Memories of the Second World War
and the Post-war Years

Donated to

St. Columba’s R.C. Primary School, Cupar

By members of Cupar U3A
(University of the Third Age)

PART ONE

November 2011
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This was Coventry.

—Bristol.

— and Plymouth.
Wartime France

In March 1940, two months before my fifth birthday, I left Singapore with my Mother and Father and my younger brother Peter, heading for Great Britain on the liner "Empress of India". My father was an officer in the Royal Engineers, and we had spent three years in Singapore and now had to return.

The journey was uneventful until we entered the Mediterranean, and it was then decided that the ship could go no further. WWII had started in September 1939, and by March 1940 it was not safe to go through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic, then cross the Bay of Biscay and land at Southampton, due to the number of German submarines. The Empress of India was a large luxury liner, and would have been an obvious target. Instead, the ship docked in Marseilles, in the south of France, and we had to take a train to the north, and we ended up at Cherbourg. I can remember the train journey, which took two days, and worst of all there was little food on the train. My father had to try to buy food at the stations where we stopped on the way, and we were all very hungry. Everybody on the train was very nervous, because although the west of France was not occupied, the Germans were steadily advancing across France from the east, and nobody was very sure exactly where they had reached. Luckily, the train managed to get to Cherbourg.

At Cherbourg, we boarded a ferry for the overnight journey to Portsmouth. I remember this part very clearly. Because the Channel was so dangerous, with the German submarines (U-Boats) all over the place, all the adult passengers, including my parents, had to sit on deck for the whole journey, wearing their life jackets. Peter and I were given a cabin, with bunk beds in it. A sailor from the ferry had the job of sitting in a chair in the cabin with us all night, wearing a life jacket, and holding two life jackets for Peter and me. If the ferry was hit by a torpedo, his job was to wake us up, put our life jackets on, and take us upstairs to our parents on the deck.

Luckily, we crossed the Channel safely and were not torpedoed. We landed at Portsmouth the next morning, and took the train to London and stayed for a short time with my Granny in Ealing.
WWII memories - Chris Morley

Sydenham – V 1

Living in Sydenham, on the corner of Jews Walk and Longton Grove, we had quite a few air raids. In the summer of 1944, when I was nine, the V1 rockets or “Doodle Bugs” started to arrive in large numbers. They made a strange sound, rather like a motor bike with engine problems, and could not be mistaken for anything else. As long as they were running, you were OK. When they stopped, you had about ten seconds to take shelter, and they were actually pretty powerful bombs.

One afternoon, I heard a Doodle Bug overhead, making a very funny sound indeed, and ran outside to see it. It was flying in a tight circle over my head, just going round and round. Flying just behind it was a Spitfire, and the Spitfire was firing its cannons at the Doodle Bug - hence the funny noise. For several minutes this continued, Doodle Bug and Spitfire circling overhead, with bursts of cannon fire as well.

Suddenly, the Doodle Bug straightened out and flew away from me, diving towards the ground. An enormous explosion followed. I found out next day that it had landed in the grounds of the Crystal Palace which was about 800 metres south of our house, and had not done any real damage.

V1 Flying Bomb Cut-away
A new terror was loosed on Southern England after the Allied landings in France: a jet-driven robot bomb with a ton of explosive in its warhead. It was Hitler’s long-threatened secret weapon—V 1. Of 8,000 flying bombs launched against Britain, 2,300 reached the London area, a large proportion being destroyed by rocket batteries, A.A. shells with a radio proximity fuse, R.A.F. fighters and a barrage of 2,000 balloons. V 1’s damaged more than 1,000,000 houses in the London region.
WWII memories - Chris Morley

Sydenham – V 2

We were living in a rented house in Sydenham, south London, on the corner of Jews Walk and Longton Grove. You can find it on Google maps. It was the winter of 1944 - 1945, and I was nine years old, my brother Peter was seven, and my brother Giles was about twenty months. It was a very snowy winter, and Peter and I were outside in the garden that afternoon playing in the snow, and my mother and Giles were in the house.

I was rolling a monster snowball, which got bigger and bigger. I remember stopping to rest, standing with my hands on this huge snowball. There was an enormous explosion and a bright flash, and suddenly I found myself lying on my back in the snow, with Peter a few metres from me, and I was watching the chimneys of the house. Smoke and soot were pouring up out of the chimneys, and I was lying in the snow and covered in soot. We realised that this was a bomb very close to us, and it was actually a V2 rocket. These rockets were faster than the speed of sound, so there was no warning noise before they hit. This one demolished a house not very far away.

