

Lest We Forget

World War II

Remember and Respect

A BETA Research Book with Local Memories



Poppy growing on Sword Beach 2019



Visit to Normandy Beaches 2019



Some BETA members outside Café Gondree.



Pegasus bridge today and Café Gondree



Remains of Mulberry Harbour Arromanches



PLUTO – Pipeline under the Ocean



Landing craft from Sword Beach



British cemetery Ranville, Normandy

A BETA PROJECT

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WARTIME MEMORIES written by Kathleen Oliver

**Rain and fog and sleet and snow.
Sun and sand and moonlight glow**

**Heart of laughter heart of pain -
Treasured picture in a frame.**

**Verses scribbled in a book
Bits of heather, walks we took.**

**Melodies and half-lost rhymes -
All the myriad scattered lines.**

**Scents on breezes - daffodils,
Bluebells, clover, purple hills.**

**Air raid sirens - screeching bombs
Throbbing engines of the Hun**

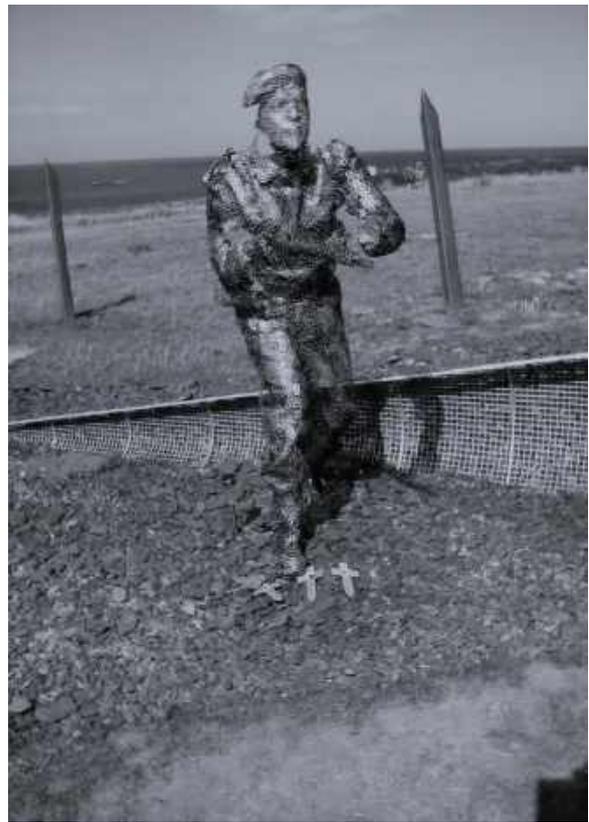
**"Douse that light" - "Your gas mask please"
"What's that light there in the trees?"**

**We won't forget, we who are left
We won't forget - must not forget.**

**We pray to God, if God there be,
To save man from himself.**

A BETA Research Book with Local Memories





British memorial at Arromanches, France. Statue of veteran Bill Pendell looking at depiction of his younger self at D Day 75 years earlier.



British Memorial in Normandy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been possible without a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, we are grateful that they realise the importance of recording history. We believe that recording local memories with WWII research gives the community ownership of their heritage.

We would like to give a special thank you to all those who contributed memories and photos for our book. We feel very humble when we think of the contributions and sacrifices people of WWII made for us.

On the 80th anniversary of the start of World War II, we wanted to commemorate and record people's personal and family memories of World War II in Wigan and the surrounding areas, together with WWII research.

We have laughed and cried as we have typed up and collated the memories and we are grateful to all those who helped us with their contributions and photographs. It has been an honour for us to record all these personal stories for the present generation and generations to come. *Remember and Respect.*

Les Rogers,

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Lily Berry

James Frost

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Eileen and George Walsh

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All those who told us their personal and family stories

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The Rise of Nazi Germany

HYPERINFLATION IN GERMANY PRIOR TO WORLD WAR TWO

The Treaty of Versailles

This was the peace treaty signed at the end of World War I by the Allies - British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, French Premier Georges Clemenceau and, under protest, by Germany. This treaty was signed in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles, Paris, France on June 28th 1919 and took force on January 10th 1920. The treaty gave some German territories to neighbouring countries and placed other German territories under international supervision. Germany was also stripped of its overseas colonies, its military capabilities were severely restricted and it was required to pay war reparations to the Allied countries. The treaty also created the League of Nations.

World War One reparations –

The payments and transfers of property and equipment that Germany was forced to make after its defeat during World War One. Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles (the 'war guilt' clause) declared Germany and its allies responsible for all 'loss and damage' of the Allies during the war and set up the basis for reparations.

In January 1921, the total sum due by Germany was decided by an Inter-Allied Reparations Commission and was set at 132 billion gold marks, about £6.6 billion.

The German Weimar government's main crisis occurred in 1923 after the Germans missed a reparations payment late in 1922. This set off a chain of events that included occupation, hyperinflation and rebellions.

French and Belgian troops' occupation of the Ruhr

Prices ran out of control, for example a loaf of bread, which cost 250 marks in January 1923, had risen to 200,000 million marks in November 1923. By autumn 1923 it cost more to print a note than the note was worth.

During the crisis, workers were often paid twice per day because prices rose so fast their wages were virtually worthless by lunchtime.



German children using bundles of German bank notes as building blocks

Third Reich economic nationalism

Before the Nazis took control of the Reichstag in 1933, around 6 million Germans were unemployed; the German economy was in total collapse, Germany had no international credit rating, and was almost bankrupt from one reparations payment. The German people were demotivated, factories were closed from lack of money to pay wages, benefits were cut as the Government had no money to pay them and inflation was spiralling out of control.

Inside an incredible three years, all this was changed. Unemployment was banned by the Nazi Party and went from 5 million to zero in the space of a few years. Every unemployed man had to take up an available job, or risk being sent to prison. Non-Germans had their citizenship removed and were thus not eligible for employment. The Nazis sponsored building programmes for new Football Stadia, enormous housing projects, and planting of new forests. In 1937 a new state-sponsored car manufacturer was commissioned by Hitler to provide cheap cars for families. It was called Volkswagen, which meant 'people's car' and families were encouraged to buy one by making monthly payments. In January 1937 Hitler removed Germany's signature from the Treaty of Versailles.

A new programme of Military Service took thousands of unemployed young men off the list and into the Wehrmacht (National German Army). This meant that lots more guns, military vehicles, uniforms and kit were needed, this in turn provided even more employment. The SS also took on thousands of new members, but since they had to buy their own uniforms, this tended to be from the more educated and affluent middle classes. The SS (Schutzstaffel) were formed by Adolf Hitler in 1925 initially to be his personal bodyguard. Members were taught that they were the elite not only of the Nazi Party but of all humankind.

