor's Lane in the patio, there was a sort scullery where the laundry was. We used to play in the patio and yes, we were very close, and I remember bits of Gibraltarian English or Llanito English coming through; she used to say 'tipa' for teapot and she used to always call us 'dalling', 'dalling' [*darling*].

JR: *You went to school locally, did you have a lot of local Gibraltarian friends?*

JS: Well I think I did, I don't remember them really. I know I also joined the Brownies a pack that was in the Convent garden. We used to go and meet there, so I learnt how to clean my shoes, and how to take a message...Strangely enough, when I went back to England afterwards, it was a big wrench; it was so different, it was grey, it was I don't know ...it was a big wrench and I didn't want to join the Brownies, school was OK to begin with, I missed Gib even after just a few years....

JR: *and that's really quite interesting and is that part of your current friendship with Gibraltar now, why you're coming back?*

JS: Coming back....Yes, because my mother's family connections back to 1885 when her [*my*] great grandfather was born here on a hulk a coaling hulk in the Bay: I'm trying to find out more about that family, the Spencers, he was a master mariner originally, his father ...But I do also want to find out more about life in the '50s here as I remember it, but Brympton is no more...

JR: *...and just from your own perspective from your early childhood and you're only talking maximum age of 7, it's changed obviously...*

JS: It has changed, but when I first came back with my mother in the '80s or '90s, it seemed very depressed - I guess, was the border still closed? I can't remember when the border opened up again - it seemed very depressed, very dirty....Of course, since then there's been a lot of development along the waterfront

JR: *...the character of Gibraltar, how would you sum up that?*

JS: Incredibly friendly and welcoming. For example I went to church in the cathedral on Sunday morning, and at the end of the service.... Well of course when you go to church people will invite you stay on for coffee: but three different ladies came up and said oh you must come and join us for lunch, we have lunch every Sunday with different visitors, so I spent three hours with them on Sunday with cathedral folk I didn't know and that was lovely.... But I think everybody's very friendly and that's the impression I get. Personally, when I get back, I just feel it's home...

JR: *Because it's quite an amazing journey it's....*

JS: Lots of things have happened to me since then but...

JR: *It's an amazing journey that your father and your mother went on, militarily, this thing that your father did during the war...*

JS: I forgot to say that for his war work he was given the MBE and then when the Queen's visit came he was introduced to the Queen almost as soon as she stepped on land, not at the naval dockyard but the next thing she did on the tour was to reopen Reclamation Road as Queensway and so somewhere near Ragged Staff gate I don't know

exactly where he and a few other people were introduced to her there; but then, as I understand from what my mother wrote about those two days, he was running about behind the scenes organising.... he didn't get to meet her until the dinner party in the Convent

Then when the royal party left he was invited onto the yacht which I've always understood it was a surprise to him and he was presented with the MVO

JR: *He was presented with it...*

JS: The MVO. I remember we were waiting in the Tower, probably on the balcony watching, or maybe down below, but anyway we were at the dockyard waiting for him to come back and that was a big surprise to us

JR: *So it's not just the unique and amazing things your father did which must be a part of your life, but it's the fact that you were here when you were a child...even though for all intents and purposes, you're British and you live in Bristol as a librarian, Gibraltar is a very important part of your life and ...*

JS: Increasingly so I think....

JR: *What about ... have you got Gibraltar identity?... Do you see yourself as being British but a little bit Gibraltarian?*

JS: Well, my sister definitely is, being born hereI've definitely been influenced by Gibraltar, yes....

JR: *Would you say it's part of your identity and nationality even?*

JS: It's certainly the reason why.... if there's a military band, march past or whatever, I have to stop and listen, because in the early days, when they did 'the Keys' and 'Sunset' nearly every day, all those ceremonies.... in the '50s and we could hear them every day.... it surprises people who know me now, why would I like martial music? am I military? not really, but I have got that military background, not as much as people who were here in the services more recently but...

JR: *So tonight you'll have the parade...*

JS: Yes, I *have* to go to the parade!

JR: *...the Queen's parade, celebrating the Queen's birthday at Casemates Square; so that's going to be a special...*

JS: Yes; and my first trip here with the Friends of Gibraltar was last year, when the Wessexes were visiting - I was lucky enough to have my name picked out of a hat to go to the Governor's garden party for that; and it was really lovely to be where I had been running about as a Brownieand I forgot to say, I'd also been to a Christmas party in the Convent, where I was most disappointed that Father Christmas came down some steps, instead of down a chimneyIt was lovely to be able to go to the garden party last year and to be able to say to Edward that my father was in charge of the security here when his mother came.

JR: *So I hope you have a really nice ceremony this evening...*

JS: Thank you, I will...

JR: *I think we've come full scope and your father obviously had an amazing career and relationship...*

JS: It was definitely the highlight of their lives...

JR: *...and formed a relationship and also you have continued that relationship with Gibraltar. Jennifer Scherr, thank you.*

*Compiled: December 2013
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