Peter and I were not injured at all, but we were pretty scared and ran in to the house to find my mother. She and my brother Giles had been standing at the window in the front of the house, and Giles had wanted a biscuit so she turned away from the window and carried him to the back of the room. As they got there, the V2 exploded, and the windows were blown in by the blast, glass and window frames and everything. Luckily, they were not hit by anything, so all four of us were extremely fortunate to have avoided injury.
OUT of a serene sky on the evening of September 8, 1944, the first V 2 fell on Chiswick. From that hour, until the enemy's launching sites were captured by the Allied armies at the end of the following March, London endured the last of Hitler's terror weapons — a rocket-propelled projectile, weighing 12 tons, with a warhead of 2,000 lb. of explosive, travelling at 3,000 miles an hour and with a range of 200 miles. . . . The V 2 gave no warning. After the tremendous explosion a sound like thunder was heard; this was the noise of its flight, which could not be heard until after the explosion because the rocket travelled much faster than sound. One thousand and fifty rockets reached Britain, killing 2,754 people and seriously injuring 6,523. . . . And day after day the business of the capital was carried on as though there were no menace. Londoners were fortified by the knowledge that this was Hitler's "final fling."
While we were living at the corner of Jews Walk and Longton Grove, in Sydenham, my brother Peter and I went to a little school in Westwood Hill, a little bit further up the hill from Jews Walk.

Air raids were fairly common at the time, so we were not at all worried when the sirens sounded and all the pupils were moved in to what they called the "Gas Proof Room", which was a sealed room with heavy steel shutters and a reinforced ceiling. We were sitting there when there was this tremendous roaring noise from outside, together with very loud rattling noises from the shutters. This was a bit worrying, but soon after that the "All Clear" sounded on the sirens and we went back to our lessons.

My mother came to fetch us from school a few minutes later. She told us that she had been walking up Westwood Hill, and behind her in the distance there was this noise from an aircraft engine. She dived in to a doorway, and a Messerschmitt fighter came flying up the hill, just higher than the top of the lampposts, firing its cannons. She was not hurt, but the noise we had heard in the school was this Messerschmitt's engine and also the cannon shells rattling against the shutters.
WWII memories - Chris Morley

Sydenham - General memories

I was 10 when the war ended, so I have quite a lot of memories of things which interested me as a boy. Here are some of them:-

All bus stops were removed in London, so that any invading troops would not know if they were on a bus route or not. Buses would stop at any lamppost if required.

Most vehicles (buses, lorries and cars) had the front wings painted white so that they could be seen in the dark. This was because all streetlights were turned off.

Headlamps on vehicles were covered with tin cans like saucepans with three slots in the base, to let through just a glimmer of light.

Buses and trams had their windows covered with a kind of netting glued to the windows. It made them very difficult to see through, but the idea was that it would save the passengers from being cut by flying glass if a bomb landed nearby.

Interior lights in trains and buses and trams were heavily shrouded with metal shields to cut down the amount of light escaping out. This was the same idea as the blackout blinds on all house windows. Underground trains were allowed to keep all their lights on whilst they were underground, but had to turn them off when on the surface.

Walking around was always fun, because you could be sure of finding bits of shrapnel in the street if you kept your eyes open.
I was born in 1946 and therefore have no personal memories of the War. My father, however, was in the Eighth Army (in the Royal Artillery) and was posted to North Africa, where he took part in the desert campaign against Field Marshal Rommel’s Afrika Corps. He was a Bombardier, which meant that he was in charge of an anti-aircraft gun, and he was responsible with his crew (two or three men, I think) for making sure the gun was kept clean and in good working order, and of course for firing it if enemy aircraft flew overhead.

My father was a very good model maker, and he was asked to make small models of aircraft for the purpose of aircraft recognition. You’ve heard of ‘friendly fire’, when soldiers fire at people on their own side because they make a mistake and think they are firing at the enemy – imagine being killed by someone who is on your side! – but it does happen. Anyway, he made these models and they were used in teaching British soldiers the shapes of their own and enemy aircraft so that mistakes were less likely to be made. I remember that he brought one model, of a Mosquito fighter-bomber, back home at the end of the war.

Eventually Rommel’s soldiers were beaten, after the Battle of El Alamein, and the Eighth Army crossed the Mediterranean and fought their way up through Italy. My father was older than most of the soldiers and he was not sent into Italy. Instead, he stayed in Egypt and helped to run a great big prisoner of war camp, not for German soldiers but for Italians – they had been the Germans’ allies. Italy came out of the war in 1944, and these prisoners really just wanted to go home – they did not think of themselves as enemies of the British soldiers. A lot of them became ‘co-operators’, that is, men who were quite happy to help the British, not by fighting but by doing other things. My father worked in an office with two co-operators with whom he became friendly, and one of them taught him to speak Italian. The other one was a very good artist, and painted a picture of my mother, using a photograph my father had to work from. I still have that picture – it has been painted on a piece of wood, because that was all they had; but it is very good (a copy is included overleaf). When my father was a very old man, I asked him the name of the man who taught him Italian, and he told me it, and without his knowledge I wrote to the town in Italy where this man had stayed, to see if I would get a reply as I wanted to give my father a nice surprise if word came back. Sadly, it did not. Possibly the man had moved away or had died.

My father and his crew fired their gun into the sky when enemy planes went across. I once asked my father if he had ever hit anything, but he said he didn’t know. If he had, probably the pilot and plane crew were killed. I wondered if he ever thought about that. He also told me that once he saw an enemy attack on the Suez Canal. A big ship was there and he knew that a good friend of his was on it. The ship was hit and his friend was killed – of course he didn’t know that till later – all he could do was watch from the other bank.