Women told to stay at home

Employers were discouraged from taking on women while the Nazis delivered propaganda for women to stay home and be good wives and mothers, alongside giving them increased family benefits for doing so. This took women off the unemployment list and encouraged them to breed more children.

Imports were forbidden unless vital to survival and then heavily discouraged, with research established to reproduce these goods from inside Germany as soon as possible. No more bread was imported from Poland, so that meant more German bread was needed, creating new jobs for farmers and bakers.

In the space of four years, Nazi Germany changed from a defeated nation, a bankrupt economy, strangled by war debt, inflation and lack of foreign capital; into full employment with the strongest economy and biggest military power in Europe. to supply the German nation.

Germany finally paid off World War I reparations, with the last 70 million euro (£60m) payment drawing the debt to a close in October 2010. The repayments had been delayed until East and West Germany were re-united in 1990 and payments were then made in annual instalments.

1933

Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in Germany in 1933. The Nazi party arrested all communists, social democrats and trade unionists.

Article in The Daily Worker" Newspaper about Nazi Germany and how they were treating Jews.



This 1933 newspaper article is on display at the Manchester Jewish Museum.

February 1933 – The Reichstag, the German Parliament, was burned down and it was blamed on the Communists. 4,000 communists were arrested. Subsequently the Nazi vote went up from 33% to 44%.

March 1933 - Dachau, the first German concentration camp was set up initially to house communists then social democrats, trade unionists and those who opposed the Nazi regime.

July 1933 - the Nazis passed a law that allowed forced sterilisation of 350,000 men and women, who were deemed likely to produce 'inferior' children.

1934

January 26th Germany and Poland sign the 10 year Non-Aggression Pact

June 30th – Night of the Long Knives - Opponents of Hitler are killed by the SS and Gestapo

August 19th – Hitler becomes Fuhrer as well as Chancellor and President of Germany

Sir Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists – the Blackshirts from Manchester University's Centre for Jewish Studies and Michel Wolf

Sir Oswald Mosley, the 6th Baronet of Ancoats, Manchester was the founder and leader of the far-right British Union of Fascists and a supporter of Hitler and Mussolini. Mosley Street in Manchester is named after his family. The BUF wore uniforms, black shirts. In 1933 the BUF claimed 50,000 members and the Daily Mail with a headline "Hurrah for the Blackshirts!", was an early supporter. Despite strong opposition from Manchester's left-wing and Jewish communities, the BUF grew in 1933 and 1934, opening eighteen branches in Manchester and surrounding areas. In 1933 a BUF meeting at the Free Trade Hall descended into rioting between fascists and anti-fascist communists and was broken up by police. The BUF also had its northern headquarters at Salford, in a house called Thornleigh.

After the brutality of the fascist meeting earlier in 1934 Mosley thought he would have a repeat performance in Manchester. To combat this threat an anti-fascist co-ordinating committee of Young Jewish and Young communists was created to counter the fascists. Leafleting and public meetings were organised and deputations demanded the banning of the fascist meeting. The meeting was allowed, and to add insult to injury the Chief Constable banned all marches, a decision clearly taken to make anti-fascist mobilisation more difficult.

The anti-fascists were determined that there would be no repeat of fascist violence and intimidation. On Saturday 29th September 1934 a united demonstration of over 3,000 marched along Hyde road to Belle Vue and paid their entrance fee. Mosley was to speak from The Gallery which was protected by the lake and his supporters assembled on the open air dance floor in front of the lake. In addition to Mosley's bodyguard, there were wooden barriers, the police and fire engines with water cannon at the ready. 500 Blackshirts marched from a hall under The Gallery and formed up military style. Mosley stepped forward to the microphone to speak but was greeted by a wall of sound that completely drowned his speech. "Down with fascism", "Down with the Blackshirt thugs!" and ant-fascist songs, the Red Flag, and the Internationale. The sound never stopped for over an hour. In spite of the powerful amplifiers turned up to maximum Mosley could not be heard. The only sound they could now hear was the singing of 'Bye Bye Blackshirt' to the tune 'bye 'bye blackbird'. Mosley's humiliation was complete, what was supposed to have been his most important meeting since Olympia was in fact the first of a series of defeats he was to suffer in Manchester. In 1934 the Daily Mail withdrew their support for the BUF.



Mosley married Diana Mitford, a wealthy society beauty in 1936. The couple idolised Hitler, he was guest of honour at their wedding in Berlin at Joseph Goebbels' home. In 1940, with Britain at war with Nazi Germany, Mosley's British Union of Fascists, had been banned, and he and Diana had been interned.



The British Relay Team won the Gold Medal, Berlin Olympics 1936, Godfrey Brown, Bill Roberts, Godfrey Rampling, Freddie Wolff.



Japanese invasion of China 7th July 1937

1935

At the Nuremburg rally in 1935 the Nazi party proclaimed laws for the protection of German blood and honour.

The Nazis saw Russians, Jews, Gypsies, Black people and Poles as inferior. They also persecuted Communists, Trade Unionists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Homosexuals and people with disabilities.

In October Mussolini sent Italian troops to invade Ethiopia. The League of Nations condemned the Italian invasion. Italian authorities estimated that 16,000 Ethiopians and 2,700 Italian colonial troops died in Ethiopia.

1936

January - Germany and Poland sign a 10 year non-aggression pact

July 17th - Start of the Spanish Civil War

August 1st – 16th August - BERLIN OLYMPICS

William "Bill" Roberts (5 April 1912 – 5 December 2001) was born in Salford and was a winner of a gold medal for Great Britain in the 4x400m relay in the 1936 Summer Olympics.

October - Berlin Rome axis providing mutual assistance between Hitler, Germany and Mussolini, Italy.

1937

January - Hitler removes Germany's signature from the Treaty of Versailles

April 25th German bombing of Guernica in Spain

June - Pablo Picasso painted "Guernica" whilst living in Paris

July 1st Pastor Martin Niemöller was arrested in Germany on Hitler's orders and sent to Dachau Concentration camp.

July 7th – Japanese invade China

December - Nanjing, China – Massacre of Chinese by Japanese troops
60,000 Nanjing residents killed by Japanese soldiers.



