

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF A CHILD IN WAR-TIME NOTTINGHAM

As human beings we have the ability to look back on our lives, those of us who went through the 1940's - the War Years in Europe, the eventual peace and the re-building. We have to try and balance the lives we were destined to have to what might have been.

Many years ago when war was declared (1939), as a young boy of 3 1/2 years, my family were living and working in Coventry, England. Britain then became a target for that evil regime, the German Nazi Party. Having crushed half of Europe, Britain was to be their next victim, Coventry as you *may* know, is situated in central England in the huge engineering and manufacturing heartland of the UK.

This point on the map must have appealed to the German airforce commanders because they bombed it night after night for many days, even weeks. The devastation was terrible; nobody had seen such widespread death and destructions at that time. Britain seemed to be alone and our people were frightened and confused. Who will or could help us?

After some time children like myself and my brother were evacuated to various parts of the countryside - away from danger and the fear that hung over us every night.

A railway train was organised and filled with children and some mothers and despatched to the North of England. We as children, being very young thought this was a big adventure as we set off from Coventry. Several hours into our journey we stopped at a station called Leeds (Yorkshire). Within a few minutes of our arrival another train pulled up at the platform across the line, it was plain to see that most of the windows were smashed with big holes in the carriages. There was a lot of shouting and calls for help. Ambulances began to arrive, some got onto the platform and people were helped into them. Later I learned from my brother that the train we saw had been attacked, machine gunned as it made its way across the Pennines, north of Leeds.

Our train moved out of Leeds with all lights out, it was black as hell as we moved along and it wasn't long before I was asleep. Suddenly I awoke, the train had stopped moving, we were in another station much the same kind as the last, this was Carlisle. Cups of tea were waiting for us all and for the children a sandwich and a little cake. Mum looked so ill and tired but kept smiling at us and holding us both close. Other people looked sad - some were crying softly in a quiet corner.

Sometime later we set off again, this time it was getting light, which meant there was something to see. After what seemed like hours and hours we came to another station, this was Sheffield. Now it was daylight fully, lots of people about us were hungry. We were given tea, soup, sandwiches and cakes - a real treat. After another long wait we moved off again and I thought this was like a bad dream with no end. I remember at this time I was sick and so were other kids. Pleased to say it didn't last long. I now felt very tired and again fell asleep.

Our next stop was Nottingham and as we came into the station Mum and big brother saw Dad on the platform, I couldn't see [as] everybody was in the way but then I did see my Dad, he was lovely, tall and smart and waving like mad. When the tram stopped everybody went mad. Our family were the worse, so it seemed, I felt so proud so brave, so little but so nappy.

Later I learnt that Dad was working for the Government as a civilian, being 36 at the time he was considered too old for call-up but with his previous military service he was seconded to this government post. He took us to the Nottingham Ice Stadium where all personnel connected to government employees were cleared and then billeted out to private houses,

I remember a tall RAF officer talking to my mother at the Ice Stadium and then he gave my brother and I a piece of chocolate (it was like gold). Later we were taken by RAF car to a house in Bulwell, Nottingham which became our home for the next 12 years.

The war seemed a lot more distant from Nottingham but when Birmingham was bombed some 50 miles away the whole night sky was red as the fires burned Nottingham got a little bombing but I don't think it was a main target.

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As time moved on we lived a sort of normal life but the main thoughts were about the war, the Army in the desert, the RAF defending Britain against the enemy and the Royal and Merchant Navies bringing food and supplies of all kinds across the Atlantic. No greater friend could we have in those dark and sad days than the USA.

People in my age group and others will be eternally grateful for the help and sacrifice that the United States gave us.

As early war years passed and we began to make some impression on the German war machine a strange thing happened in our country. A man dressed in Khaki uniform, brown lace-up boots and a funny hat with two points, one each end made his entrance into the UK. This was "GI Joe" the American serviceman. At first I thought they were all called Joe. But of course that wasn't the case. These soldiers were different - they were confident, they were sometimes a little loud - but [to us] kids they were beautiful, so friendly, so generous, so nice.

When I look back at that time I just knew we were going to win this horrible war

About 2 million US soldiers came to Britain from all parts of the United States - a lot never returned home, they died defending ours.

Yes we won but at a huge cost, many men and women lost their lives freeing Europe and the world. People like me will never forget them and I hope history never forgets the sacrifice these men, these women, these brothers from across the Atlantic made for us.

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Williams