I don’t know why this was, because usually soldiers would get leave and be able to go home, but my father was in North Africa for at least five years without a break. I only recently discovered a strange thing. I said he was a keen model maker. Before the War, he had bought a magazine called ‘Model Maker’ every time it came out – once a fortnight I think – and he had kept them all. For the whole six years of the War, my mother continued with the order, and when he came home, there was something like 150 magazines waiting unopened for him. I am sure she hoped that he would be able to come home sooner than he did, because the War would be over, and he would be able to get into normal life, to go to work and make his models at home as he used to do. Sometimes I wonder what it must have
been like for her, to have your husband go away for all that time and not know whether he would come back safely or not.
Alan Kennedy – WW2 Memories

I was 3 years old when the war began and 9 years old by the time it ended in Europe.

My family was living in a Church Manse in Cambuslang, which was about a mile south of the giant Colville steel, and iron works. As a major producer of steel and iron for the war effort the works were as much a target for enemy bombers as were the Clyde shipyards. Many local folk had fairly flimsy Anderson Shelters to go to during a raid. They were constructed in back gardens below ground level and the roof was a sheet of corrugated iron topped with a heavy covering of soil. They would protect one from flying bomb splinters but not from a direct hit.

We were different in that the old manse building under the stairs which would have been used originally to store food and maybe wine. The cellar had three little rooms with stone shelving and overall was just big enough for our family of five. It was certainly safe from all but the very largest bombs. I often wondered how we would get out as a direct hit would bring the huge old well-built stone house down on top of us!

When the community siren wailed to warn of an approaching enemy bomber raid, we all took to the cellars, day or night. We kept a paraffin lamp, a small paraffin cooking stove and thick blankets ready at all times, together with an emergency torch and some tinned food. Although we were so protected we could still hear the explosions as bombs landed on or near the steel works. Also, the noise of anti-aircraft guns firing at the bombers. Fortunately the nearest bomb explosion took place about half a mile away on the local golf course. We now learned that lights were placed in the countryside to deceive the enemy bombers into thinking the steelworks were not where they thought they were —- I can believe it helped but it certainly wrecked the golf course and I remember going to look at some of the huge bomb craters afterwards. Although it received many direct hits, the steelworks managed to continue producing steel and iron.

The morning after the raids, which usually occurred at night, we would go outside to find the ground littered with shrapnel. These were usually small one inch or so fragments of exploded anti-aircraft shells and had to be quickly swept from all the roads to stop them puncturing vehicle tyres. I seem to remember a competition amongst local kids to find the largest piece which came to a swift end when a youngster brought in a shell which had failed to explode—but which might have done at any moment!

In 1944 after British Forces had landed in France, we often saw planes of all types flying over us with three white stripes on the wings. This denoted they had been involved in support of the landings in France and helped identify them when so many nervous troops were on the beaches in Normandy and possibly willing to fire at any plane in case it was an enemy one.

Around our property ran an old stone wall on top of which were iron supports to hold wire to keep animals in. To aid the war effort every scrap of metal was needed to build ships and planes and guns so these were taken along with any aluminium saucepans that could be spared. How much of that scrap metal was later usefully used to build Spitfires and battleships is now a point for discussion! We only
managed to keep our old iron gates to the drive up to the house after the authorities relented on seizing them. We were lucky with some extra food supplies as an elderly Dutch sea captain was a friend of my father. He and his merchant ship made frequent dangerous trips to South Africa to bring in much needed food supplies. Every few months or so he brought us a couple of bags of raisins and two or three bars of dark chocolate, items which were rarely, if ever, seen in our shops. I hope he survived the war. He certainly lived dangerously through it. Just a few months after the war in Europe ended, I tasted my first banana. Until then we occasionally had banana essence for making cakes but never a real banana as ships coming into Britain brought only essential items. It was almost totally black with only a hint of yellow and had been in transit for some time. I remember it well and ate it all, black skin included!

Alan Kennedy
18th September 2011
Isobel Mitchinson

I was born in 1942 and was only three when the war was over so I have no real wartime memories although I do remember gas masks. Because there were fears that the Germans would use gas, everyone was issued with a gas mask which you had to carry with you whenever you went out.

The masks for children were brightly coloured and were supposed to look like Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse. Masks for adults were boring khaki coloured. They all had a horrible rubbery smell. The government issued 38 million of them but they were never needed. My mum kept them, in their boxes, on a shelf in our bedroom. Even though we couldn’t see them inside their boxes my sister and I were afraid of them.

I was living in Dunfermline where there was no fighting so I did not need to be evacuated, but our neighbour had two nieces with her who came from Coventry, which was badly bombed. Although our neighbour was very kind to them they were very unhappy as they didn’t see their mum and dad for ages and they were only 7 and 8. At least they knew our neighbours whereas most children were sent to live with strangers.

My dad did not fight in the war. He worked on the railways and this was called a ‘reserved occupation’ because it was vital to keep the trains running to move troops and supplies. He therefore did not have to fight but he was a member of the Home Guard so he had to attend drills and take part in fire-watching duties. If you have seen ‘Dad’s Army’ on TV, that is the Home Guard. His brothers both went to war. One, Robert, was in the army and was captured and held prisoner by the Germans for 4 years, the other, David, was in the RAF and came through unharmed. I can remember the great family party we had at my granny’s house in Ladybank when he finally came home after the war was over.