Wigan Memorial to people from Wigan who took part in the Spanish Civil War



"Guernica"

Painted by Pablo Picasso in response to the German bombing of Guernica, it is 3.5 x 8 metres. Picasso remained in Paris during WWII but his apartment was frequently searched. During one search a German officer saw a photograph of the painting 'Guernica'. "Did you do that?" the German officer asked Picasso. "No," Picasso replied, "You did".



Spanish Civil War July 1936 to March 1939

On 18th July 1936 General Franco and his fascists led a military uprising against the elected government of Spain (The Republicans). Franco was supported by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, thus making Franco better equipped and more powerful than the elected government. The German Luftwaffe bombed and blitzed the Republicans and their strongholds. The Republicans finally surrendered on 28th March 1939. The Republicans were supported by many volunteers who came from other countries and were known as The International Brigade.

In 1936, just after finishing his book "The Road to Wigan Pier", George Orwell (real name Eric Blair) travelled to Spain to fight for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War against Franco's fascist Nationalist Party

A memorial to 12 freedom fighters from Wigan who volunteered to fight for the Spanish government against Franco's and Hitler's fascists has been erected in Wigan.

Ex-coal miner Michael Gallagher, of Ashton Street, Scholes, had taken part in hunger marches in 1934 and 1936 to London from Wigan. He joined the International Brigade for the Spanish Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and was killed at the Battle of Brunete, Spain 6th to 25th July 1937.

Coal Miner Bernard Sweeney from Wigan joined the International Brigade for the Spanish Republicans and died at the Battle of Belchite (24th August to 27th September 1937), Brunete, Spain

Paul Francis Dewhurst from Lowton also joined the International Brigade for the Spanish Republicans and died at the battle of Brunete. Paul's family later ran the Theatre Royal in Leigh,

Nurse Lily Robinson, who lived in The Wiend, Wigan was smuggled out to Republican Spain and is believed to have worked as a nurse during the Spanish Civil War. On her return she became a nurse at Billinge Hospital

Others on memorial Edwin Blood, John Connolly, Hector Coop, Harold Croston, Tommy Degnan, Pat Deignan, Arthur Evans, Benny Hoath.

26th April 1937 Bombing of Guernica in Spain by the Nazi German Luftwaffe in support of General Franco. Three-quarters of the town is destroyed and hundreds killed

Spanish Republican doctor Frederic Durán-Jordà was first to set up blood banks during the Spanish Civil War. He fled to Britain and worked with Dr Janet Vaughan at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School at Hammersmith Hospital to create a system of national blood banks.

1938

January 6th– psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud arrives in London having fled from Vienna in Austria.

February 14th – the British naval base at Singapore begins operations.

February 20th – Anthony Eden resigns as Foreign Secretary over Chamberlain's policy towards Italy. Lord Halifax takes over.

March 12th - the German 8th army crossed the border into Austria. The troops were greeted by cheering Austrians with Nazi salutes, Nazi flags, and flowers

March 14th – Prime Minister Chamberlain tells the House of Commons that the government "emphatically" disapproves of the German Anschluss in Austria, but that "nothing could have prevented this action by Germany unless we and others with us had been prepared to use force to prevent it.

April 16th – Anglo-Italian Treaty: Britain recognises Italian government over Ethiopia, in return for Italian troops withdrawing from Spain.

June 1st– the Bren light machine gun comes into service with British Army.

July 9th - gas masks are issued to the civilian population.

July 22nd– Britain rejects a proposal from its ambassador in Berlin, Neville Henderson, for a four power summit on Czechoslovakia consisting of Britain, France, Germany and the U.S.S.R. as London will under no circumstances accept the Soviet Union as a diplomatic partner.

September 7th – The Times publishes a lead article which calls on Czechoslovakia to cede the Sudetenland to Germany.

September 15th – Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain meets German Chancellor Adolf Hitler in Berchtesgaden in an attempt to negotiate an end to German expansionist policies.

September 21st – representatives of the British and French governments call on Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš to tell him Britain and France will not fight Hitler if he decides to annex the Sudetenland by force. At home, Winston Churchill warns of grave consequences to European security if Czechoslovakia is partitioned.

September 29th – Chamberlain signs the Munich Agreement with Germany determining to resolve all future disputes between the two countries through peaceful means. The Munich Agreement stipulated that Czechoslovakia must cede Sudetenland to Germany. German occupation of the Sudetenland would be completed by 10th October. Neville Chamberlain returns to the UK from Munich, George VI and Queen Elizabeth appear with Chamberlain on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to celebrate the agreement.

December 1st to 2nd – first Kindertransport from Berlin to London Liverpool Street station via Harwich.

1938

Adolph Hitler was Chancellor of Germany. German soldiers went into Austria. Everyone in Britain was worried that there would be another World War.

29th September – The Munich Agreement.

This was signed by the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, Edouard Daladier of France, Benito Mussolini, Italy and Adolph Hitler of Germany. Hitler promised not to invade Poland, France or Britain. In return Hitler was allowed to invade Czechoslovakia. Russia wanted to be involved in the talks, but Britain and Poland would not allow them to be part of the talks.

Neville Chamberlain returned to Britain and was cheered by the British people because they did not want another war.



Chamberlain said "My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Go home and get a nice quiet sleep."

"When mum heard the wireless broadcast telling us of the Peace Treaty with Adolf Hitler, she was made up. Neville Chamberlain said it was Peace for our Time.

My mum was terrified that we would be going to war again as my dad had been killed in the Great War." Mary, (Wigan)

"My dad listened to the King on the wireless. He told us that our Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, had signed a Peace Treaty with Adolf Hitler of Germany and there would be no war.

We all danced with joy and my dad cried, he had been so worried that I might have to go to war like he did." Billy, (Hindley)

9th November - The devastation of "Kristallnacht", the "Night of Broken Glass". Nazis in Germany set fire to synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools and businesses and killed close to 100 Jews.

2nd December - The first Kindertransport arrived at Harwich bringing 196 children from a Berlin Jewish orphanage burned by the Nazis during Kristallnacht.



Arriving at Theresienstadt Camp

Theresienstadt served as a transit camp for Czech Jews whom the Germans deported to killing centres, concentration camps, and forced-labour camps in German-occupied Poland, Belorussia, and the Baltic States.

It was a ghetto-labour camp. The SS deported and then incarcerated there certain categories of German, Austrian, and Czech Jews, based on their age, disability as a result of past military service, or domestic celebrity in the arts and other cultural life. To disguise the physical annihilation of the Jews deported from the Greater German Reich, the Nazi regime employed the general fiction, primarily inside Germany, that the deported Jews would be deployed as productive labour in the East. Since it seemed implausible that elderly Jews could be used for forced labour, the Nazis used Theresienstadt to hide the nature of the deportations. Theresienstadt served as a holding pen for Jews in the above-mentioned groups. It was expected that that poor conditions there would hasten the deaths of many deportees, until the SS and police could deport the survivors to killing centres in the East.

