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 TWO

November 2011
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The following letters, all written by my mother, are just those that have survived from her early wartime days. She wrote home weekly, but not all of them reached their destination and not all have survived the passage of time. She sent a package of letters to me in 1988 to help me with a World War II project I was doing with my class of P.7s in a Glasgow school. Until then, I did not know that they existed. As she explains in the first covering letter below, written to me in 1988, many of her later letters have not survived.

*After they have read these I hope they may have learned something how the War affected ordinary people’s lives (from the point of view of one little family at least) and how in the time of War, people showed resourcefulness, courage and community spirit in the face of a common threat.*
This was Coventry.

—Bristol.

—And Plymouth.
1940s MEMORIES - INTRODUCTION

My grandmother Margaret and grandfather Edmund Thomson had emigrated from Aberdeen to the United States of America in the early 1900’s. They had three children: Nellie (born 1902), Edmund or Ed (born 1906) and my mother, Margaret Thomson (born 1908) and they settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In 1930 Margaret (also known as Peg) travelled with her sister Nellie back to Scotland to visit relatives and to see where her forebears had come from. On board the same transatlantic ocean liner was a George Yule working as Assistant Purser in his university summer holidays. He was studying at Edinburgh University and his family lived in Edinburgh. George was to become my father.

Peg and George married in Edinburgh in 1935 and then settled in various towns in England wherever George’s job as a civil servant took him. In 1938 they were living in Halifax in rented accommodation and when war broke out in 1939, they’d just had their first child, Alison, who is my older sister.

In those days, people did not often have enough money to travel abroad and my father was just a young man, with not much of a salary and a wife and child to support. He worked six and a half days a week and had few holidays. That was why my mother and father could not travel back to the States to show off their new baby to the new grandparents, Grandma & Grandpa Thomson. They sent photos and lots of letters – BUT – then War was announced and everything changed.

I was born in Halifax too, in 1943, but by the time my young sister, Carolyn, arrived in 1944, the family had already moved to Wormit in Fife, and my father was working in the Cupar office. My father was in the Home Guard during the War as his poor eyesight meant that he was not allowed to join the Army, as he had wanted to. The War was over by the time 1945 arrived and our grandparents still never had seen their first three grandchildren (except for Grandma, who had seen Alison as a newborn, travelling back to the States, arriving home shortly before war was declared, as you will read in the letters*)!

(Marion Davie, nee Yule)

* See ‘Letters Home 1939-1941’
VISIT TO AMERICA – 1947

During the war, ocean liners were used as troop ships, and then after the end of the War in 1945 they were needed for the repatriation of the thousands of troops displaced by the War. That was why it wasn’t until 1947 that my father was able to book passages for my mother and the three of us to travel to the States. He managed to book our passages on one the first voyages the ‘RMS Queen Elizabeth’ made from Southampton to New York after being re-fitted as an ocean liner and we travelled back to Southampton at the end of August 1947 on the ‘RMS Queen Mary’. We would see our grandparents in America at last!

This photo was taken on 9th May 1947. The reverse of the photo reads “On board R.M.S. Queen Elizabeth. Marion points out skyscrapers to Carolyn”, but actually I was pointing out the Statue of Liberty to her as we passed it. I can remember it well – I was nearly four years old after all! Carolyn was 2 ½ years old.

We are sitting on a pile of luggage waiting to disembark from the ship.

I remember the big black cabin trunk which had many labels on the outside. One label was exactly the same as the oval ‘White Star Cunard to Europe’ one!

The trunk had all sorts of labels on it from previous voyages my mother had made. The trunk stood upright in our cabin like a mini wardrobe and opened out to reveal hanging space on one side and a set of drawers on the other, similar to the one below. Our trunk was kept in a cupboard under the stairs and we had lots of fun playing with it, when we were allowed to!

We all loved the four months we stayed in Philadelphia, but unfortunately we never had the chance of visiting our grandparents again, although we wrote and sent them recorded messages.

Marion Davie 2011
LETTERS HOME TO PHILADELPHIA (1939-1941)

The following letters, all written by my mother, are just those that have survived from her early wartime days. She wrote home weekly, but not all of them reached their destination and not all have survived the passage of time. She sent a package of letters to me in 1988 to help me with a World War II project I was doing with my class of P.7s in a Glasgow school. Until then, I did not know that they existed. As she explains in the first covering letter below, written to me in 1988, many of her later letters have not survived.

There is much in the letters concerning all the ‘doings’ of the new baby Alison, questions asked about family and friends back in Philadelphia and descriptions of events and people around them in Halifax, in addition to her comments on the war and wartime conditions. Having been brought up in America (my mother was an American citizen before she became a naturalized British citizen) there are some Americanisms in the letters. There are also explanatory notes in square brackets where I thought it might be useful.

I have transcribed her letters, but have omitted the superfluous material (marked ....) leaving what I hope is the useful information for your pupils.

After they have read these I hope they may have learned something how the War affected ordinary people’s lives (from the point of view of one little family at least) and how in the time of War, people showed resourcefulness, courage and community spirit in the face of a common threat.

(Marion Davie nee Yule – September 2011)
Feb.15, 1988

Dear Marion,

This is only a fraction of the letters I wrote home, and you will notice that they are addressed to Nellie. As perhaps you already know, I wrote every Sunday to Mother and Dad, all the years since I left home, up until her death in 1955 (Dad died in 1954). You will notice that these letters are addressed to Nellie, who used to write me separately, and I tried to find time for her extra letters. The ones I wrote to Mother and Dad (and they contained all the important news) were handed on to Ed and Stel to read. What happened to them after that, I don’t know - probably destroyed. Some letters of course, (and food parcels) never arrived because of the increased sinkings of ships by the Germans. It would be after 1941, when things got worse, with increased shortages of food etc., and with less time on my hands, I gave up writing separate letters to Nellie, and sent combined ones, which of course were turned over to Ed.

The detailed progress of Alison is because, as the first grandchild, and the war, with not a glimpse of her, it was necessary to give them some idea of what she was like. The family had to wait a long time before they saw the 3 of you. By the time you and Carolyn came along, film couldn’t be bought. I’m sorry I haven’t the later year letters, when rationing was more drastic, and before the tide finally turned - so that you could make your project more realistic, but you may like to read these for your own sake. Do, please, put them back carefully in their own envelopes. Alison says it is proof of authenticity. You will note that the Censor cut some words out of one letter, but otherwise I was lucky. Unfortunately, Stel is not a hoarder. Everything was always turfed out if there was no immediate use for it.............

Now I must go and make myself a cup of tea. Take care of my letters. I can pick them up sometime later on........

Much love to you both

M & Peg
Dear Nellie

I don’t blame you for wondering when you’re going to get a letter for yourself but it’s only because I’ve been so awfully busy that I haven’t done it. With all this war business, there’s been so much extra to do – as though we didn’t have enough already!

George has just finished today making the fitted frames with the tar paper for the living room and now we have only one more room to do – the bedroom mother had. Mrs Emmett was telling me on Friday that the police have been twice to her mother’s house, on account of light showing. In some cases there are heavy fines.

All the people in the shops on Skircoat Green [a suburb of Halifax] have been asking if Mother arrived home safely. This Athenia business [SS Athenia – passenger liner torpedoed by German submarine on 3 September 1939, 200 miles NW of the Irish coast on the first day of WWII] has made me even more thankful that mother left when she did. Remember it was the Athenia that George sailed on after he’d left the Transylvania. He was wondering if the fellows he knew on her were quite safe.

Hitler can’t be anything else but mad. We have to carry our gas masks wherever we go. George has to take his with him to the office each day. He says the town looks so queer – all sandbagged and curbs whitened, etc.

Thanks for your letter telling of Ma’s safe arrival......

As re your letter, George says that you’d have to find your way to the house in the dark – there ain’t nothing else but – very few people go out at nights – the only guide is the white of the curb stones.

So the Duke and Duchess of Windsor are coming back home – I think it’s a good thing, because there are plenty of things he could do over here now that Britain is at War.

We got a couple of enlargements of the snap taken in the garden the day of the christening, but they have announced that all photographs in mails going out of the country will be confiscated, so I don’t see any use sending them. George is going to make further inquiry at the post office. I believe Mother got the original small one....