After the war was over the country was very poor and lots of things were still scarce. To try to make sure that everyone had a fair share the government introduced rationing and everyone had a book with coupons for all sorts of things like food and clothes. Sweeties were still rationed for ages after the war and even after rationing stopped they were still very scarce and I can remember whenever a shop got supplies in everyone would tell their friends and we would all go and queue up for what felt like hours to buy them. My mum used to make peppermint sweets which I loved but sadly I don’t know the recipe.

We didn’t have television and all our news came from the radio or newspapers. To be honest, because it all seemed so far away I wasn’t really interested and was too busy playing with my friends. We didn’t have a lot of toys and of course, no computers. Mostly the girls played with dolls and the boys with guns and we all had ludo, snakes and ladders and playing cards. All my memories of those days are happy ones.
World War Two Memories

As an eight year old in October 1939 I was visiting relatives on Costorphine Hill, to the west of Edinburgh. It was just a few weeks after the start of the war in a period later described as the “Phoney War”.

Suddenly an aircraft flew very low over our heads, followed closely by another one. I can still see it in my mind’s eye. Two streams of what I thought was fire coming out of the front of the second aircraft. They both disappeared over the hill towards Edinburgh. What I saw was in fact machine gun fire from a Spitfire. I remember my grown up relatives wondering about what we had seen and the general view was that ‘they had been practising’. Very little news was given about what happened during the war and I had no idea that we had witnessed what was probably the first German attack of the war and not an isolated incident.

Another incident in which family members were involved happened later. There was a very large factory which made ball-bearings (vital for manufacturing) in the area on the south side of Edinburgh where we lived. This was bombed and a bomb landed very close to the tenement where my grandmother and aunt lived in separate flats. If my grandmother had not been visiting her daughter in the top flat, she might have been killed as her kitchen ceiling landed on her chair! Both ladies arrived on my parents’ doorstep in the middle of the night looking very dusty and dishevelled!

Memories of the war are of the total darkness outside (the Blackout), and the long summer evenings; light till midnight because of double summertime – two hours forward instead of one.

- Of very little heating inside which caused many of us to have chilblains.

- Of getting only one bath a week to save on fuel.

- Of having stone “pigs” filled with hot water in bed instead of hot water bottles – no rubber available.

- Of ‘make do and mend’ with clothes and getting an extra clothes ration because of being very tall for my age and having big feet. NEW clothes were very rare and exciting.

Submitted by Eleanor Duncan, Cupar
Another Wartime Memory

The year must have been 1941. We were living near Clydebank in Glasgow. German bombers were attacking the shipyards in the industrial part of Glasgow and all over the city barrage balloons appeared. These giant balloons were filled with lighter than air gas and tethered to the ground by giant hawsers. Enemy planes were unable to fly low over their targets as they had to avoid getting entangled in the steel hawsers. The German pilots had to fly higher which meant they were less accurate and also made them better targets for the machine gunners on the ground.

We lived in a house with a stone staircase inside. I was about seven years old and was put under this stair for safety during an air raid. I came out and saw my mother and brother standing at one of the windows watching the searchlights trying to catch enemy planes in the beam to make them easier targets. I was immediately sent back under the stairs. It was years later before I realised that had a bomb dropped nearby then the blast would have blown the glass out of the window and all over them. You would have thought that adults would have known better. Just goes to show.

Rationing of food during the war helped make sure that everyone could share what food was available. Supplies were brought in by sea with great difficulty; merchant ships were regularly sunk by air or torpedo attacks. I remember the first time I saw an orange. My mother had joined a queue to obtain this exotic fruit, but I don’t remember eating it. In our house we all had our butter ration measured out at the beginning of the week and placed on a little plate with our name on it. When the butter was finished we could eat horrible margarine. Vegetables were grown in every available space and we all got equal shares of what food was available. This was done by means of a ration book bearing our name. Little square coupons were cut out of this ration book and given to the butcher, baker, and sweetie shop owner in exchange for whatever amount of food was available.

Peta Rennie
More Wartime Memories from Scotland

Air Raid Shelters These were built to protect the public during air raids. There was one built in Bonnygate, near what is now the Y.M.C.A. building (Marathon House). Built of bricks with a reinforced concrete roof, people were encouraged to take shelter if the air raid warning sounded. People were also encouraged to leave their homes during an air raid, because a direct hit could cause a total collapse, especially if there was no extra protection inside the house. Schools all had air raid shelters built outside in the playgrounds. We had regular practices at getting out of the classrooms and into the shelter in the shortest possible time. An Anderson shelter was made of corrugated iron with a concrete floor and this was for use in private gardens. The shelters were partially buried in the ground and had an entry door.