Prof. Julius Dreifuss was born in Baden, Germany on 16th September 1876. He was a lecturer and married to Mathilde nee Nachmann. Prior to and during WWII he lived in Bruchsal, Germany. Prof. Dreifuss was murdered in the Shoah (The Shoah is Hebrew for the Holocaust).

Mathilde Dreifuss nee Nachman was born in Rastatt, Germany on 26th May 1887 to Leopold and Bela. She was a housewife and married to Julius. Prior to and during WWII she lived in Bruchsal, Germany. Mathilde was murdered in the Shoah.

Their names are on the Yad Vasham Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

1938

Leo – a refugee from Germany



Gustav Leopold Dreifuss, known to us as Leo, was Jewish and lived in Bruchsal, Germany with his parents Professor Julius Dreifuss and Mathilde Dreifuss.

In 1933, 501 Jewish inhabitants were counted in Bruchsal. The Nazi hounding was directed in Bruchsal against the Jewish commercial and industrial enterprises in the city. In May 1934 numerous restrictions were put on Jewish life in the city. Jewish residents were not allowed to enter the city for swimming and sunbathing. In 1936 a separate school was set up for the Jewish students. The synagogue was burnt down during the pogrom (persecution of the Jews) of

November 1938. Nazis smashed the windows of Jewish shops. On October 22nd 1940, 79 Jewish inhabitants were deported from Bruchsal. Just after the pogrom and burning of the Bruchsal synagogue, Leo's parents sent him for safety to a family in Wigan in 1938 - he was 17 years old.

Leo lived in Linden Avenue, Orrell and went to college and university. He eventually worked in Wigan College as a maths teacher. We worked with him for a while and when we set up BETA in 1991 he came to visit us at least twice a year. Leo was full of admiration for what we had done in setting up BETA Education and the number of people we had helped, he called us his "two lovely girls". Leo died on 14th September 1999 aged 78 years and is buried with his adoptive Wigan parents in St. Luke's cemetery Orrell.

In 2015 we were contacted by Rolf Schmitt from Bruchsal, Germany who was researching the Dreifuss family and a commemoration plaque was being placed outside the house where they lived. Leo's parents had been killed in the Holocaust, his father Julius in Theresienstadt Ghetto, Czechoslovakia on 16th November 1942 from Enteritis and Mathilde his mother was sent to Auschwitz on 2nd September 1942 and died there on 23rd January 1943. Mathilde was sent to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt with 2,017 other people and out of these 2,012 were murdered, only 5 people survived. *Eileen and Eileen*



Professor Julius Dreifuss



Mathilde Dreifuss

Wigan Lady Missionary letter to Wigan Observer 1938

Mrs. Mabel Stedeford from Wigan was a missionary in China and her husband was a medical doctor in the mission. On 10th December 1938 she wrote the following letter to the Wigan Observer about the Japanese invasion of China. The letter was published in the paper.

“My object in writing is to suggest that while my friends in England are rejoicing over their own delivery from the horrors of war, they ought to have at the same time some thoughts of sympathy for those who have not been fortunate to escape this terrible scourge.

The encouraging aspects of the ghastly business has been the untiring efforts made for the relief of the suffering caused by the conflict between Japan and China. Many heroic sacrifices made by foreigners and Chinese alike to save those trapped and wounded in air raids, to protect the helpless against the invading Japanese soldiers and to house, feed and clothe hundreds of thousands of refugees.”



Mabel and Doctor Stedeford

Gladys Aylward was also a Christian Missionary in China at this time and her autobiography “The Small Woman” was made into a film “The Inn of the Sixth Happiness” starring Ingrid Bergman.

JAPANESE INVASION AND OCCUPATION OF CHINA

On July 7, 1937 the Japanese invaded China. On 13th December 1937, the Japanese captured Nanjing China. Japanese soldiers murdered Chinese civilians, men, women and children and disarmed soldiers who numbered an estimated 300,000. The Japanese also perpetrated widespread rape and looting.

At least 14 million Chinese were killed and some 80 million became refugees over the course of World War Two. The war ended 2nd September 1945.

Kristallnacht and Dachau the first German Concentration camp

The devastation of "Kristallnacht", the "Night of Broken Glass" on 9th November 1938. Nazis in Germany set fire to synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools and businesses and killed close to 100 Jews.

In the aftermath of Kristallnacht 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to Nazi concentration camps, 10,000 of them to Dachau.

Dachau was the first concentration camp set up just after Hitler came to power in 1933. Dachau was used to hold and torture political opponents and union organizers, the camps initially held around 45,000 prisoners.

In March 1933–1939, before the onset of World War Two, most prisoners consisted of:

- Communists
- Socialists
- Social Democrats
- Roma
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Homosexuals
- Persons accused of 'antisocial' or socially 'deviant' behaviour by the Germans.



Pastor Martin Niemöller

On 1st July 1937 Pastor Martin Niemöller was arrested in Germany on Hitler's orders and was sent to Dachau Concentration camp until liberation in 1945. He narrowly escaped execution. Pastor Martin Niemöller wrote the following:

“First they came for the Communists,
but I was not a Communist,
so I did not speak out.

Then they came for the Socialists and the trade
unionists, but I was neither,
so I did not speak out.

Then they came for the Jews,
but I was not a Jew, so I did not speak out.

And when they came for me,
there was no one left to speak out for me.”