The complaints from Miss Yule’s bedroom have died away...... She’s really very good and doesn’t cry nearly as much as she did when she was younger. Tell Mamma we’ve got the cot from Mrs Reddy’s. They’ve moved into their new house and George says that it’s very nice, Mrs Reddy was disgusted because of the War and that she couldn’t get out at nights.

I don’t know whether George’s Dad will buy the new car or not – gas [petrol] is rationed now, and the limit is enough for 50 miles per week.

I know that this letter is full of the war, but somehow we can’t get away from the subject – it affects our lives so entirely. There was nothing else though for Britain and France to do – that maniac had to be stopped some time.

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It’s too bad that Poland had to bear the brunt of it. It’s too bad, that Britain and France can’t just hop across to all those neutral countries and give them immediate help. But studying the map, it’s plain to see the difficulties. Poland is in an unfortunate position geographically. We listened to a speech by the Polish ambassador last night and it was very sad – yet stirring too.

We were hoping that the Bremen might be captured – she was on the sea at the time of the declaration of war. Unfortunately she got to safety. [The SS Bremen was a German built ocean liner constructed for the transatlantic sea route. On 26 August 1939, in anticipation of the invasion of Poland, the German naval high command ordered all German merchant ships to head to German ports immediately. Bremen was on a westbound crossing and 2 days from New York when she received the order. Bremen’s captain decided to continue to New York to disembark her 1770 passengers. She left New York without passengers on 30 August 1939 and on 1 September she was ordered to make for the Russian port of Murmansk. Underway, her crew painted the ship grey for camouflage. She made use of bad weather and high speed to avoid Royal Navy cruisers, arriving in Murmansk on 6 September 1939]

What is the genuine option of things at home [U.S.A] now? I do hope they repeal the neutrality act – it would shorten the war, I feel sure, because Germany wouldn’t be able to pay cash for anything she wanted to buy.

I don’t know when you’ll get this letter – we can’t tell when the boats will be going. I’ll write as often as I can......

Much love to you
Ever
George, Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy and Nellie,

I can’t understand it – I got a letter this week too! Some boats must be getting through all right.

I think I’d better start by answering all your questions first. Alison is fine .......
Well, lately she seems to be taking delight in being fairly quiet until the news comes on and then immediately starting to shriek at the top of her lungs. Not crying – just enjoying the sound of her own voice, and blowing bubbles at the same time – until we can’t hear a word the man says and we have to be satisfied to wait for the 9 PM news......

George took Thursday afternoon off so I went to see “The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle” [1939 film starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers]...... Alison behaved herself this time and George had no trouble. He’s taking off what time he can get.

We got our ration cards this week but to date we’re only to be rationed for butter, bacon and sugar. It’s not supposed to start until next month, but all three are hard to get. George tried several places in town the other day and couldn’t get a bit of butter, and we can get only ¼ lb. each per week at the Co-op. Margarine is plentiful, so we’re filling out with that.

Apples must be plentiful all over, this year. We still have some cookers left from the tree in the garden. They were dandy apples and some of them were huge. We too have been having apples in every form – I don’t know what I’ll do for dessert when they are finished.

We’re wondering now what Germany is going to do about Holland – she’ll be terribly close to Britain if she can get air bases on the Dutch coast. Holland has a very small army compared with the German forces on her frontiers.

......Thank you very much for the Bulletins [Philadelphian newspaper] but please don’t send any more now. We wanted to see if we were missing anything, but it looks as though the reports are just about the same. Some of the writers to the Bulletin are certainly down on Britain though, aren’t they? George is going to pass them on to Mr Reddy when he is through with them.

Did you hear the Queen speak last night? I thought she was very good.

.... George hasn’t had much chance to finish all the work on the allotment but we’re still getting a few cabbages, although they’re small. We had turnips last week, but I believe they’re finished now. The allotment has certainly been a big help in the supplying of vegetables. ..... 

Every night, the station at Hamburg delivers the most awful tirade at Britain – and my gosh, the way they twist things around! They’re still harping on the whereabouts of the Ark Royal. Wasn’t it a darn shame that bomb didn’t get Hitler? That was the biggest disappointment I’ve had in years. A mere matter of minutes and he had to miss it! Curses! Britain of course is blamed for that too. Doesn’t the whole affair look fishy though?
Alison is quiet now, so that means she’s asleep..... Yes she still waves her arms about wildly and looks like a young Hitler....

Well, I hope the War continues as quietly as it has been doing – it’s more worrying than frightening – and we’re getting used to sticking in the house all the time. We’ve been listening to a show being given in France to both armies – Noel Coward and Maurice Chevalier were the stars. Noel Coward is in the Service now with the Intelligence Dept.. Electricity and coal is not to be rationed yet – isn’t that a help?

Much love to you all from
George, Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy and Nellie,

......It’s still cold and all this week, the pavements have been sheets of ice and the place has been hidden in deep fog. A couple of people said that they’d never remembered Halifax so cold before. Even George thought it pretty bad and I’m wearing three sweaters and woolen stockings to do my work in. The chilblains are here again, but most everyone seems to have them. All of which brings me back to the same old argument – why the heck don’t they have cellars with a proper furnace? In addition to the cold, there’s the constant dampness with which to contend. I haven’t had the baby out now for well over a week.....

It was really awful coming home tonight with the pram in the black-out. It was absolutely pitch black – with not even a gleam from the moon to relieve the inky darkness. You can’t guess how grateful we are for even a tiny bit of moonlight. I walked in front of the pram with the torch, while George followed pushing it. We’re supposed to have the flashlight covered with two layers of paper now, but I still haven’t done it – but I hold it down to the ground all the time. I was glad when we got home. ..... I’ve made an appointment for the dentist for next Tuesday night and I’m hoping there will be a moon. I wanted to go on Saturday afternoon when George could stay with the baby, but he doesn’t have hours then.

Rationing for butter, sugar and bacon starts tomorrow. We’re to get ¼ lb. each per week of sugar – butter and bacon are the same – 4 oz. each per week.

Well folksies, I’m very sleepy now – it has been a full day and we were up at 6.30 this morning. Those Sundays when we slept till 12 seem ages ago. Still we’re keeping well, so that’s the important thing. We’re disturbed over the resignation of Hore-Belisha. [Leslie Hore-Belisha resigned early 1940 as Secretary of State for War. Continued to be influential through weekly articles in News of the World] The papers are full of it and they don’t approve of his successor. It’s very unfortunate at this time because after all this boasting of a “solid front” it will give the Nazis something to crow over. We’re waiting for some explanation of it.

This is all now....
Much love to you all
George, Peg and Alison

PS I’m sorry your card was late, but I can’t get into town now as I used to.
Dear Nellie, Mamma & Daddy

As I told you Monday morning, both your letters arrived together – the one you wrote on the 21\textsuperscript{st}, Nellie and the one of Mamma and Daddy on the 28\textsuperscript{th}.

......The box of food hasn’t arrived yet. I hope there is no difficulty on account of the sugar being rationed. I wish you hadn’t had all that trouble and red tape in sending it. But you mustn’t send any more now – please. I’ll really let you know if we’re short anything.

We were all right for meat this weekend which was a big help – it’s difficult to find substitutes. It has gotten us used to the time when we can get only 1/10d. worth per week per head – that includes fat and bones. Take into consideration too that the prices of all meats have risen considerably. Eggs just now are our trouble – they are very scarce and are up to 3/0d. a dozen. We can’t be sure of getting them when George goes for them. The shortage of feeding stuffs and the recent severe weather is the cause of it.

......We’ve been hearing all about the Altmark business today. [16 Feb 1940 - British destroyer ‘Cossack’ rescues 299 British seamen from German prison ship ‘Altmark’ in Norwegian Josingfjord] I think that Britain made a wise move in boldly making a complaint to Norway instead of accepting the usual long lists of complaints from the neutral countries. They take so much from Germany sinkings etc. just taking it for granted, but as soon as Britain oversteps a bit (with no danger to life) they set up a howl. So this affair has changed that slightly. We listened to the German announcer last night giving the news in English (Lord Haw-Haw they call him because his Oxford English is so exaggerated) and he called this country everything, and only near the end of his version did he mention that there were “several British subjects” on board the Altmark. Then, he sort of sneaked it in very quietly! It looks pretty fishy when the Norwegian authorities couldn’t find 300 to 400 prisoners on board a small ship like that.