Gas Masks Everyone had to carry a gas mask in a cardboard box with a shoulder strap. Gas masks came in different sizes to fit the wearer's head exactly. There was a window and filters so that one could see and breathe during an attack when cylinders of poisonous gas were dropped by enemy aircraft. I remember when mine was fitted with a new filter which was bright green. I have no recollection of any gas attacks where I was living. Children had gas masks with a picture of Mickey Mouse on and babies had special masks which covered their whole body. I had a Mickey Mouse gas mask until I grew out of it.

Shortages There were many shortages at that time. For example, if a man’s suit was worn out and shiny, the seams would be unpicked and the material turned outside in and then stitched up again. This was done very skilfully and the only sign of the alteration was that the buttons and buttonholes were now on the opposite side. Shoes were repaired at home because no one could afford to throw them out. Some people wore wooden clogs. These were very long lasting and quite comfortable but cold in winter because they did not enclose the entire foot.

Iron Railings around gardens If you look carefully you will still see where iron railings were removed from the tops of garden walls. These railings were collected to be melted down to make guns for the war effort. My grandmother had iron gates and railings at the front of her garden and she argued with the authorities that her railings and gates were needed to keep out the rabbits which would eat all the vegetables which she was growing to feed her family. The government had asked everyone to do this in their ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign. She won the argument and the railings are still in place today. My oldest sister joined the WRNS, the Women’s Royal Naval Service, when she was old enough. She became a cook and was stationed in Wales and London.

Peta Rennie
WW2 Memories

My father, Cyril Robert Bougourd was born in 1905 in Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands, which are closer to France than England. He came to London to find work before the islands were occupied by the German Army. During the Occupation from 1940-1945 my father couldn’t visit his family, nor could residents leave the island. Letters could only be sent through the Red Cross and had to be very short. If the German censors were suspicious the letters would be destroyed. It was a very difficult time for the Germans as well as the Islanders as food was scarce and there were very strict rules.

Just before the Occupation a boat was ‘found’ to evacuate children to the mainland. It was done in such a hurry that some parents had no idea where their children would end up. Some Guernsey children found themselves with families in Glasgow and recently a group of now elderly men and women went back to Glasgow to thank the city for looking after them. Some parents didn’t know where their children had been until after the war and some children didn’t want to go home.

As well as joining the River Police, my father volunteered for Civil Defence and became an Air Raid Warden. One of his duties was to direct people to the Air Raid Shelters when the sirens sounded and to make a list of all the people in the shelter so that names could be checked against unidentified casualties. Sometimes people would be registered in a district away from their homes and it could take several days to know if they were safe or not.

We had an Anderson Shelter in our back garden, but my mother didn’t take me in there very often as I was just a baby and the shelter was dark and damp, with metal bunk beds and spiders. She used to sit with me under the kitchen table. I don’t remember any of this as I wasn’t born till 1942. The shelter stayed in the garden for several years after the war and then it was dug out and taken away.

Judy Gillespie
This is to certify that

Mr. Cyril R. Bougard

Has given Full Time Service
in the

Wardens’ Service
of the
CIVIL DEFENCE GENERAL SERVICES
of the
COUNTY COUNCIL OF MIDDLESEX
in the

Borough of
HESTON & ISLEWORTH

From 11th December 1940 To 1st July 1945

The County Civil Defence Committee and the Local Council
join in expressing their sincere appreciation of these Services.

Chairman of the Middlesex County Civil Defence Committee

Mayor of the Borough of Heston and Isleworth
All men between certain ages were liable to be ‘called up’ for active service. My father was declared to be Grade 1. In fact, he didn’t go to do National Service because by that time he was working in what was called a ‘reserved occupation’. That meant that the civilian job he was doing was important for the war effort. He was a mechanical engineer for the Thames River Police in London. He was part of the group who maintained the engines. The boats patrolled the river day and night and used the water from the river to fight fires caused by the bombing raids. They once pulled out a very young and very frightened German airman who landed in the river, entangled in his parachute. They took him back to the station at Wapping and gave him a change of clothes, some food and cigarettes before handing him over to the local police.
This rather secretive document was possibly in my father’s possession so that he could be mobilised for any operation that needed his skills. Some of the River Police boats went to Dunkirk, but my father didn’t go with them. His job was to ensure that the craft were seaworthy as they were normally only used on the River Thames. I don’t know if all of them came back safely.

Judy Gillespie

THEME INTELLIGENT PROPERTY OF CUPAR U3A
Shopping in Wartime Britain

Suppose your mum were really poorly this week. Could you fetch the groceries by yourself? During the war, and for some years after, children of your age could, and regularly did. And it was dead easy. How? and Why?

Well, the how? is easy to explain. You walked to the shop – very few people had cars in those days – and one shopping bag would be big enough for a family of four, so quite easy to carry home. You’d only use the bus if you lived in a large town.

And why? Because any child of ten could make a standard list of what to buy because you bought “the rations” plus any basics you were needing. Easy peasy.

Let me take you through a typical grocery shopping routine at my house. Saturday was shopping day. After breakfast (cornflakes, bread and dripping, cup of tea) Mum would dictate my list:

Fats – butter, margarine, cooking fat, Cheese, Bacon, Sugar, Tea, was how it started, every week. All these items, and the rest of the list, we would buy at our local Co-op where we were ‘registered’. Everybody had to register with a shop to get their rations. Think hard and you’ll soon realise why!