1939

- March 15th** German invasion of all of Czechoslovakia.
- April 1st** End of Spanish Civil War, won by Franco's fascists supported by Hitler.
- 7th** Mussolini and his Italian troops invaded Albania.
- June 1st** The Royal Navy **submarine HMS Thetis sank** during trials in **Liverpool Bay**. 99 men were lost.
- 28th** The **Women's Auxiliary Air Force** is created, absorbing the forty-eight **RAF** companies of the Auxiliary Territorial Service.
- August 23rd** Russia signs non-aggression pact with Hitler.
- September 1st** Adolf Hitler signed "a euthanasia note" known as the T4 programme, authorising his doctor Karl Brandt to implement euthanasia centres to kill mentally ill and disabled people including many babies. Between 1939 and 1941 **euthanasia** ordered by the German state, led to the murder, by doctors and medical staff, of at least 70,000.
- German invasion of Poland.
- Start of British evacuation from cities called "Operation Pied Piper". First batch of children, evacuees from Salford and Manchester areas arrived in Wigan and were taken to homes in Shevington, Parbold, and Wrightington.
- Blackout imposed across Britain.
- 3rd** Declaration of war by the United Kingdom on Germany following the German invasion of Poland. Shortly after 11.00am Prime Minister Chamberlain announced this news on BBC Radio, speaking from 10 Downing Street. Twenty minutes later, air raid sirens sound in London (a false alarm)
- Chamberlain creates a small War Cabinet which includes Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty. General mobilisation of the armed services begins. The signal "Total Germany" is sent to ships.
- British liner **SS Athenia**, an unarmed passenger ship, became the first civilian casualty of the war when she is torpedoed by German submarine U30 between Rockall & Tory Island. Of the 1,418 aboard, 98 passengers and 19 crew are killed.
- The BBC Home Service begins broadcasting, but BBC Television shuts down until 1946.
- September 4th** First bombing of Wilhelmshaven, Germany by Royal Air Force

1939

September 4th National Service (Armed Forces) Act passed by Parliament for all men aged 18 to 41. Wages 15 shillings a week for a private (1 shilling = 5p).

In the week beginning today 400,000 pets were euthanised in the UK.

During September 38 million gas masks were given out, house to house.

9th British Expeditionary Force sent to France.

10th British submarine HMS Triton torpedoes and sinks another British submarine, HMS Oxley, believing her to be a German U-boat, with the loss of 52 crew.

17th HMS Courageous sunk by German U boat.

Russian Soviet troops invaded Poland from the east.

October 14th HMS Royal Oak sunk by a German U-boat in Scapa Flow, Orkney Islands with the loss of 833 crew.

16th First enemy aircraft shot down by RAF Fighter Command, a Junkers Ju 88 brought down into the sea by Spitfires following an attack on Rosyth Naval Dockyard in Scotland.

28th The liner "Yorkshire" was torpedoed in the Atlantic.

28th Mussolini and Italian troops invade Greece.

30th British battleship HMS Nelson is unsuccessfully attacked by U-56 under the command of captain Wilhelm Zahn off Orkney and is hit by 3 torpedoes, none of which explode.

November 23rd British armed merchantman HMS Rawalpindi is sunk in an action with German battleships Scharnhorst & Gneisenau.

December 4th German submarine U-36 is torpedoed and sunk by British submarine HMS Salmon off Stavanger, the first enemy submarine lost to a British attack during the War.

13th The Battle of the River Plate took place between HMS Exeter, HMS Ajax, HMNZS Achilles and the German Graf Spee, forcing the latter to scuttle herself on 17 December.

18th Battle of the Heligoland Bight: RAF Bomber Command, on a daylight mission to attack Kriegsmarine ships in the Heligoland Bight, is repulsed by Luftwaffe fighter aircraft.

18th Death of Wigan Councillor Christopher Lowe, Standish, fatally injured in Standish "black-out" road accident, he was 52 years old.

19th George Ashby from Atherton injured in roof fall at Chanters Colliery No.1 Coal Pit roof fall. He died 5th January 1940.



Saying goodbye to soldiers of the British Expeditionary Forces off to France and Belgium September 1939



British Soldiers meeting French Soldiers

HMS Thetis – 1st June 1939

My uncle Albert worked on building submarines in Liverpool. When I was young in the 1950's my mum told me about a submarine that sunk just before the start of WW2 and the Navy refused to allow the men on board to be rescued. I Never knew or heard any more about this. In 2009 Government papers were released and Tony Booth wrote a book about the incident, "Thetis Down, the Slow Death of a Submarine".

On 1st June 1939 the Royal Navy submarine HMS Thetis sank during trials in Liverpool Bay. 99 men were lost, 51 crew members, 26 Cammell Laird employees, 8 other naval officers, 7 Admiralty overseeing officers, 4 Vickers-Armstrong employees, 2 caterers and a Mersey pilot. Among the dead were two naval constructors and several of the submarine team from Cammell-Laird; experienced designers and builders of submarines who would have been needed during the war. Four men managed to escape from the sinking vessel, including Captain Harry Oram and Lieutenant Frederick Woods. The four men escaped through Thetis' only escape chamber, one by one before it became blocked.

HMS Thetis partly resurfaced with the men still alive inside and rescuers could have saved them in just five minutes by cutting air holes through the 5/8in-thick steel hull. A larger hole could then have been cut to let them out, but the Admiralty refused to allow the rescue because the hull would have been permanently weakened. Saving the submarine was deemed more important than rescuing the 99 men on board.

After 50 hours trapped inside their metal tomb in Liverpool Bay, all the 99 men were dead of carbon dioxide poisoning, killed by the breath they had exhaled. It was the Royal Navy's worst peacetime submarine disaster.

The submarine was successfully salvaged, in 1940 it was re-named as HMS Thunderbolt. On 14th March 1943 HMS Thunderbolt was sunk off Sicily by an Italian corvette, all on board were lost.