......Alison gets funnier every day and I still wish as hard that you might see her. Still, perhaps it won’t be so long – we’ll just have to hope!

......George and Alison send their love to you all along with mine

Peg
Dear Mamma, Daddy and Nellie,

I’ll make a start, but don’t know when I’ll have to stop. Alison is on the rug beside us......

Thank you for the sixpence – I believe it has been spent already. Mrs Reddy has bought a fur coat – she says she’s going to get something for her money while she can. They say we’ll be lucky if the £ is worth 10/- at the end of the war. Things have gone up tremendously in price even now.

......George’s mother is coming down [from Edinburgh] for the week beginning March 18th. We heard in this week’s letter..... She also said that she’d been hearing the guns this week when those German planes were shot down at the Forth.

......George is sitting opposite me now doing office work. He’s had some home several nights, and on Tuesday and Wednesday he worked later at the office and I packed him a tea. It’s this new Excess Profits Tax which is giving them so much extra work.....

The Sumner Welles visit is getting a lot of publicity. [Sumner Welles, 1892-1961. From 1937 until his forced resignation in 1943, he was US Under-Secretary of State and F.D. Roosevelt’s right-hand man] There’s something about it in every news bulletin and the papers are writing plenty about it. Is it just a political move of Roosevelt’s? Surely he can’t really be expecting to do anything in the way of a peace settlement now! It would only mean war starting up again in another 6 months or a year with Hitler better prepared than ever to wipe us off the map. He won’t be satisfied until that happens. I hope he’s in an asylum before that project gets under way.

Just now he seems to be getting his own way in the matter of sinkings. .... We hear the news bulletins from all over Europe (they all have a broadcast in English) and in addition to that, we’re finding out a lot of the why’s and wherefore’s of the war – with all its angles and problems. It’s interesting and enlightening. But I’m steering clear of war discussion – we get so much of it. If only there weren’t so many frontiers in Europe – I don’t see how a federation form of government could work there at all. There are too many different races, and nationalisms bang up close to each other. Their back doors are too near. I think it’s that part which the American, with the almost limitless expanse he can look across, can’t understand about Europeans and their continual wars. A federation seems ideal – but how to put it into practice?

.... Take care of yourselves now
Much love to all from
George, Peg and Alison
Dear Nellie, Mamma and Daddy

......George’s Mother arrives tomorrow and she told us she was bringing a piece of meat with her. I don’t know what’s wrong with Halifax, but they couldn’t even supply the full ration of meat this week. People were allowed 1/10d. worth according to the ration, but no one got more than 1/2d. I guess it will work out all right in time. We heard good news this week – the butter ration is to be increased to ½ lb. per head per week. So we’re not doing badly.....

The doctor stopped in this morning to tell us to wait until Alison is a year old before giving her injections for diphtheria. According to the American books you should get it done at eight months. We were taking the precaution because there is a mild epidemic of diphtheria in Halifax.

We heard news of another raid on Scapa Flow today. [Scapa Flow, Orkney, a natural harbour and the Northern base for British fleets in both World Wars. In WWII the Home Fleet was based there to protect Arctic convoys to Murmansk] They said that one civilian was killed – I hope there were no more. With this new reinstatement of the Iron Guard in Rumania, we’re wondering what’s up between Germany and that country. It’s beginning to look now as though the war is about to move on, but whether it will be on the Western Front or in the Balkans is the question. So many things seem to be coming up to hamper the war effort – it’s India this time. We often wondered if the IRA weren’t getting a lot of help and encouragement from Hitler & Co. Those Irishmen would do anything for a chance to strike at Britain.....

Tonight we heard a very interesting [radio] talk – or talks – by Wolfgang Somebody, (now Professor at London University), a former German judge, a former lawyer in Berlin, and the mother of a young German lawyer who died in a concentration camp. Their topic was one in a series “Under Nazi Rule in Germany”. Tonight’s was “The Law Courts”. We know, of course, of all the brutalities and injustices, but it sounds so much worse when you listen to actual experiences told by the victims. Remember those Gestapo stories in the Post ['Saturday Evening Post' – an American journal] written by William White [William S. White 1905-94, journalist, Pulitzer Prize winner 1955]? Well, we heard him speak on the Nazis, in the radio feature “In Town Tonight”. His stories are awfully good, I think.

.... Well, it’s time for the 9 o’clock news and we try not to miss it. Not much new except that Muss and Hit [Mussolini & Hitler] are meeting at the Bremner Pass. Things change so quickly on this side of the Atlantic.

Well, Family, this is all for tonight. Keep well and be good to yourselves. We’ll do the same. Alison says to tell you that she can stand up on her feet on my lap when she’s leaning on my shoulder. What a gal!

Much love to you all
George, Peg and Button-nose
Dear Nellie, Mamma and Daddy,

Mail is coming in well here too just now – a letter a week for the last three weeks – so here’s hoping it continues. It seems a funny week when I don’t hear from you. Glad things are going along normally and you’re keeping well.

.....Nellie, will you please do me a favour? It’s about this dollar I’m sending back. A long time ago Mrs Raper asked me if I’d mind very much asking my family to get her a lipstick and I’ve been putting it off. When she was in the States last summer she got a Colgate’s Cashmere Bouquet lipstick, and since then she hasn’t been satisfied with the kind she can get here. She thought if it wasn’t too much trouble, she could give me the money and I could pay you. But the trouble is that any English money I sent, you’d lose on, and I thought that the difficulty would be solved if I sent back the dollar which came with the foodstuffs. We’ve been holding on to it. So-o-o if you have time, I’d appreciate it. I don’t know how much lipsticks are – it’s a small white or cream coloured case with a black top.... If they are only 25 cents get two, but don’t spend more than the dollar I am sending.

.....We’re wondering about these new demands which Britain and France have made to Sweden and Norway. It’s about time the let down of neutrality started to work both ways. We hear so many versions of each story, it’s a wonder we’re not dizzy.

.... I’ll get another paper off to you soon.... They seem to having a lot of weird stories in the American press about the war. I think Britain should make an effort to counteract the effect of Nazi and pro-Nazi lies and half-truths in the States. It’s not doing the Allied cause any good to expect that American public opinion will be able to sift and analyse through all the conflicting and damaging reports they’re apparently getting. They’ve got a good case – and it’s worth while taking on the additional (and very necessary) task of putting it across to the neutrals. But no, they sit down and are amused instead of denying what are often ridiculous stories. For instance, the story of British marines armed with bayonets taking over the Clipper mails. Wasn’t it only the Washington Post and the New york Times which published a full denial of the story? The original story made good headlines and I don’t blame the press for exploiting it – but how it must have made Hitler chuckle. Oh, I’m full of good ideas about how the Allies could win the war easily, but nobody concerned seems to care. But seriously, I do think that they could do more in the propaganda line with the material they’ve got. Yet, that was said in the last war too – and it did pretty well for itself, didn’t it? I’d much rather be discussing this properly with you – I like to hear about all angles and I learn so much more in discussion. But let’s forget the war.

.... Keep well now and enjoy yourselves
Much love to you all
George, Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy and Nellie,

Happy Birthday to you-oo-oo –tra-la la. ....Your letter (Nellie’s contribution too) arrived early this week so I’m doing well, or at least the British Navy is. Lots of excitement this weekend over the Narvik exploit. [April 1940 – First and second battles of Narvik. 5 British destroyers sailed into the Norwegian port of Narvik and delivered a surprise attack on German warships and transports. All but one German ship was destroyed.] Hitler isn’t getting it all his own way, after all. We sat up late last night for the news to come through, because the announcer hinted that there would be an important Admiralty announcement. It was worth waiting for. Britain has been blamed for everything else, at home, - I wonder if there are dimwits crazy enough to believe that she is to blame for the Nazis invading Denmark and Norway. They didn’t waste any time going into action this time when they were allowed to. Enough of the war for the moment.....

We hear so much of this criticism and armchair advice from America (they make no secret of it in the papers) that I’m beginning to wonder if the people at home (the non-reading, non-thinking contingent) ever look at a map or study past history. It annoys me, because I dislike having the whole of America misunderstood because of the rantings of some two-by-four congressman from the Middle West. I realize that the majority of Americans sympathize with the Allies and it’s a pity that ridicule is spouting from both sides of the Atlantic. If they’re just going to sit pretty with folded hands, they have no right whatever to belittle the efforts of Britain and France who have got right down to the business of doing something about it. Italy is even worse. I think she’ll just sit right on the fence till she sees which way the wind is blowing and then fall down on the winning side. Whew – I intended to steer clear of the war, but can you wonder at it? We get nothing else from morning till night.