Thinking of what else to put on the list didn’t take long, but might include some of the following in the hope they might be in the store. Cereal (usually Kellogg’s cornflakes), Flour, Cocoa (no drinking chocolate at that time), Oxo Cubes, HP sauce (the only sauce there was - tomato sauce came later) and Marmite, pudding rice (no Ambrosia, -- and eating rice instead of potatoes was unheard of!) Matches, Dad’s tobacco or cigarettes.

It went without saying that any tinned goods in the shop were to be bought. Today’s standard baked bean tin was the size for a family of four. Tinned goods only came to the shops now and again. The same was true for jam, pickles, dried fruit and many other items: if it was in the shop, you bought it.

These items were ‘on coupons’ which was another method of rationing. This allowed you a certain amount of choice. For example, if your mum made jam every summer you probably wouldn’t buy the jam on offer in the shop-and so save a coupon- which you might spend a few weeks later when some raisins came in (thinking hopefully of Christmas cake. Everybody had the same number of coupons regardless of age, so by being careful and by looking ahead you could prepare for, say, Christmas, a birthday, a wedding or even in case of illness.
So here I am in the queue at the Co-op, ration books, list and purse in my hand ready to be served when it’s my turn. No self-service here. First the ration books are handed over and marked with indelible pencil. Before biros were invented in the 1950’s this was the only way to stop people trying to cheat. The marks these special pencils made couldn’t be rubbed out. The rations would be carefully weighed out by the grocer. Then I’d read the ‘coupons’ list. They probably didn’t have everything, but you took what there was. And then there might be a ‘special’. A tin, perhaps plums? Peaches? Salmon? Evaporated milk? You never knew but you took it gratefully. The money is handed over, Co-op number quoted and out I come with a week’s groceries. It all fits easily in one shopping bag. Next stop the butcher next door for meat and eggs. No need for a ten year-old to know the difference between beef steak and mince, a lamb chop or a pork chop. I take the ration of meat, by weight, that the butcher offers plus the ration of eggs. Note the order in which we shop – the eggs can now lie gently on the rest of the shopping in their paper bag. No egg boxes in those days.

And so to home. Bag emptied. Groceries checked and put away, change checked. And a new list. This will be more fun – we can choose! - though it will be much heavier to carry home because it’s the greengrocer we’re going to. His list reads: Potatoes, Carrots, Onions and Greens – any amount, any kind, and maybe fruit, apples, plums or pears, if in season. No need to put oranges, lemons, bananas on the list. They are, for most of the war “Green and Blue ration books only” i.e. for children under five and twelve respectively. Everyone queued for these on the day they came in, whatever day of the week it was. The word “oranges” would pass round a town like wildfire. Even tomatoes were hard to come by. I grew up thinking they were as exotic as mangoes or pineapples.

Many, many people grew their own fruit and vegetables in back gardens and allotments. Some kept hens for extra eggs or rabbits for extra meat. Mums must have had a hard time thinking how to feed their families.

Not much food and not much variety. Nothing pre-packed, ready prepared or frozen. No pizzas. No ice cream, no yoghurt, no crisps. Rationed sweets. One Mars bar would be cut into eight slices so we could have a piece every day.

But it was all so easy for a ten year-old child to carry home.

Ruth Cooke
WORLD WAR TWO

World War II is generally accepted to have started on 1st September 1939.

I learned that we were at war with Germany when I came home from Sunday School. It didn’t mean much to me as a child, but for our parents who had lived through World War One only twenty years before, it must have been beyond belief. My father had fought in France and was lucky enough to come through that alive and unwounded. Thankfully he was too old to be called up for the army again.

This was going to be a very different war as towns and cities were going to be bombed and thousands of civilians killed.

Things started to change immediately and I’ll list the things I remember below: -

1. The blackout was enforced immediately so that German bombers would not be able to pick out their bombing targets from above. Men and women who were not in the forces were recruited into the ARP force (Air Raid Precautions).

ARP Warden’s helmet

Everyone had to put up blackout blinds in their homes (made of thick black cloth) on every window and door. If the slightest chink of light could be seen from outside your house, an ARP Warden would ring the bell and order you to get it sorted immediately.

Strong tape had to be stuck in a cross shape over every window to prevent glass bursting into the house if there was a bomb blast. Our school classroom windows were covered with this tape for years.

There were no streetlights and white lines were painted on the edges of pavements so you could see where to cross the road.

If you took a torch out in the dark to help you to see where you were going, it had to have a shield over it so that a small beam of light only shone downwards.

Only people in essential jobs (like doctors) could drive a car and at night their lights had also to be covered with a shield so that the light only shone on the road.

ARP Warden’s helmet

2. Travel was restricted and there were very many places you were not allowed to go as they were needed by the army, and were fenced off by barbed wire.

3. Concrete barriers were erected at staggered intervals along some main roads so if the Germans invaded our shores they would have difficulty driving tanks into the towns. Thankfully whether these would have worked or not was never tested.

