

## My Memories of World War II

My first memory was seeing my Dad and our next door neighbour digging a massive great hole at the top of the garden. It was about 2.5 metres wide and 4 metres long, and approx 2.5 metres deep. They then put wooden railway sleepers across the top, and then shovelled the earth back on top. They carved steps down in to it, and lined the walls inside with sacking to soak up the damp. I think we had old apple boxes to sit on, but I don't remember what Auntie Gwen and I were put in to sleep. I was only about three years old at the time, and Auntie Gwen was a baby. We had candles for lighting.



Entrance to "Dugout"

One Christmas I was given a toy tin helmet, which I believed would allow me to stand up outside with the men, and watch the anti aircraft guns firing at the German bombers which they had caught in the cross beams of search lights. My Dad would not let me stay up there, so I threw down the helmet and was sent back down with my Mother. In the morning, I found a big hole in the top of my helmet – which might have been in my head if I'd stayed up there.

One evening at about 11pm, the air raid warning siren went off, and Mum got us out of bed, and put our siren suits (bit like brown baby grows) on and rushed us down the dug out. About 2 hours later the 'All Clear' went, and we went out of the dug out. It looked as though our house had been hit by a bomb and was on fire, but what had happened was that my Mum had been ironing and the iron had burned right through the wooden ironing board. (In those days, irons did not have thermostats, and you had to switch them on and off to keep the temperature right.) I suppose my Dad must have put the fire out because we couldn't call the Fire Brigade because nobody near us had a telephone.

I started school in 1941, when I was five, and we were not allowed to go home at lunch time, in case there was an air raid. If the siren went we all went in to the school air raid shelter which was brick built with a very thick concrete roof. We used to sing nursery rhymes very loudly so we would not be frightened by the guns firing and bombs exploding.

Another memory was standing out the front of the house at night, and seeing our guns firing at German planes. They used to use what were called 'tracer bullets'

They had sort of chemical built in to them which glowed after they had been fired so that they left a trail behind them so that the gun crews could see whether they were on target.

Later on in the war, when I was about 7 or 8 years old we had a Morrison Shelter indoors. It was about 2metres by 3metres and with a steel plate on top and cage wire round the outside. We all had to sleep in their every night, but it was good because we didn't then have go outside in the cold and damp of the "Dugout." Some people had Anderson Shelters in the garden made of corrugated Iron and concrete. But I think ours was better.



Morrison Shelter      Anderson Shelter

All the window panes had crosses of masking tape put on them so that if a bomb blast smashed them the glass would not fly all over the place.

Then of course there was "The Blackout." Before switching on any lights at night, we had to put up black sheets of material up at the window so that no light was visible outside. This was so that the German planes could not determine where people were living, especially in towns and cities. These stayed up all night, so that when you put the lights out to go to bed, it was pitch dark indoors, so you needed torches or candles if you wanted to move about. Outside there were no streetlights for the same reason, so everywhere was dark.

It was thought that the German Army might well invade us, so to make life more difficult for them, all signposts were removed.

Of course, lots of metal was used in making armaments – guns, planes etc. so it was necessary to remove garden fences that were made of iron to help. There is still evidence of this in Malling Road Snodland, where you can see small walls at the front of houses with metal stubs poking out from the top.

One day, we were out in the fields, and found lots of strips of silver foil with black backing all over the ground. We thought the Germans had dropped it to confuse our radar, so we proceeded to collect it up. We didn't make much impression though because it was everywhere. That was fortunate though because we afterwards found out that it was the R.A.F. who had dropped it to confuse the German radar !

A lot of bombs fell in open places, and left great holes in the ground which we called 'bomb craters'. These were interesting to children because they nearly always had water in the bottom, and we were able to catch 'tiddlers' (tiny fish) and 'tadpoles' in jam jars and take them home to show Mum.

One time, (probably about 1944) they dug a trench right across the field in front of our house. It was good fun to watch! Then they put a black pipe in it, and then a massive great bulldozer came and filled the trench in again. Of course, they didn't tell us what it was for. But it was Operation Pluto (Pipeline Under The Ocean) to take petrol down to the South Coast, and then under the English Channel to France, so that it could supply fuel to all our soldiers in France. The pipeline was marked by two concrete posts, about two metres high, and one metre apart, with wooden struts across them. The posts were painted white, and they still paint them white – even today!

I can remember lying in bed one evening (no siren had sounded saying that there was an air raid) and hearing a very heavy engine sound up in the sky. All of a sudden the noise stopped, and everything went quiet, and then there was a very loud bang. It was a German V 1. flying bomb, which we referred to as a "doodlebug." They didn't have pilots, but were guided by the use of gyroscopes. One time I saw a doodlebug flying towards our houses, and a Spitfire flew along side it and tipped its wing so that it went off course and crashed into a field instead of an area where there might have been lots of people. Apparently this happened quite a lot, and the brave pilots in Spitfires and Hurricanes must have saved lots of people's lives.

I can remember seeing hundreds of American bombers towing gliders behind them, and we were told that the planes and gliders were full of 'paratroopers' (soldiers equipped with parachutes) who were on their way over to France for an 'airborne invasion.'

In 1944 when I was 8 years old, I can remember tanks, guns, and loads of soldiers and equipment being in the fields to the front and back of our house over in Leybourne. At the time we did not properly know what was happening, but to us, as children, no fear was apparent – it was just fun, and we enjoyed seeing it all. It was code-named "Operation Overlord" and they were all collecting in the South of England to go across the English Channel to France for the Normandy Invasion – called "D – Day."

John Weller/Grandad 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012.