I had to smile when you told me that string beans were 27 cts. a lb. A couple of weeks ago over here, they were 4/6d. per lb. but I believe they are down to 3/8d. and 3/6d. now. The green vegetables are still conspicuous for their absence. George got some seed potatoes, peas, cabbage and sprouts on Saturday and has gotten some of them in – all the potatoes. They’ll take up quite a lot of room in the allotment. We didn’t have any last year – this summer there will be less flowers.

....George got his new “specs” on Friday and they look very nice. He needed them badly. He’s still got plenty of work to do and he brought home work to do this weekend.

We’ve just been listening to the news. Italy seems to be continuing a more bitter anti-British press. I wonder what will happen in that direction. We listened too to the German announcer from Hamburg – in English – I feel like wringing his neck, he sounds so smug and arrogant and too glib. According to him, the Allies haven’t a chance, and spend all their time making explanations for their blunders and mistakes. Just now we have a French announcer on. It’s a good thing all the countries broadcast in English. I have to keep remembering that propaganda this is on the air when we hear all these attempts to dishearten and discourage and put doubts in our minds.

... This is all for now. It sounds as though the house is about to be blown down.

Much love to you all from George, Peg and Alison.
Dear Mamma, Daddy and Nellie

Two letters this week – one on Monday and one yesterday afternoon.... They’ve [the Navy] been doing pretty well lately for us, haven’t they....

Our Sunday papers now have six sheets in them now and the morning papers are even worse. Saturdays the Halifax evening paper is one double sheet and that’s all. We’re still short of green vegetables and carrots, and turnips are very dear. We had some nice lettuce today though and some cress which George had in the cold frame. It was nice and tender too.....

Jack [George’s younger brother Jack was studying medicine at Edinburgh University – he volunteered for the Merchant Navy and was a doctor on convoy ships] has registered with his age group, but there is little chance of his being called up before he finishes his training. After that he’ll have to intern for at least six months, so it looks as though he’ll be all right for a year.

..... We’re still seriously thinking of trying to get some sort of holiday this year. George has written to find out about a little called Seascale on the west Cumberland coast. It has sands and guarantees rest and change for anyone. It’s away from any big town and there are no munitions factories or aerodromes anywhere near. With it being right on the sea, it ought to be grand for the three of us. The difficulty will be to find a boarding house where they’ll be willing to take the baby. .... I know it seems like an undertaking, when she’s so young, but George must take his time off before June this year, and everything is so unsettled, we thought we’d better get some kind of a change, if there is a chance now at all.

......We’re all right for meat just now – we can get our full rationed amount. I saw a food price-list a couple of days ago – Sussex strawberries – 7/6d. a lb.!

Much love to you all

George Peg and Alison
80 St Albans Road, Halifax Yorkshire  
Sunday May 26 1940  

[Note the date! The first day of the evacuation of troops from Dunkirk]

Dear Mamma, Daddy and Nellie

No mail this week – it seems a long time since I heard from you. I don’t know where to start with the news – so much of the wrong kind has come to our ears this week and so much has happened in a short week. We wonder every moment what will happen next. It’s not pleasant to consider the prospect of them controlling so many of the channel ports. Now Boulogne is in their hands. It seems such a long time ago that we used to see advertised all over the town in Hove [near Brighton] – “Day trips from Brighton to Boulogne”.

But it’s got to end in an Allied victory – we mustn’t think of anything else. I wish America would realize the great danger and state definitely that they were on the side of the Allies. They wouldn’t have to send an Expeditionary Force overseas – a step impractical at the moment anyway.

By the way, in case you’ve been worried about hearing of air raids in Yorkshire – it wasn’t in Halifax. The bombs were dropped in the North Riding of Yorkshire – we’re in the West Riding. On the map it seems only a matter of a few miles apart, but we hear no sirens or explosions.

Everyone has welcomed the new emergency powers of the government. A lot of people feel as we do – that they should have been introduced at the beginning of the war. The unexpectedness of the situation in France has come as a great shock – no one imagined that the Germans could have forced a way through and advanced with such rapidity. They really must have brilliant strategists and organizers. They’ve been prepared for everything – and add to that their inborn ruthlessness, it’s not surprising they’ve won first round.

Did you hear the King? He was splendid and spoke better than I’ve ever heard him. He didn’t mince any of his words either – or try to spare the feelings of the people, which is to his credit. They really want to know just how serious is the situation and what it is that must be faced.

.....I had no trouble getting the money, thank you again – and I’m thinking of turning it over, with the rest of my birthday money, to the government, for Defence Bonds. If it will help to leave us in peace and security, I know you’ll back me in the idea.

.....I’ve been working all week on blackout curtains and I’m at last finished the ones for the bathroom, the front door, the kitchen window and door, and the window above the door. If you don’t get them exactly right there’s sure to be a glow or a crack you hadn’t figured on. But we tested them again last night and there’s not a trace of any light to be seen, so I’m satisfied now. It makes me want to get the whole house done, but I’d need an awful lot of curtain material and it would have to be terribly thick stuff to keep even a glow from showing. With the new danger from air raids, the police have increased their fines for blackout offences. Down in Worthing (near Hove) a policeman went to the door of a house where light was showing and some crazy woman poured hot water over him. She was fined £5.

.....I haven’t been to the movies – you sort of lose your appetite for them. We have to carry our identity or National Registration cards with us always now. I’m taking care of Alison’s because she’s more often with me.

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF CUPAR U3A
George has been busy in his allotment and we got some very nice lettuce – not much, but it was good. We’ve had rhubarb too, and he says that there seems to be quite a lot of blossom on the strawberry plants. We can get no carrots or turnips but the cabbage is more plentiful now. Now that the weather has been warmer we shouldn’t have long to wait for local grown stuff.....

....Alison wakened and we’re all in the garden now and she’s in her playpen eating a rusk.... The lupins are coming out and the garden is looking nice and trim....It’s fine sitting here peacefully in the garden – let’s hope it continues. How are the chances for Roosevelt getting in for a 3rd term? He seems very much pro-Ally.

I hope all this chopping and changing of French generals is all for the best. I’m sorry to be keeping on about the war but it’s at our very doorstep, and we can’t very well avoid the subject.

.....Mrs Moore was asking for you the other day Mamma – you know, the place where you got the chicken. Eggs are cheaper just now – they’re down to 2/2d. per doz. .... We heard thunder in the distance and now the rain has chased us inside. It’s like moving a whole household by the time we get all Alison’s stuff in – pen, pram rugs etc – and the lady herself.

The Halifax Local Defense Volunteers are expected to be called up in a few days. In some parts of the country they’ve already been busy.

.... The baby is off to bed and sleep and I have some odd jobs to do while we’re listening to the radio. Keep well now, all of you – and I’ll be hanging my neck out of the window looking for the mailman.

Much love to you all
George Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy and Nellie

I’ve got an awful lot to tell you – but first of all, did you get my cable and the letter I wrote on Monday morning when I received that large batch of letters? I hope you did because I didn’t want you to have to wait for an answer. Now that things aren’t as good, we didn’t know when the next plane would be going. It stands just about as it did when I gave you my reasons for staying – on Monday. There’s no kidding ourselves that we feel any too happy about what may lie ahead of us, but I do feel that the Allies will win out in the end. We’re praying for that anyway, and as long as the baby is all right, we’ll be thankful. I really don’t think it would be safe to go on an American boat, with the way mines are floating about and the Nazis’ disregard of human life and neutrality....