Tall poles of wood were driven into the seabed rounds our shores, also to prevent enemy landing craft from driving from the sea up the beaches to the towns.

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4. Air raid shelters were built all over the towns and cities and everyone had to stop whatever they were doing and go to an air raid shelter when the siren went off. The siren was on the roof of a cinema very near our house and the wailing sound, which came in waves, was very loud and very scary. When the bombing raid was over and the bombers had left our shores, the ‘all clear’ would sound. This was one long wailing sound and we were all happy when we heard this.

A next-door neighbour of ours had an Anderson Shelter made in her garden and as she lived alone, there was room for our family in it too. We got wakened out of our sleep by the siren and we had to put on warm clothes and my Mum would fill a flask of tea and get some biscuits and we would all go next door into the shelter and wrap ourselves in blankets to keep warm. Sometimes we didn’t have to stay long, but some nights we had to stay for hours before the ‘all clear’ sounded.

I can’t remember whether we managed to sleep or not, but I expect we would have nodded off at times. I remember one night sneakily opening the canvas sheet which was the door and peeping out to see if I could see the bombers. My Dad shouted at me so loudly I never did that again. By the way, we still had to go to school in the morning.

The times we had most air raid alerts was when Clydebank (7 miles from Glasgow) was being bombed, as there were shipyards and many factories there. Many hundreds of men, women and children were killed in these air raids. Sometimes the bombers would miss their target and on one of these occasions a house was hit not far from us and three people were killed. Sometimes fighter planes would come over and just fire their guns at anything. This was called ‘strafing’.

5. Everything was rationed - food, clothes, furniture, coal and of course there were no sweets and no bananas except for young children. Mothers had to be very clever cooks to make the week’s rations last. People thought up clever recipes. I remember mashed parsnip with banana essence which was supposed to taste like mashed bananas. It was pretty awful, but we always ate up everything we got as we knew there was nothing else. They do say people were healthier during rationing than they are now, and had better teeth as there were no sweets and no fizzy drinks.

We were lucky, as we had a garden with rhubarb and fruit bushes and my Dad had the use of a greenhouse and a large plot of land from a neighbour. He grew tomatoes, potatoes, turnips, carrots, cabbage, sprouts, lettuce, parsley and some more unusual things like vegetable marrow and celery.

6. I remember we had things called ‘British Restaurants’. I was only ever in them twice, but we thought they were great. You queued up at a counter and got a three course meal, all at the same time - plate of soup on the top, a metal separator, meat, potatoes and vegetables, another separator, and a pudding on the bottom. The price was one shilling (five pence to you).

7. I almost forgot gas masks. Everyone had to go to a hall and be issued with a gas mask which had to be carried at all times in a little case or a bag. There were three kinds,
ordinary ones for older children and adults, ‘Mickey Mouse’ ones (which were meant to be
less scary) for young children and great big ones for babies. These were in a big cardboard
box and mothers had to have that sitting on the pram every time they went out.

We had gas mask drill in school once a week and woe betide you if you had forgotten your
mask. You had to be able to put them on very quickly in case bombs were dropped which
were full of poisonous gas. It was very uncomfortable wearing them and thankfully we never
had to put them on in earnest.

8. You will have heard about children being evacuated from the cities to the countryside
to escape bombing, but did you know that anyone who had one or two spare bedrooms had
soldiers billeted on them. Relatives of mine had two soldiers staying with them and after they
left a family arrived whose house had been bombed in the Clydebank blitz. They had nothing
but the clothes they were wearing. They had lost everything but their lives.

9. Another thing which happened was the sudden appearance of Barrage
Balloons in the skies. We could see one from our living room window. These huge
balloons were anchored to the ground with strong ropes. They were to keep enemy
bombers from flying low over the towns and cities.

10. A very dramatic thing which happened was that we woke up one morning to a terrible
noise coming from the front of the house. When we looked out we saw two men removing
our gate and railings with acetylene cutters. In a short time, all we were left with was stubs of
metal on our garden wall.

You can still see these stubs on many of the older houses in Cupar. One I pass each day is
at Watt’s restaurant and bar.

This metal was apparently to be used to make guns, but we found out after the war that they
were no use for this purpose and were just piled up in scrap yards.

11. One more thing I remember is the giant posters all over the
town of a wall with huge ears and the caption ‘Walls have Ears’,
‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’. This was to warn people that there
were enemy spies everywhere who were trying to pick up any
useful pieces of information perhaps from a person who worked in
a munitions factory or from someone in the armed forces.

You may be thinking you could not have managed to live through these times, but it is
amazing what you can do, and do without, when there is no alternative. I certainly hope you
will never have to find out.

Marion Cross - 20 November 2011
My recollections of the Second World War in “A Northeast Coast Town” (alias Hull)

I was born in Hull in 1943 so I was only 2 when the War ended. Most of my memories are of growing up in Hull after the Second World War.

Let me start by telling you about Hull. It’s very flat and used to be the biggest fishing port in the world. You could always tell when it was going to rain because the wind would blow from a certain direction and it would turn the tops of the Kipper Vats towards the city. If you could smell the fish you would know it was going to rain.

