**My Memories of the Second World War**

The first thing that I can remember about World War II was as the age of four in about August of 1945, looking out of the bedroom window and seeing the delivery of corrugated iron pieces that would be assembled and half-sunk into the garden as an Anderson shelter.

We had air-raid warnings, first as a practice then for real. The warning from the sirens consisted of a succession of rising and falling notes while the all-clear was one continuous note.

In 1941, South Shields, where I was born and brought up and which lies at the mouth of the River Tyne, we had a succession of bombing raids – on one night alone 68 people were killed and 2000 rendered homeless. German bombers had mistaken a local arched bridge for the famous Tyne Bridge at Newcastle, eight miles inland. The town’s shipyards were hit and many of the town’s major shops were demolished. We never had a Woolworth’s again. But for South Shields there were far more casualties at sea: the Atlantic and Russian convoys meant that several thousand Merchant Navy sailors from the town died after their ships were hit by shells or torpedoes.

We had barrage balloons in the daytime and searchlights at night. In the shelter we could hear the chug-chug of German planes’ engines (a different sound from the British) and incendiary bombs whistling down. I cannot remember being afraid: I was probably too young. If it was a day-time raid, at school in the air-raid shelters we sang “ten green bottles” until the all-clear .We always carried our gas masks and we kept a tin full of emergency food supplies in our desks at school.

 Rationing meant that our diet was restricted. The nearest I got to imported fruit to was seeing an advert for bananas stuck on the greengrocers’ window. I wondered what a banana would taste like. My wife, Doreen remembers her grandmother asking to buy an orange from the mother of a young child but even sixpence was not enough to get her to part with it. The burden of putting together meals lay on my Mam who had to stand for hours in queues every day and then produce something for dinner.

My Dad worked long hours as a fitter in a shipyard and Doreen’s Dad worked in the same yard as a joiner. These were reserved occupations so they were not called up.

At height of the bombing my mother, brother and I were evacuated to the town of Alston in the high Pennine hills. Food there was much less of a problem and I remember seeing a plucked chicken on the table. It was cut open to reveal two unlaid eggs. Luxury!

The bombing of north-east England eventually halted and we returned home, where we kept rabbits to supplement our diet. Ironically, when Doodlebugs started to rain down on London, we put up evacuees from Dagenham, a mother and her baby.

We got our information about the war mainly from newspapers, newsreels at the cinema, news bulletins on the radio. War news was usually good because of the propaganda element but it became even better after the Normandy landings and then Germany’s surrender. The blackout, which had made moving around at night so difficult, was lifted and we had a wonderful party under the switched on street lights. One terrible memory that I have is of seeing a newsreel of British troops liberating Belsen concentration camp full of emaciated people and heaps of dead bodies. I have never doubted the existence of the Holocaust. For us, the war was effectively over even though hostilities against Japan went on for a few bloody months longer.

The slow but steady return to normality always reminds me of the film, “The Wizard of Oz”, which starts in black and white then turns into colour -- wartime was black and white and peacetime was colour.

In 1947 the town’s sandy beaches were re-opened having been cleared of mines and barbed wire so we could all go to the seaside again. Recovery was slow and rationing continued until 1951 but that hardly mattered. We had a National Health Service and free education. The shipyards were busy so my father was in work. For our family, my parents’ memories of their suffering during the Great Depression meant that the availability of work was paramount.

Finally, during the war we wondered what would they could find to put in news bulletins in peacetime? We all know now!

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