We have a soldier billeted with us. I think I told you that they were looking for places last week. Well, thousands of them have arrived in Halifax to be billeted until they can be re-equipped and sorted back into their various regiments. In the evacuation of Dunkirk they had to leave practically everything. This fellow – Harry – is a gunner in the Royal Artillery is 27 and comes from Worcestershire. The whole neighbourhood is full of soldiers – most everyone has one or two and you can’t move in the town for them. They arrived Wednesday morning and I don’t know how long they’ll be staying. He’s a nice fellow and has made himself at home. He had no shoes – only a huge pair of rubber boots – and I had to give him some of George’s clothes. Luckily, he was able to squeeze into a pair of George’s shoes. Most of the men are in the same boat. It means a lot of work, but we’re only too glad that it’s not German soldiers we have to take care of. He was on the beach at Dunkirk for two days and a night before he was taken off. He says he knows now what it is to be thirsty. He has told us a lot of what happened and it doesn’t make pleasant hearing. He told us that the stories of Nazi airmen machine-gunning women and children refugees wasn’t just propaganda, he actually saw it done. The various disguises of the German parachutists were true stories too – they’ve been women, nuns, refugees, farmers etc. – everything but their own uniforms.

.....We’ve been having a heatwave for the last week and everyone is worn out....The baby’s asleep now and I’m resting in bed. George is doing the dishes for me and Harry is taking his usual after dinner rest. It’s seldom that we have a big cooked meal on Sunday and I’m tired now, but he has a big appetite...

...I baked Alison a birthday cake.....iced it all over and put one pink candle on it.... George brought home some ice-cream that night, and Harry helped us celebrate. I thought this was awfully nice of him – he went into town that day to get a hair cut and he brought home a rattle for her! She made friends with him quite soon, tho for about the first day or so, she sat and gave him a proper once-over. Mrs Rothery doesn’t have any soldiers because Mr Rothery is still ill and will have to stay in bed another two weeks. She brought over a homemade loaf for me and she gave one to another neighbor who has two soldiers. The baker and butcher shops on Skircoat Green were practically sold out this week-end, with the extra drain on them. The soldiers have their own ration cards though, and they are turned over to us, so we’re able to get enough of all the rationed stuff.

.....I do wish that America would do something quickly in the way of helping the Allies with planes and munitions. They need them now, before it’s too late. I think it’s a disgrace that they should be hesitating when the very future of the civilized world is at stake. Woodring ought to be popped! [Harry

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THIS DOCUMENT IS THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF CUPAR U3A
Woodring (1887-1967) US politician - For seven years Woodring was a valued member of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s team. He was Secretary of War from 1936-1940. He left the cabinet after a falling out with the president. He played an important role in the federal government as World War II approached.

Don’t they realize that if the Allies go under, that America will have to face the onslaught alone? Surely they’re not naïve enough to think that Hitler will be satisfied to leave the Western Continent alone? And what about the export trade? .....They’re not being asked to send men – just the supplies the Allies need so desperately. If Chamberlain and Baldwin hadn’t blundered along so complacently, there would have been enough to fight with, long ago. How blind everyone has been – and what a job Churchill has stepped into! He was the only one who kept warning the government and wasn’t listened to.

.....We’ve been very much disappointed with the allotment this year..... Some sort of slug has gotten into the roots of the gooseberries and we won’t get one berry this year. They’ve started now on the blackcurrants..... the drought is keeping back the peas and they’re just not growing.....The turnips have come to nothing and the sprouts are being eaten.

.....George has brought the dartboard down from the attic and hung it on the garden seat. A couple of soldiers from Mrs Smith’s came up to have a game, Mary Rothery came over and we had quite a party. ... I think we’ll be able to get some extra sugar for jam making this year. George had to fill out a long questionnaire last winter when he put in an application for some..... He had a phone call from a Captain somebody about the Local Defence Volunteers. He is to start this week. I don’t know how many nights of duty he’ll have but it’s from 9.30 p.m. till Morning! There is a parade once a week – 7.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m..

I’ll have to stop now to get tea ready. It’s different now. Sunday tea is a case of eating what’s there but now I have to prepare a regular meal. It must have been a terrible experience for those men. Harry broke a couple of his teeth on the army biscuits. He said that all the time they were on the beach awaiting embarkation they were shelled continuously. Gun, oil and petrol, all sorts of supplies had to be left.

..... ‘Ninotchka’ [1939 film starring Greta Garbo, my mother’s favourite film star] is advertised for next week, so I must go and see it. The bombers better stay away from Halifax that night. They seem to have been in most of the counties lately. I hope that Italy stays out – at least until the Allies can get enough planes to tackle both of them [Germany & Italy]. Edith [a friend in America] tells me that the king is in Canada. That’s a laugh – because he’s still carrying on here. We read every day of where he has been and see his pictures....

Lots of love to you all,
George, Peg and Alison

Hello folks,
My thanks too for the grand present you sent for Alison’s first birthday.... Try not to worry too much – you know how much rainy and misty weather we normally get in Halifax. It may seem strange, but we’re hoping that this spell of grand weather will break soon, so that the Huns will find it a pretty hard task to find Halifax – love to you all
George
Dear Sammy Daddy & Yellie,

Out of all the news this week I don't know what to believe. I must have good news or only progress instead of all the discouraging nonsense that has happened this last few days. The collapse of France has been a great shock and tremendous shock to all of us. You are informed that they would have given in before it looks now as though Britain stands alone. You all seem to be fighting to the bitter end. Communists are inviting all the rest of Europe to help them fight Britain for which I want to give them a cheer. At the beginning of the week, I don't think we could have helped a single one.

An accident occurred yesterday at about 3 A.M. and it wasn't having any more time. George went to D.D. at about 11 A.M. and was out all night - not returning until 6.00 A.M. That is the only thing I don't like about it. His having to be away all through the night. Anyway, as soon as the room was cleared, I got up, turned on the water in the bath tub and the full of some of the hot water from the washtub I was told to do in the case. We'll just have to hope that everything goes alright and that he never gets any more.

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Dear Mamma, Daddy and Nellie,

Out of all the news this week I don’t know where to begin. I wish it were good news we could discuss instead of all the discouraging business that has happened in the last few days. The collapse of France has been a great blow and tremendous shock to all of us. No one dreamed that they would have given in - and it looks now as though Britain stands entirely alone. They all seem to be flocking to the Axis tent. Rumania too, with all her oil, is apparently lost to Britain for supplies.

I went up to Skircoat Green at the beginning of the week - the day the news of France first came through, and everyone was very subdued and appeared to be still reeling. But they’re determined and ready to keep Hitler from invading the British Isles by every means possible. If only the government were more ruthless - I’d like to see them try some of the tricks the Nazis do. So, in the meantime we’ll just have to hope hard that everything goes all right and that he doesn’t get a foothold here.

On Thursday morning, Halifax had an air raid warning at about 3 am. They couldn’t have picked a worse time. George went on L.D.V. patrol duty at 8 p.m. on Wednesday and was out all night - not returning until 6.00 on Thursday morning. That’s the only part I don’t like about it - his having to be away all through the night. Anyway, as soon as the siren sounded, I got up, turned on the water in the bathtub, and then banged on Harry’s door that the siren had gone. He’s a very sound sleeper. Then I grabbed up the baby and her bed clothes and carried her downstairs to our corner in the living room we’d planned to go, when things started. Harry said that he wasn’t getting up, so I told him to turn off the water when the tub was full. I got up the screens over the windows piled up the furniture to protect our corner, filled the electric kettle, arranged a mattress on the floor for Alison and got ready the things we’d need. By this time, Alison was wide awake and all ready to play. She was awfully good that night for which I blessed her, and I got a candle lit and settled down to wait. The “all-clear” finally came and I packed her off to bed again. It’s difficult to sleep afterwards, and I was just dozing off when George came home at 6 am. He’d heard planes and all the searchlights were going but

[page 2]

no bombs were dropped in the town. He said that in the surrounding districts the sirens had started at 12 o’clock (the lady next door heard them too) but ours didn’t go until three. He said that he kept hoping that the Halifax one wouldn’t go. Their post is on a hill way over in Northowram1, the other side of Halifax, and he has a lot of traveling to get to it. He was hoping for a place

1 See map of Halifax and district on p. 8

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nearer home but they have to go where they are sent. Then too, at some places they don’t get enough volunteers for the post and they have to get people from far away. The Nazis have been very busy in Northeast England as I suppose you’ve already heard.

Our soldier left us at 2 o’clock today to go somewhere - we don’t know. Batteries of the Dunkirk men have all been re-clothed and re-equipped and many left Halifax yesterday and today. The town is still alive with troops, for more are coming in. There are all sorts of army trucks, red cross trucks, motor cyclists, gun carriers etc. wherever you look.