HMS Thetis sinking surrounded by rescue ships

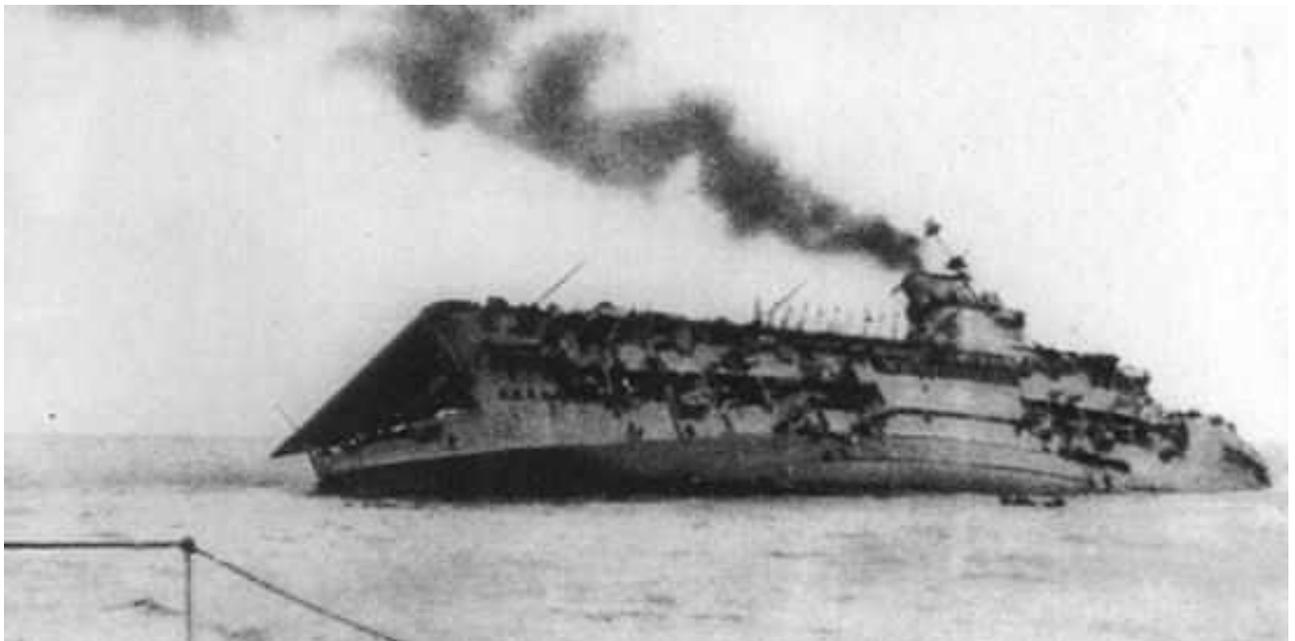
HMS Courageous

On 17th September 1939, HMS Courageous was on patrol off the coast of Ireland. Two of her four escorting destroyers had been sent to help a merchant ship under attack and all her aircraft had returned from patrols. Courageous was stalked for over two hours by submarine U-29, she then turned into the wind to launch her aircraft. This put the ship right across the bow of the submarine, which fired three torpedoes, two of which struck the ship on her port side before any aircraft could take off. It also knocked out all electrical power, Courageous capsized and sank in 20 minutes with the loss of the commander, 17 officers and 501 ratings, including 36 RAF service crewmen. All Swordfish aircraft of 811 and 822 Squadron were lost with the ship.

The survivors were rescued by the Dutch liner Veendam and British Freighter Collingworth. The two escorting destroyers counter-attacked U29 for four hours, but the submarine escaped.

Mr. William Bertwistle of Beech Hill, Wigan was a Leading Stoker on aircraft carrier HMS Courageous when it was sunk by a U boat on 27th September 1939.

William was on the mess deck when he heard two explosions, the deck lifted up and the ship listed, the blast carried him into the water. William had to swim for his life, he then found a lifebuoy and was in the water about 25 minutes before being rescued



HMS Courageous sinking

THE ROYAL OAK

The Royal Oak was Britain's largest battleship. On the night of October 13th 1939, just after the start of World War II, The Royal Oak was in Scapa Flow, which was an "impregnable" Navy base in Scotland. A German U boat, commanded by Lt. Com. Prien, followed some little boats through the narrow channels. The U boat fired 4 torpedoes at The Royal Oak, followed by 2 more torpedoes and then escaped.

The Royal Oak was sunk and 833 sailors lost their lives and went down with the ship. 386 sailors were rescued thanks to the heroic actions of the skipper and crew of the tiny tender, Daisy 2.

After this tragedy, it was decided to build permanent barriers across the entrance and this took 4 years to complete. The work was mainly done by Italian prisoners of war who also converted a Nissen hut to a chapel. The chapel is now a tourist attraction. The site of The Royal Oak is now an official war grave. *Les R., Wigan*



Joseph Williams aged 17 years from Platt Bridge, Wigan was amongst those who lost their lives on the Royal Oak. His rank was Boy 1st Class, P/JX 157723. He joined the Navy in March 1938 at the age of 16 years. His sister, Mrs. Gladys Sherrington, said that she had received a letter from him two weeks earlier (September 30th) saying "things are so quiet, you hardly know there is a war on." His name is on the Royal Navy Memorial,

Royal Marine Richard H. Wood, Po/X 2911, from a well-known Wigan family, was a survivor of the sinking of the Royal Oak.

Sinking of the Liner Yorkshire – 17th October 1939

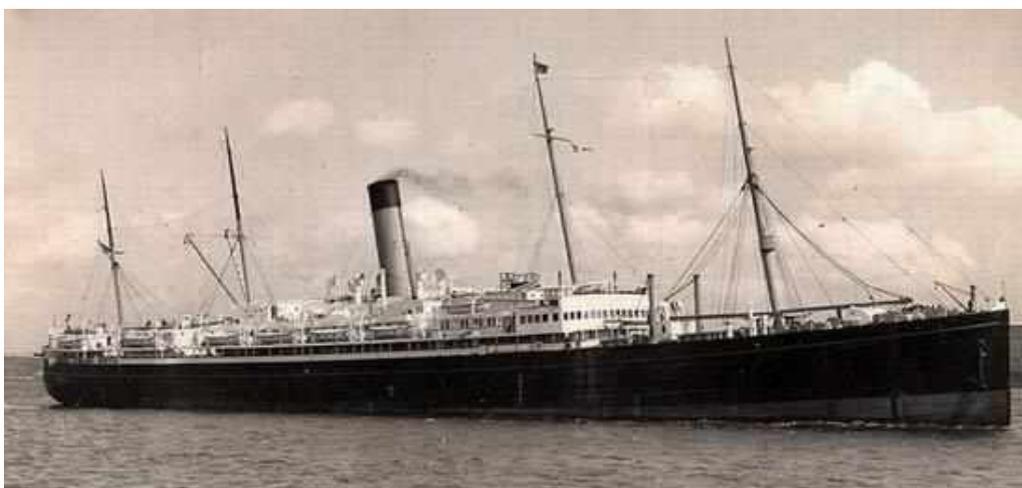
Company Sergeant Major Horace Armstrong of the British Army was stationed in India and when war broke out he sent his wife Mrs Margaret Armstrong and their four children back to England and safety. Margaret was 34 years old and from New Springs in Wigan. They were on the liner Yorkshire in convoy off the French coast near the Bay of Biscay when it was torpedoed by German submarine U-37. This was at 16.31 on 17th October 1939.

The Yorkshire (master, Victor Charles Patrick Smalley) was hit by two stern torpedoes and sank in just 9 minutes. Margaret perished with her daughters Annie Elizabeth age 4 years and Joyce age 2 years. Her other two children, Hazel and Kenneth survived the sinking.

The master of the Yorkshire, 25 crew members and 33 passengers were lost. 105 crew members and 118 passengers were picked up by the American steam merchant Independence Hall and landed at Bordeaux on 20 October. Another ship in the convoy, the City of Mandalay, was hit just after the Yorkshire.



