

Subject: World War 2 - wartime experiences

When the war began, I was 6 and my wife was 5 and just before it kicked off the first things that happened were people had shelters dug in the middle of their gardens and these were made of corrugated iron in a U shape and sunk into the ground at about 4 feet and covered over with the soil from the original hole and 6 adults could take shelter in one of them during an air raid. The next thing that happened was officials came round and issued everyone including children with Identity cards and this was followed by more officials issuing everyone with gas masks made of rubber and metal with Perspex screens and we all carried them around with us in cylindrical metal cases hung over our shoulders for most of the war.

When the air raids started in 1940, they were mainly in the daytime and unfortunately the weather was sunny with lovely blue skies. just right for the German bombers but I borrowed LT Aldersons binoculars to watch the dog fights over London in which the Spitfires and Hurricanes knocked hell out of the German aircraft and I saw many of them shot down in this phase. life could be risky I out shopping as the Germans sometimes were able to machine gun high streets and peoples back gardens and on one occasion when our shelter was being enlarged to take our family and our four neighbours I was picked up by the workman and we dived into the shelter in on such an occasion as the gardens were fired upon. The R.A. F were so successful that the German Largely stopped daylight raids and started night-time bombing. On one occasion my wife had just returned from school when the school had a direct hit, and the cleaners were killed. After this happened most children did not go to school for many months. when the night-time bombing commenced, we had moved to a new house as our lovely flat had lost all windows and ceilings and internal walls were wobbling. Our new house did not have a shelter so we all got into the coal cellar under the stairs and on occasion we had the three sisters and the son of one of them in this tiny space so there were 10 of us underneath the stairs. As we all did, we went to bed but had to get up when the wailing sirens went off in the middle of the night and my wife would go down to her grandmother's underground coal cellars for their shelter. Many children of course were evacuated to the countryside without their families. The German raids at night were eventually stopped as we developed a night fighter to shoot them down at night. We also had another weapon of defence in the form of enormous barrage balloons flown at different heights to disrupt the Germans flight path.

My family eventually had to go into a park shelter as it became too dangerous to stay in the house but unfortunately for us the shelter suffered a direct hit with my father crawling through a small tunnel with water and blankets for the injured and after this my father decided.

that every night we would have to go to Piccadilly tube station and sleep on the platform when the trains stopped running. I forgot that while we were in our coal cellars, we had to put up with a mobile gun which would fire from the railway at the bottom of our garden and the whole house appeared to jump into the air.

Of course, we all had ration books during the war with meat butter eggs margarine sweets and clothes all rationed along with many other items and on occasion in the period when the hens were laying you could go weeks without an egg and then get six allocations all at once. Fruit was another thing that was difficult to get hold of and bananas were not available at all.

Towards the end of the war the Germans started using a V1 flying bomb which had a rocket motor and some small wings to help it fly and its engine would suddenly stop, and the bomb would fall to the ground and explode, this form of attack was launched from a mobile ramp over in France, but we stopped this form of attack by bombing the launch pads and using RAF planes to tip them over into the fields of Kent. The next weapon used was a V2 which was a rocket launched from Germany and came without warning and could do substantial damage. One landed in South London where my father worked and threw a railway line half a mile and the blast dented my father's cigarette case in his coat.

in the last year or so of the war we all went back to school and despite all the odd we did the eleven plus exams and we both went to grammar schools, but my school was in Taunton, so I was evacuated with my friends and we all took a 5-hour train journey from Paddington for what is a just over an hour now. We were met at the station and allocated to families and my friend Pat and I went to stay in a large house with two families which had previously had servants and I believe our room was the servants' quarters. We had many adventures in the countryside as none of us had this opportunity before in our lives like being chased by a bull and fishing for roach in the river Tone.

I should say that my wife's experience of shelters was to sleep under Mann Crossman Brewery cellar on beer crates with a mattress on top which was not exactly comfortable.

When the war ended there were enormous celebrations and I remember being out in the street at 4AM in the morning and we all went to street parties and on a subsequent occasion. my father took the whole family to Buckingham Palace to see the King and Queen and the two Princesses and Winston Churchill Later in the month we all went to Westminster to see a fabulous firework displays with all boats and bridges including temporary bridges lit up in a way that seemed forever.

Obviously, our wartime experiences were much greater than this, but I hope this gives an impression of what it felt like during the war.

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