The armistice France has been forced to make isn’t going to do the country any good. It[s awful to think that now he’ll have all those resources as well to wage war against this country.

They’re talking now about evacuating British children of 5 to 16 to the Dominions and America. The mothers of those children can’t go with them. A minister was talking about it on the radio today, and he said that the parents must be wholly responsible for the choice, the government could only point out the dangers or the advantages of both courses. I feel sure that the Nazis wouldn’t hesitate to destroy the ships even though they were full of children.

George has just told me that refugees from the Channel Islands are coming in and that the people across the street have been asked to take someone, so maybe we’ll have to take some of them if we don’t get another soldier in the meantime. I hope they give us a chance to rest up first. We’re going to try to get to bed early this week now there will be no one to sit up for.

Yesterday afternoon I left the baby with George and went into town to do some necessary shopping. I wanted to get an outfit for Alison for next winter with the money you sent and before the prices went sky high. There’s bound to be a big difference in the material too. After a long search I got what I wanted - an all wool cloth coat, leggings and cute poke bonnet to match. It’s what they call a ‘pram set’. I had to judge as to size but I got it big enough, I’m quite sure. It’s a lovely shade of old rose with unobtrusive trimmings of a darker shade of velvet. It’s very sweet and is a lovely cut. It cost 29/1 1/2d, as [page3] you must have known exactly how much to send. I also bought her two nightgowns in a larger size.

George had a birthday on Saturday, but the poor man didn’t get a cake. I’d had a busy day and though I could have done it at night on Thursday, we were both so tired, we decided to give it a miss for this year. He had to register for military service on Saturday (his birthday) and when he gave his birth date, the man wished him many happy returns.

Mrs Reddy has taken the youngsters to the Lake district for two weeks. She went with her sister who comes from a place which has been bombed and she decided to pack up and go to a safer place. She’s going to stay as long as necessary, but Mrs Reddy says that she’ll only stay for the two weeks and she’ll make a vacation out of it.

The photographs of Alison aren’t ready yet so they’ll have to come in next week’s letter. By the way, the letter you wrote on June 2, arrived before the one you wrote on May 26th. The papers arrived - yesterday, Daddy - thank you very much. I was surprised all over again at the size of them. Our papers are so thin. I had to get some things in Woolworth’s yesterday - and they don’t wrap up a thing now. We don’t burn any scraps of paper now.

Do you remember the two iron flower stands we had in the garden, Mamma? Well I hope the landlord doesn’t feel hurt, but I turned them over to the collector of scrap iron for the war effort.

George also took apart a broken down coal stove
in the cellar, and that has gone out too.

Sylvia and Laurie\textsuperscript{34} sent Alison a cute little dress for her 1st birthday.

Now that I think I've given you all the new about the war, I'll get down to the home front. We're all well and we'll soon catch up on our sleep. George is worse off because he's out of the house before 8 o'clock now, and he had three evenings of LDV work last week including his whole night out until 6 am.

The day after the raid warning, Alison was cranky and we thought it was on account of her broken sleep, but since then, we've discovered that two more teeth are coming, so it was probably that. Friday night, she had us up, but today she was very good, so I think they must have broken through. She was as good as gold today and in the afternoon I put her out front in her pram. She hailed every passer-by and then held a conversation with them as they stopped. She knows and tries several words. Sometimes she can say “Teddy” right off, but most of the time it’s “tiddah” or “tidd”. For bath, she says “baa” or “baap”. She’s certainly a noisy little person and there’s no doubt as to the strength of her lungs. She’s finally got over her fright of the teddy and has even touched him or knocked him about. Today in the pram, George had put the teddy for her to play with. Later, he saw her chewing something red, and her mouth and fingers were all stained red. She’d got hold of a red label on the teddy and made short work of it. She looked real intrigued when I showed her her red hands.

Just now Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon are broadcasting on the Forces programme. They must have decided that they're going to be safe over here. I admire them for continuing these entertainments to the troops.

We've just heard the terms of the armistice. The Bordeaux Govt. insisted that they wouldn't accept a shameful peace, but I don't know what could be more shameful or humiliating than that.

Did you hear of Vic Oliver? He's an American, I believe, and he's a big start over here. He's on with Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon and they've just put on a good show.

This is all for now. I hope we have the picture for next week. Don't worry - things will turn out all right, and we'll take good care of ourselves.

Much love to you all
George Peg and Alison

PS I wish you could see Alison’s new things - thanks again to all of you, for your present to her. When she puts it on she's sure to say “Don’t I look cute?”
Bye Peg

\textsuperscript{2} Glover
Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

.....I’m to be alone tonight – George leaves in an hour for all night L.D.V. duty. I hope Hitler doesn’t choose tonight for his dirty work. .... He had to go to drill on Tuesday and on Wednesday night he had to report for his uniform and rifle. He was there again last night and this morning he was called out at 4 a.m. for some sort of trial. He was back just in time to hear the 7 a.m. news. His uniform is the same style as the regular soldier but the material is different and they’re made to wear over their regular clothes. It fits everywhere except at the collar. The man it does fit ought to be in the circus... He took it to the tailor to have it made smaller... All the men were having the same trouble.... The rifles are American – 1917 vintage, but they look threatening enough. We heard planes last night and were wondering if they were the ones which dropped bombs in North west England last night.

... What’s going to happen at home now that Roosevelt has accepted the nomination [for presidency]? There will be a great deal of prejudice against a 3rd term. Needless to say, it’s all being watched with a great deal of interest over here.... In their enthusiasm for manning their own defences, I hope they don’t overlook the fact that it will be far cheaper (in every way) if they help Britain now than if she is left to find her own material. There’s no need to declare war – they can just go on sending over loads of planes and guns. In fact it might be more help if they didn’t declare war – though the moral boost to the British would make a tremendous difference. But if she were tied up now in defence, when it’s wholly inadequate against Nazi force, America wouldn’t be able to send the materials at this moment when it’s desperately needed – to Britain. But the 5th column in America must be huge, judging from the wild tales they tell of the British.

......There was a door to door collection for aluminium on Monday. There has been a big response. That’s the general feeling all over - everybody wants to help, they just want a lead.

.... Take good care of yourselves – and we’ll do the same
Much love to you all
George Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

.....George had rifle practice at Shibden Park yesterday afternoon and he took Alison and me along for the afternoon.....It has beautiful flower gardens and a children’s playground. The superintendent and one of the gardeners are in George’s Home Guard company and Shibden Hall is their post....

I guess you heard about the loss of the Transylvania [10th August 1940, ex-liner, recommissioned as an armed merchant cruiser of the Northern Patrol, was torpedoed and sunk. George had sailed on her as one of his university vacation jobs] – I think they might have spared her, don’t you? I’m wondering if she was carrying mails on the Atlantic route.

... The RAF has been doing a magnificent piece of work – surely the Germans must feel it a strain even on their large number of planes. It works both ways of course, but the British losses have been comparatively small in view of the Nazi crashes..... The British deserve a few successes now. Despite all this, the people aren’t discouraged in any way from continuing their efforts to resist. There seems to be no division about that. George is to receive machine gun training. He says he’s going to feel a whole lot safer behind one of those than a rifle when the Nazis hove in sight, if they do.

...Well – the much talked of invasion didn’t happen on Thursday – I wonder if it has been called off or only postponed. I wouldn’t mind having a revolver myself if any of them came to our front gate. Preparations have been well made for meeting them anyway and Hitler must be prepared to lose a lot of men if he does attempt it.

Much love to you all
George Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

.....We are ready for anything this weekend – for we have been well warned that the invasion is near. The people are fighting mad now and ready for any of the filthy surprises Hitler may have. This was the day set, so we don’t know what’s going to happen except that he’ll get a hot reception if he does try anything. The RAF were bombing stocks of barges all along the French and Belgian coasts for 7 hours again last night. They’re doing such marvelous work – it’s a pity they haven’t as many planes as the Nazis. These London raids are horrible – they are doing it to terrorize the people, nothing else and we heard tonight that the Palace has been bombed again – that’s the third time – you’ve got to hand it to the Queen – she sticks right there and is always ready to inspect bombed areas in all the dangerous parts of London. The experiences the people are going through are like nothing on earth. It must be terrible.... When I think of how they are messing up London, I’d like to get my hands on their throats.