Mrs.
Margaret
Armstrong
and her
four
children.



British Liner
"Yorkshire"

Memories of 1939

Dad went into the army at the start of the war. My mother took a job in the Beech Hill ammunitions factory making casings for bombs. My grandparents looked after me while mother was at work. Everyone had been given a gas mask in a small cardboard box. We had to carry the gas mask everywhere, as children, we were allowed to colour and draw pictures on our box. We also had to carry identity cards with our name and number, mine was NASQ2382. In school, we were all encouraged to save our money to win the war. The Government needed money to buy armaments and food from the USA.

Most food and clothing was rationed, in our house we didn't drink much tea so mum was able to swap tea coupons for clothing coupons. In school an inspector would come in to measure everyone's feet and if you had big feet you got extra coupons.

The radio had two programmes, the Home Service and the Light programme. At 7 p.m. every night we listened to news about the war. They didn't tell us what was really going on if it was bad news, so that morale was kept up. People in occupied countries also listened to the BBC news on secret radios.

When we went to the pictures and they would show the latest news about the war, all the children would boo the Germans, Italians and Japanese and cheer for the allies.

The blackout meant that we all had black curtains on the windows and no street lights. The Air Raid wardens patrolled the streets and would knock on the door if they could see any light from the house.

Theresa Mather from Wigan, born 1932

"During the war I was a master baker working in a bakery with a shop. Owing to food rationing, we devised ways of making our baking ingredients go a long way and nothing was wasted.

One example is a sweet pie recipe I devised to use up leftover cake crumbs. I rolled out and cut two thin rounds of pastry and made a filling of the cake crumbs with a small blob of jam. My customers really enjoyed these and they were very popular. I also volunteered as a fire watcher and first aider."

Mrs I. Leary (nee Parkinson), Orrell



Memories of 1939

"I was born in 1935 and lived in Fletchers Flats, Scholes. Although I was young when the war started, I remember most things in vivid detail. Like being hushed when the news came on the wireless, father polishing boots and whitening spats, talking about his khakis and the Drill Hall, then he was gone. Brass bands and soldiers marching down the main road, as crowds clapped and called out to them.

I remember a train ride to Rhyl, where it stopped in the countryside by a field full of tents and soldiers ran to greet us. This family reunion lasted an hour or so, then we had to leave. Soldiers and wives clung to each other and children wept and wailed as we boarded the train. Soldiers were ordered to stand to attention, but when the train pulled away, they broke rank and ran alongside shouting and waving their last goodbyes.

We had identity cards and ration books, gasmasks and a list of instructions regarding air raids. We taped the windows and added blackout blinds. At St. George's school we practised air raid drills and I remember the terror of being accidentally locked in the classroom when the sirens did go off. After this, head counts were done and all doors were left unlocked.

When our neighbour, Pete, was called up, it left us with no men in the flats. At night time tramps prowled the hallways, knocking on doors and sleeping in an empty upstairs flat. We put rows of empty bottles on the stairs and in the night we would hear the clinking of tumbling bottles and sounds of running feet, eventually we got a dog."

Elizabeth Rostron, Ontario, Canada, born 1935 in Scholes, Wigan

"There was an air of excitement in our house, yet there was something anxious about my mum and dad. I remember the anxious wait for the radio announcement and I knew, even though I was only 9, that it was going to be something that was going to change our lives, how I knew that, I really can't remember.

We all gathered around the wireless for the 11 o'clock announcement. Then the dreaded words came over the wireless. War was declared, our country was now at war. I will never forget my dad, tears began to well up in his eyes and for the first time in my short life I watched as my dad began to cry. He cried and cried and I couldn't understand why. I couldn't understand why my dad, a kind and generous man, a man who loved his family, was so upset. I knew he hadn't been well, but why cry? My mum ushered us out into the street to play. When war broke out everything changed. We went to school part-time, we had to take gas masks with us and we had some dangerous times.

It was beginning to make sense to me why my dad found it heart breaking that war had been declared. My dad had fought in the First World War, he had been wounded and had been hospitalised with what was known as "shell shock". Not only did he suffer this terrible affliction caused by bombs and guns, he also lost a lung through breathing in the most awful gases. All this whilst serving for his country in the trenches and battlefields of a war-torn country."

Joan Hurst, Scholes, Wigan

Memories of 1939

“In 1939 I was called up and had to report to the TA Drill Hall in Wigan. At the Drill Hall we didn't have any cooking facilities and we used to go to Gerner's café in Wigan. After this we used to walk around Wigan in our new uniforms and look in the shops.

In Woolworths I saw a lovely girl on the razor blade counter and started talking to her. I used to buy a lot of razor blades. When I was sent to Belgium she gave me her photo to carry and address so I could write to her.

We went to Belgium on the Isle of Man boat. We didn't have a lot to do there and this time was called “The Phoney War”.

In 1941 I married the girl from Woollies and we were married for 61 years until she died.” *Bob R. from Wigan.*



Bob in 1939



This is the photo Hilda gave Bob and he carried this with him



Bob and Hilda on their Wedding Day 1941

SCHOOL CHILDREN'S MEMORIES OF WARTIME –

Eric and Dora Watson (nee Unsworth)



I, Eric, started at Whelley school, Wigan at the age of 11 years in 1939. The school was divided into boys' school and girls' school. When the war started the girls' school was used as a hospital. This meant that the boys' school was also the girls' school. The timetable was that the boys went to school mornings and the girls afternoons. The next week this was reversed and this went on to the end of the war.

Whelley school had air raid shelters built in the middle of the grounds and we had regular air raid practice. We all had to carry our gas masks which came in a cardboard box, with a long piece of string to go over our shoulders.

The male schoolteachers had been called up and we had female teachers to replace them. Two of the male schoolteachers became prisoners of war in Japanese camps.

I was in hospital in 1945 and next to me was a returned prisoner of war from a Japanese camp. I remember him crying in his sleep and some of the things he told me of what had happened to him and his mates in the camp, made me cry as well.



I, Dora, have a memory of my beloved only dolly that my mum said I had to give to a cousin's daughter who didn't have any toys. I reluctantly gave her my dolly, but even today at the age of 88 years, I remember that dolly.



Dora's dad, Robert Unsworth, was a First Aider and Air Raid Warden, he was based opposite St. Paul's Church, Goose Green, at the Police Station.



Whelley school children practising an air raid.