Apart from London, Hull was bombed more than any other place in the U.K.

By 1945, 152,000 people had been made homeless (due to bomb damage) with 34,000 alone left without homes between May 7 and May 9, 1941. Over 90% of the population suffered some damage to their houses Of Hull’s 92,660 homes, just 5,945 escaped undamaged. By 1945, 152,000 people had been made homeless.

People living in Hull have always felt that the rest of the country was unaware of the hardship they endured. In a recent radio interview one lady said "The radio never said anything about Hull being bombed. We were all a bit upset about that. All the other towns being bombed were mentioned but Hull was never mentioned once. All they ever said was a 'north-east coast town'. I suppose this was to protect public morale in the rest of the country.

I’ve attached a slide show with pictures of what it was like in Hull during the war
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-humber-13282836

We lived close to the Fish Dock and in 1941 the next-door house to my granddad’s was hit by a bomb. Luckily it was one of the few nights when my Auntie had persuaded him that he should sleep in the air raid shelter instead of his own bed! Someone has produced a map charting all the bombs that dropped on Hull and I was able to go into the map and find the date and type of bomb that hit our neighbours.
http://www.hullblitz.org/

Because of the bombing I was evacuated with my mother and sister to a farming village 30 miles away in the Yorkshire Wolds.

After the war, I remember that, growing up in Hull, we were surrounded by bombed sites. They were great places for children to play in and we used to make bonfires for Guy Fawkes Night using the wood from the bombed buildings. There were dips, hollows and hills caused by the explosions which made it ideal territory for playing hide and seek. Some of the sites weren’t developed for thirty years or so.

In a funny way, although it was scarce, the food we ate then was very healthy. You ought to try some of the recipes. Food and clothes were rationed which meant you could only get a limited amount of food and very restricted products for which you had to use “rationing coupons”. Every 2 to 4 weeks, you would have to go to a Centre to stand in a queue to get your next rationing book. People used to swap coupons if they had run out of a particular food' The colour of your ration book was very important as it made sure you go the right amount and types of food needed for your health. You were only allowed the quantity of food which was stated on the coupon. Most people grew some of their own vegetables and we were sent apple and bramble picking to supplement the allowance. It wasn’t until 9 years after the War that they stopped rationing meat and bacon. 

Mike Sawyer

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The quiet hero

Susan Bracher describes how her father’s vivid prisoner-of-war diaries have kept his memory alive

As told to Moira Petty

I was nine weeks old when my father, Pat Brooks-Hill, went missing in action in 1942 and three when he returned home, a stranger to me and the most unassuming of war heroes. He turned our garden, mended my tricycle and rose to become a bank manager. A devoted family man, he was overjoyed at the postwar births of my sister and brother. The one subject we never discussed was the war; he didn’t want to be reminded of it.

But in 1989, aged 67, he suddenly produced, on handwritten sheets, an expanded version of the diaries he’d kept during the war, which I’d never seen. In later years I had his memoirs printed and bound for each of the family. I thought I really understood him for the first time and felt a surge of pride at his enduring spirit and quiet heroism.

He’d married in 1939 and joined the navy as a volunteer in 1940. In August 1942, as the captain of a tank landing craft, he took part in the disastrous Dieppe raid, when British and Canadian forces attempted an incursion into the French port held by the Germans, who moved them down from positions on the cliffs.

His landing craft was set on fire and my father was captured. My mother received a telegram from the War Office saying he was missing in action. His diary tells how he, liberated, bedraggled with splinters of mortar shell from head to foot, had been taken to hospital in Rouen and put into isolation suffering from scarlet fever, his only consolation his

Precious memories

Pat Brooks-Hill with his wife and daughter, Susan (top) and the pencil case he made in the PoW camp (above)

wedding ring and a sea-stained photograph of my mother.

Two months later, he was sent to a PoW camp in northern Germany and an incredible picture emerges of the prisoners’ stoicism and resourcefulness. He studied for and passed two banking exams and learnt shorthand so he could transcribe, then read aloud, news bulletins on the PoWs’ illicitly built radio.

It was heartbreaking to read how low he was by the end of 1944, worn down by cold and hunger. They were given millet in lieu of cereal, and the meagre supply of coal petered out. But the precious wireless told them the Allies were advancing. In April 1945, the PoWs were marched northwards for 10 days, sleeping in wet fields and diving into ditches as RAF planes swooped low and mistakenly strafed them, with inevitable tragic losses.

Within two weeks of reaching his new camp, Allied tanks drove through the gate. ‘The emotion was indescribable. I was in British hands at last,’ wrote my father. Recently, my granddaughters were studying the Second World War and I unpacked the diaries, photos and other mementoes for them to take in to school. Half-forgotten among them was a pencil case my father had lovingly sewn, decorated with rabbits and my name, while in the camp. The thought of his big hands stitching ‘Susan’ with such care, then determinedly bringing his gift home, is intensely moving to me. It was so rewarding passing his story on to my grandchildren and bringing alive for them a man who was ordinary and yet extraordinary. As ever, on Remembrance Day, I shall think of my late father and be forever grateful that he kept those much-treasured diaries.