.... We had only one air raid alarm this week.....no bombs dropped. On Thursday, during the day, Harrogate was bombed and the big Majestic Hotel got it.... Remember those lovely gardens and antique shops?....

Much love to you all
Peg

___________________
___________________________________________
_____________________
80 St Albans Road, Halifax Yorkshire
Sunday October 27 1940

Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

This has been a very quiet week – no air raid warnings as yet, though we’ve had the German bombers over a couple of times. There is no mistaking their heavy drone, and the air raid wardens have been at their posts on those nights.

... We’ve just been listening to the 9 p.m. news but there is not much new. London continues to be bombed mercilessly, but the RAF is making Berlin bomb-conscious too. I wish they’d get so sick of them that they’d start on Hitler and his gang for promising them that British bombers would never get over.... Now the Germans claim to have sunk the 42,000-ton ‘Empress of Britain’. Hope it’s not true. What a blow....

Take care of yourselves and don’t worry
Much love to you all
George Peg and Alison

___________________
___________________________________________
_____________________
80 St Albans Road, Halifax Yorkshire
Sunday September 15 1940

Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

.....We are ready for anything this weekend – for we have been well warned that the invasion is near. The people are fighting mad now and ready for any of the filthy surprises Hitler may have. This was the day set, so we don’t know what’s going to happen except that he’ll get a hot reception if he does try anything. The RAF were bombing stocks of barges all along the French and Belgian coasts for 7 hours again last night. They’re doing such marvelous work – it’s a pity they haven’t as many planes as the Nazis. These London raids are horrible – they are doing it to terrorize the people, nothing else and we heard tonight that the Palace has been bombed again – that’s the third time – you’ve got to hand it to the Queen – she sticks right there and is always ready to inspect bombed areas in all the dangerous parts of London. The experiences the people are going through are like nothing on earth. It must be terrible.... When I think of how they are messing up London, I’d like to get my hands on their throats.

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Much love to you all
Peg
Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

.....I made some lentil soup for today....Alison ate a fair-sized plateful of it. She was so hungry, she almost had her nose in it, but it’s good to see her with such a good appetite. We’re still only getting 2 ozs. Of butter per week per person, but we’re getting a fair amount of margarine to make up. Eggs, fresh ones, are hard to find but we have the preserved eggs I told you about....

The Coventry bombing was vile but Hamburg seems to have come in for a share of return bombing. I’m glad they are getting it – it’s the only way of persuading the German people they haven’t the sole right to inflict misery on every generation of other nations.

I almost forgot to tell you about George’s night out on Wednesday. His Home Guard section had a supper and social and he said he had a good time. He went to the drill hall first to be issued with an Army greatcoat and went right on without coming home. For supper they had sausages, mashed spuds and turnips, tea and cake and afterwards there were a few speeches (some of the officers were there), a couple of men did conjuring tricks, and they had a dartboard and a miniature billiard table. Most of the men did something and George wrote a poem about Sam in the Home Guards and got one of the men with a thick Yorkshire accent to read it, for his contribution. He had written it in dialect and it was very good.

All three letters this week had been opened by the censor. They’ll soon be well acquainted with the family. I’m often tempted to put something real fresh [US slang = cheeky] in it for them!...

Much love to you all
George Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

....The letter which arrived yesterday were the ones you wrote on Dec. 23rd and 30th. What happened to the ones between the 23rd and the 8th (and the others before that) I don’t know but I fear the worst.... First of all, thank you for all these packages you are sending us – we are hoping so hard they will arrive safely. Thank you too, for sending the dollar for the duty – you’ve thought of everything. Gosh! I hope they arrive – I’d like to get those shoes for the baby [it was very difficult to get the well-fitting children’s shoes in Britain at that time. My older sister, Alison, has had foot trouble all her life, dating from those early days of not having properly fitting footwear!].

Things are still going well in Africa – here’s hoping it continues, but I wish it were the Germans instead of the Italians. The Germans are so much more formidable. Everyone still thinks that an attempted invasion is close at hand. I don’t see what else Hitler can do if he wants a decisive victory against Britain....

We’ve been having a terrible time with milk owing to the snow.... It’s surprising how you manage at these times. The meat ration was down to 9d. last week and the butcher said that we may have to take corned beef next week, but we both like it, so he can’t make me mad. I have some oatmeal now for the breakfast...

Here’s hoping – and take care of yourselves.

Much love to you all from
George, Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

.....We’ve had bright moonlight nights almost all week and the Nazi planes have been over again. I guess you’ve read that the big attacks have started again and that Glasgow Clydeside had a couple of concentrated attacks. I’ve been wondering ever since how poor Aunt Annie has stood up to the experience, for she can’t be very strong.....

Although we knew the planes were over before, we didn’t get our first siren until Wednesday night – and the “all-clear” didn’t go until almost 4 a.m. All that time the planes were going over and thuds and bumps were making the house shake and the windows rattle.... Then on Thursday night they came again and there was the same performance – and George was out all that night on Home Guard duty. We haven’t found out which town got the concentrated attacks, for no one at the office seemed to know and of course they don’t even publish it in the local paper.....The “all-clear” sounded at 1.30 a.m. George got home after 6.30, got the fires started and got himself ready for work. When there’s not really time to go back to bed, he takes a bath at that time to pep him up a bit. Then on Friday – we got the worst yet. George was so tired, he went off to bed at 8 o’clock, but I heard the planes shortly afterwards and sure enough, just before 9, the sirens went. It was his turn on at fire watching in our street, so I had to waken him again. He dressed and went out but there were no incendiaries dropped. That night was the worst yet – the noises and thuds were louder and constant – and the house shook and the windows rattled until I wondered if they were coming in. Some bombs were dropped in the [CENSORED] and in [CENSORED] - 200 yards from George’s Home Guard post but there was no damage done.

I sat and polished the brass and afterwards mended with transparent tape, a book of Alison’s, which she’d torn almost to bits.... Poor George looked a wreck. At 1.30 I felt so tired I went off to bed and at 3.30 when the all clear sounded, George was at last able to go too.
Last night they left us alone, and tonight so far (cross fingers) we’re still lucky. How those people can stand those concentrated attacks, I don’t know. I wonder about it when I am lying safely in bed and the planes continue on their way overhead without lingering....

George’s Dad was in London from Monday till Thursday, but he was lucky enough to miss the worst of the bombing. The place where he was going to stay “had a spot of bother” (as he said) the night before, so he put up at the Strand Palace. He sent me a ½ lb. box of Terry’s chocolates – and were we glad to get them. As I told you, candy [US = sweets] is almost impossible to get hold of.

Auntie Nellie [in Edinburgh] knitted George two pairs of khaki socks and he put them on the same day they came – that was the night he was on duty.

This week we got our extra 2 oz. butter per person and what a help it was.

We listened to a recording of Roosevelt’s speech today and I felt like applauding every word of it – that man can see ahead, and he gets right down to the heart of the matter. It was a fine speech and has been received with great enthusiasm over here....

I did tell you I think, that George opened a box of cartridges [bullets] at the Home Guard Post one night, and it was marked Frankford Arsenal [i.e. the box had come from a United States Army ammunition plant located in Northeast Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, near my mother’s home area of Frankford] ..... 

Today we heard over the radio the instructions for what we are to do in the event of an invasion. It is to be issued to everyone in leaflet form in a few days.

Mamma, I’ll be thinking of you on your birthday and I wish I could give you something nice, but there’s really nothing worth while I can get to send to you. It will be different when the war is over. I hope the hanky isn’t too bright a color – but I thought it looked nice and cheerful.

Thanks for the writing paper and the bulletins – we get full use of them. The newspapers are to be cut down even more – starting tomorrow, so we may not be able to get one every day....

I’ll be looking for your next letter and I hope you are going to continue to keep well...

Much love to you all from
George, Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

Once again I am beginning a letter to you with thanks – you are being very good to us, folks. Two letters came this week – the air mail letter of June 16th telling us of the contents of a box you’d just sent and enclosing two new dollar bills. George and I, and Alison too, honestly don’t know how to thank you properly......