1940

- JANUARY** 5th Ice breaking operations on Leeds and Liverpool Canal.
8th Food rationing begins.
27th Heaviest blizzard for generations swept over Wigan and District during weekend, closing roads and railways, isolating districts, mills, collieries, etc., which temporarily ceased to function; and dislocating transport of food and other necessities.
- FEBRUARY** 16th HMS Cossack attacked German ship Altmark and released British prisoners.
- APRIL** 9th Denmark was invaded by Germany and surrendered.
Norway invaded by Germany and surrenders in June.
14 George Formby concert with other artistes at Ritz Cinema, Wigan in aid of war charities, 2,600 attended.
- MAY -** 1st John Charnley (pioneer of hip replacements that we use today, later knighted) volunteered for the Royal Army Medical Corps, taking part in the evacuation of Dunkirk.
10th Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of Britain.
Germany bombed and invaded Holland.
Germany invaded Belgium and Belgium surrendered 28th May.
Germany invaded France.
21st Battle of Arras, France.
22nd 171 Dutch and Jewish war refugees arrived in Wigan.
27th – 4th June Dunkirk Evacuation of British and French troops Operation Dynamo.
- JUNE -** 8th HMS Glorious was sunk by the Sharnhorst
8th Return of Wigan Territorials evacuated from Dunkirk
10th Mussolini and Italy declares war on Britain and France
10th North Africa (Libya, Egypt, Algiers, Tunisia, Morocco) campaign begins
11th Siege of Malta begins
14th German troops occupy Paris
15th 707 War Refugees from Guernsey arrived in Wigan
20th – 28th Evacuation of 17,000 children and adults to Britain from Guernsey – some to Wigan
22nd France surrenders to the Germans

Britain stands alone

1940

- JUNE 30th** Channel Islands invaded by Germany.
- Over 200 merchant ships** and several British war ships sunk by German U boats in the Atlantic Ocean.
- JULY 10th** Start of the **Battle of Britain** fought by the Royal Air Force.
- 29th** German Luftwaffe drop a bomb on Salford.
- AUGUST 9th** Start of the German Luftwaffe bombing Liverpool and Manchester – The Blitz.
- 24th** Frederick Stott injured in a Chanters Colliery face fall. He died on 5th December 1940 from the injuries.
- 28th** 180 German bombers attack Merseyside at night
City of Manchester bombed.
- SEPTEMBER 5th** Bomb drops on Wigan and destroys Greenhough Street Methodist Church.
- 12th** Italy invaded Egypt.
- 17th** Hitler begins the blockade of Britain. Hitler hoped he could starve Britain into submission and U boats were used to sink Royal Navy and merchant ships bringing food and supplies from North America.
- 17th** Funeral of two members of the Home Guard killed near Wigan.
- 27th** Germany, Italy and Japan sign “The Tripartite Pact”. They promised to help each other - Germany and Italy would have Europe and Japan Asia.
- Liverpool had 20 air raids in September – including the bombing of a children’s convalescent home in Birkenhead and Liverpool Central Station.
- October 26th** "Empress of Britain" sunk by enemy action, Wiganer Cyril Livesey on board and escaped to return to Wigan.
- 31st** The **RAF win the battle of Britain**. Hitler decides to postpone plans for the invasion of Britain.
- DECEMBER 17th** Lend Lease Scheme between USA and Britain.
- 22nd, 23rd, 24th** **Very heavy bombing in Manchester.**
Manchester Cathedral, The Shambles and Manchester city centre badly damaged by bombs.

WAR IN THE ARCTIC and ATLANTIC

Liverpool was Britain's most important port during the war. It handled at least one third of the country's imports. It was the main terminus for Atlantic trade convoys. By early 1941 it had also become a major naval base and the headquarters of Britain's North Atlantic campaign.

An average of four convoys a week arrived in the Mersey during the war. Between 1939 and 1945 the port of Liverpool handled over 75 million tons of cargo. Almost 74,000 airplanes and gliders were brought into the port. Over 4.7 million troops passed through, of whom 1.2 million were American.

Many warships were also built at Cammell Laird shipbuilders in Birkenhead. During the war more than 100 warships, mainly submarines and many merchant ships were built. Famous vessels such as H.M. ships 'Ark Royal', 'Rodney' and 'Prince of Wales' were also made there. On average, Laird's completed one ship every twenty days.

"Western Approaches" in Liverpool city centre, was the headquarters of the war in the Atlantic and Arctic.

During the long voyage from British ports to North Russia the convoys faced some of the harshest climatic conditions in the world, battling in the winter days of almost perpetual darkness against the natural hazards of ice, fog and ferocious storms.

In these far Northern latitudes, summer brought less adverse weather conditions, but the almost perpetual daylight rendered the Allied convoys vulnerable to attack by their German opponents at almost anytime.

One of the convoys had 33 ships, but only 10 arrived in Archangel. The convoy lost a total of 23 merchant ships that carried 430 tanks, 210 planes, 3,350 vehicles and nearly 100,000 tons of cargo.

Merchant Navy and Royal Navy ships lost

1939	222 ships sunk	(114 by U boat)
1940	1,059 ships sunk	(471 by U boat)
1941	1,328 ships sunk	(432 by U boat)
1942	1,661 ships sunk	(1159 by U boat)
1943	597 ships sunk	(463 by U boat)
1944	247 ships sunk	(132 by U boat)
1945	105 ships sunk	(56 by U boat)

During the Battle of the Atlantic more than 3,500 merchant ships and 175 warships were sunk with the loss of an estimated 26,500 Merchant Navy seafarers, and more than 23,000 Royal Navy crew.

HMS COSSACK – 16th February 1940

At 23.12 Cossack, with a boarding party of three officers and thirty ratings ready, approached Altmark which was suspected of being a prison ship.. The big tanker switched on her searchlights to dazzle Cossack's bridge personnel and tried to crash her heavy stern into the destroyer's thin plates. Expert ship handling saved Cossack from damage. As the two ships brushed together, some of the boarding party leapt across. One of those was Paymaster Sub-Lieutenant Craven who had leapt from the torpedo davit just moments before it was demolished by contact with Altmark. Cossack closed again, the rest followed and Cossack backed clear.

Four Germans were killed and five wounded in a brisk action before Altmark was seized. Only one of the boarding party was injured. Two British officers dived into the icy water to rescue a German who had fallen overboard, but he was dead when they picked him up. Other Germans escaped across the ice-floes and reached the shore. Meanwhile the boarding party had secured Altmark's bridge and stopped her engines, but the tanker's momentum carried her on and she ran aground. