

## Memories of the War in Aylesbury

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People in story:

Hazel Taylor

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This story was submitted to the People's War site by Anna Wilson of Lutterworth Library on behalf of Hazel Taylor and has been added to the site with her permission. The author fully understands the site's terms and conditions.

I was 8 years old when war broke out. There were four children at home - 3 boys and myself. The other three children were grown up. My sister and one brother were married.

My mother's second son joined the Grenadier Guards and was killed at Dunkirk at the age of 21 in 1940. He left a wife and a daughter of 3 days. My mother and father never recovered from this and I was always hoping a mistake had been made and I would find him walking home.

My mother's brother and wife lived in Stockwell, London with two children Alf and June. Alf was an ARP messenger boy. While out during a raid, a bomb was dropped on the street he was in and Alf was killed at the age of 17. The strange thing was, before Alf and George parted and the last time they were together, they said, "if we don't meet again in this world, we will meet in the next."

Evacuees

I can remember the evacuees begin brought in large groups and those in charge were knocking at people's doors to take the evacuees in. We did not have any billeted with us as my mother already had 4 children. As we lived in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire it was probably considered a safe area. We made friends with the evacuees but I realised later that it must have been very hard for them being away from home and being teased by the boys.

Eventually my mother rented out the front room to lodgers - sometimes to families of Jews. These had businesses in London do travelled there each day. There was quite a large group of them, some living in the next street. I think they were probably in the confectioners business as one of them had the nickname of the Peanut King!

Air Raids

I once spent a day in London with my mother visiting my Aunt and Uncle. June and I were in the front room when I spotted an aircraft out of the window. June knew it was a doodlebug, grabbed my hand and we ran towards the back of the flat. However, the engine cut out and it dropped behind the flats. We stood on the fire escape and watched the smoke etc. Later on our way back to the station we saw the lady whose house was bombed, pushing a pram full of what she could salvage. This included a bottle of milk

perched on top. She said she didn't mind but she had not had her tea yet. Cockney humour!

The stations were stacked with people sleeping in the underground. We had to step over them to get onto a train. On the way home there was a doodlebug flying above the train. There was a soldier and an airman running from window to window to see what happened. Eventually it dropped at the side of the train and all the windows were blown out. My father was waiting for us when we finally got to Aylesbury Station. He had heard on the wireless (as it was called in those days) how bad the raids were in London. I said I never wanted to go to London again.

One evening Aunt Emmie and Uncle Joe and June all turned up on our doorstep. Luckily Mum had not got any lodgers at the time. They stayed with us until the end of the war. We did have bombs dropped but of course nothing like London. One dropped in the next street and a piece of kerbstone went through the roof of the house next door and fell on the edge of a bed and wedged in the floor boards. Luckily there was no one in the bed at the time or in the room below. There was also a land mine dropped which destroyed a large house and caused a tremendous amount of damage over a very large area. It shook our house, which really frightened me.

#### Food and Rationing

Although my mother refused to queue up for anything, we never went hungry. Dad grew all our vegetables and lots of people had fruit trees. Another Uncle who lived about five miles away had several plum trees. We were sent by my mother to get the plums and every time we sat down to have a rest, we refreshed ourselves with the plums. My mother used to make a cake if she had an egg so we all had a share. Another thing she did was to mix grated cheese with an egg to make scrambled egg. This made a really tasty sandwich filling. The small amount of butter was mixed in with the margarine. One of my brothers worked on a farm and was allowed 12oz of cheese a week. Some of this mum traded for other things she needed (a form of black market). There was one pork butcher in the town and if the word went round that they were making sausages, I was sent to queue up for some. Everyone could only have the same amount and I was fascinated watching the butcher's wife making sausages out of the long stream of sausage coming out of the machine. Many people would join a queue even though they did not know what they were going to get. Occasionally there were oranges and I think it was only children who got these. The back of the ration book was marked so you could not get any extra. Sweet were rationed of course. E coupons would be used for 4ozs and D coupons for 2ozs. I cannot remember how much was allowed per month but of course mums and dads gave their coupons to the children. When the American forces were in England we used to be given gum and chocolate.

#### Fashion

The ladies still wore hats and gloves. In summer there were crocheted gloves to go with their summer dresses. As it was difficult to obtain these things, my mother crocheted her own berets. This soon caught on and my mother was often making them for other people. Second hand clothes could be bought without coupons. My cousin saw a blouse she liked on the market but had no coupons. The stall-holder put it on his wife, then handed it to my cousin saying, "there you are clothing second hand." Trousers for women became very popular but were called 'slacks'. This wearing of trousers was partly to do with the jobs they did. If they were working in factories, perhaps building aircraft, they had to climb up so it was sensible. My cousin had a pair of sailor's bell bottoms which nowadays are called flares.

#### Fun and Games

The games we played then were tiles, tip cat, skipping, hop scotch and three balls. We also loved dressing up. I used to dress up in my sister's old dance dress and we used to pretend we were singers on stage and performed in the back garden.

Tiles was a game which no one seems to know about. As there was very little traffic we played in the middle of the road. A large ring was chalked on the road and a small pile of broken bits of tile was stacked in the centre. There were two teams and a ball was bounced from one team to the other with the aim of knocking the stack of tiles down. The team who managed this, then scattered and tried to get back to stack the tiles up without being hit by the ball from the other team or you were out. Great fun although we lost a lot of balls in one garden and Mrs Lawson kept them. I was sent by the boys to make friends with her daughter to discover if Mrs Lawson still had the balls. Yes, they were in a bag hanging in the shed. We then got together and chanted outside the house, "We want our balls back." After a while the bag was emptied into the street.

Tip cat was a small piece of wood sharpened at each end. The player had a long piece of wood with which we would hit the sharpened end of the cat and then as it spun into the air, hit it to get it across a line. Dangerous for windows, which I found out to my cost when one went through my mother's window.

Three balls was a game of playing three balls up against the wall which I loved but parents were irritated by the constant bumping of the ball on the wall. We were then told to play against the lavatory wall.

#### Soldiers

There were two camps for Prisoners of War, one for Italians and one for Germans, outside the town. This had always been a popular walk for locals for many years long before war started. One of our neighbours waved back to a German who waved to her.

The guards told her that if it happened again she would find herself in court. They probably thought it was a signal for planning an escape. It caused a great deal of laughter amongst us. After a while, the Italians were allowed out of camp and were dressed in a brown uniform with a large round patch of yellow or orange on the back of the jacket. They were given complete freedom so they could go to the cinema or anywhere in their spare time. Both German and Italians were employed on the land.

The Stoke Mandeville hospital was nearby and of course a lot of badly injured men from the forces were there. It was a familiar sight to see them in their blue uniforms. The more able took their companions out in wheelchairs. They were always cheerful but we saw some very horrific sights - men badly burnt or blinded.

At the end of the war there were lorry loads of our men who had been prisoners of war brought back through the town. We were all there to cheer them. They were just like skeletons and were being taken to Stoke Mandeville hospital. One man shouted, 'did anyone live near Elm Green' which we did. He flung a note to take to his wife. No one was allowed to visit them, not even relatives until they had managed to make them a bit better in health.

#### Victory Parties

When peace was declared we all danced on the green. I suppose we had life a little easier than a good many. However, it gave a safe haven for those who needed it.