Tomorrow morning George is off on another Home Guard exercise..... Our butter ration has been cut again, but our meat ration has increased by 2d. – it’s up to 1/2d. now. Our cheese ration is now 2 oz. per week instead of 1 oz. and the jam ration is to be 1 lb. per month instead of ½ lb. – for a little while at least. The price of strawberries and tomatoes (and soft fruits and apples when they come in) is controlled now – and it has made a shortage of them, because of the huge increase in demand at the lower price. George was luck enough to get ½ lb. tomatoes for me today. The stores will only give them to their regular customers.... You see, most of Britain’s tomatoes come from the Channel Islands and they are now Nazi controlled.

George’s four tomato plants are coming along fine but he still has to keep them in his little greenhouse. I think I did tell you that he’d knocked out the south wall of his allotment shed and one of the men in his Home Guard platoon (who is a carpenter) put in a glass frame. Then he bought the tomato plants already potted.... If there are any over, I’d like to put some up [= bottle them] for next winter – there won’t be any to buy, I suspect. If we can get oranges, they will be a fair substitute....

Yesterday was Independence Day and I was wondering what you were all doing.... When I went came downstairs yesterday morning, I went into the dining room saying “This is my holiday, the 4th of July – Hurray! Hurray!” and Alison joined in right away too and got all excited.... She laughed until the three of us were laughing at each other.....

You were asking about Sylvia’s folks, Nellie. Yes, one of the bombings was very close to their house and though they weren’t hit, it must have been pretty bad. The last we heard, her Mother was under the doctor’s care because of the effect on her nerves.....

I made a package of strawberry Jello [jelly crystals sent in a food parcel from USA] for Alison. Her verdict is “lovey-pudding”..... I managed to get some lard in our fat allowance and George got some rhubarb from the allotment so I made a rhubarb pie. Sometimes we can’t always spare the fat for baking, but I did pretty well this week – scraping off this and that.....

Thursday was my night off and I went to the pictures... I’ve already warned George that I’ve got to go next week to see “The Philadelphia Story”. It’s not often that I get a chance to see Philadelphia in the movies.... I won’t be going in the winter, I guess – I rarely went last winter. The blackout can be so unpleasant and there are no signs that the war will be over by then.

I know you’ll be as glad as we are that the RAF are pounding away night and day now at Germany and occupied territories. We were wishing that the Russians could get a chance to fight on German soil but there seems little chance of that now....
We took some pictures up in Edinburgh,... but we are wondering if we are going to get all the prints we want. Photographers’ supplies have been drastically cut and we may get very few of what we have ordered, but we’ll certainly try to get yours over to you. Some were pretty good.

I’ve been looking every day for the box you sent and I’ll keep looking, and let you know as soon as it arrives. Here’s hoping and we’ve got our fingers crossed too.

I guess George will be coming back from the allotment soon – it’s 9.30 p.m. – and we might as well have a cup of tea. I’m trying to get some more weight on him, but I’m not having much luck, despite all the food I give him. I guess he’s being kept too busy to put on any weight....

Keep well now
Much love to you all
George, Peg and Alison
Dear Mamma, Daddy & Nellie

I got a very pleasant surprise this week when your letter of July 27th turned up. Where it has been for 2 ½ months I can’t imagine....

George was busy today pulling crab apples and he had to borrow the fire-watching ladder to get up. There were only about 2½ lbs.... There was a very poor apple crop all over the country. George’s Dad was telling us that he only got 10 dozen cooking apples for his crop and he has quite a few trees. Anyway, I’m going to use the crab apple juice to flavor some marrow jam that I’ll make this week. There isn’t enough to bother making jelly itself. George also pruned the other apple tree, so I hope there is an improvement next year. The few cookers we did get, I dried and have stored for the winter. There were about 12 large ones and I peeled and cored them and cut them into rings about ¼ inch thick. Then I cleaned and cut thin sticks to fit across the oven and strung the rings on the sticks – so that the slices didn’t touch. On the day I’d been using the oven and before it cooled I fitted in the sticks, turned the gas as low as possible and kept the door slightly ajar. Then they had to cool for 12 hours in a room of average temperature. After that I stored them in a paper-lined tin. A bit of fiddling, sez you, but it’s the only thing to do, bar bottling, if we’re to get fresh fruit in the winter. Because, they certainly won’t be importing any.

We have to be up early tomorrow morning. George has to leave the house by 8.15 to go into town where buses will take the Home Guards to a rifle range at Huddersfield. There’s to be all sorts of things – tommy guns, projectors for throwing grenades and firing at various length ranges. They have to take their mess tins with them and are to be given a meal. Drinks aren’t supplied so I’m going to make a flask of cocoa. It will be pretty cold I imagine, for we’ve been having a real wintry wind – and he won’t be getting back until about tea time. He went to a lecture and drill on Friday night – mobile training and guerilla tactics etc. – and several nights next week and again on Sunday he’ll be training.

On Sunday, there is to be a turnout of all the Civilian Defence workers and Home Guards in this district for rehearsal on a complete scale. Some of the Home Guards, previous to this point in the manoeuvres, have to test the Emergency Feeding Plan, so George’s company was told that they wouldn’t be needing a Sunday dinner at home. Not so bad, is it?....

I got Jack’s stockings mailed off to him on Monday. [Sea boot stockings were needed by servicemen in the Navy or Merchant Navy. They were huge and were knitted in very thick oiled whitish wool on four knitting pins. Your hands got quite sore knitting them. Wool was expensive and you could only get it in service colours. My mother knitted several pairs of these stockings for George’s young brother, Jack, who by this time finished his medical training and was in the Navy as a doctor on the Atlantic convoys] I hope they arrive, for apparently some of George’s letters to him have gone astray. We had a letter from him on Friday – and the doctor has laid himself up. He is on one of the American destroyers and it lurched in one direction when he was all set for it to go in the other.... We heard on the radio tonight that Yorkshire is one of the districts where children under 6 years of age will get 1 lb. of oranges next week. Their ration books must be produced. The last time there was a shipment of oranges, it was distributed in the south – and we’ve been wondering when Yorkshire would be mentioned. So that’s good news.
Not so good — the news from the Russian front. I wonder whenever those Nazis are to be stopped. It makes us hate them more than ever. The stories of their occupation of Crete are horrible, aren’t they? [‘The occupation began in May 1941 and brought about terrible hardships for the Greek civilian population. Over 300,000 civilians died in Athens alone from starvation, tens of thousands more through reprisals by Nazis and collaborators, and the country’s economy was ruined” — From Wikipedia] I’ve become very bloodthirsty where Germans are concerned and have already thought of some really lovely, just plans for revenge.....

George’s Dad asks us if we would consider traveling up to Edinburgh this Christmas instead of his coming down, but I’m afraid it’s a pretty big undertaking. Our journey in June with Alison was miserable so what it will be like in the very cold weather is unthinkable. The trains are overcrowded past the limit and behind time, and waiting on cold platforms with her isn’t my idea of fun and I don’t think it is George’s. Jack may get Christmas leave and his Dad thought that he’d probably like to come home then. [George and Jack’s Dad had recently been widowed] Anyway, the war business doesn’t look too good, and the decision may be taken out of our hands. All these invasion manoeuvres doesn’t add to one’s peace of mind.... It’s such a long journey and I don’t expect the trains will be heated.....

I was able to get ½ lb. of liver this week in addition to our ration, and we enjoyed it. George always makes me eat the most of it (not all in one day!) and he eats the other meat. My turn for liver won’t come again for a month. It’s the only way to work it for fair distribution. We are still only getting 1/2d. per ration per week of meat — but I find we can fill in all right with fish, soup or some bacon on those days we don’t have meat.

I have started giving Alison halibut oil, and I’m still taking that Livogen — and George takes malt and cod liver oil (when he remembers it). And we are eating plenty shredded raw cabbage and freshly grated raw carrots to give us — calcium is it? — anyway they are supposed to be making up some deficiency in our present day diet. George has some fine cabbages in the allotment and I always think of you, Mamma when I’m preparing them, for you liked them so much.

Well, it is getting very late and I’ll have to go off to bed. Imagine, having to be up by seven on a Sunday morning.

I hope I hear good reports about you all in your next letter. Keep well, enjoy yourselves and don’t sit up too late.

Much love to you all
George, Peg and Alison

NO MORE LETTERS HOME HAVE SURVIVED THE PASSAGE OF TIME
Words written by my father, George W Yule (1910-1969) after World War II.

He became a Humanist and a member of United Nations in the hope for long-term peace.

(M. Davie 2011)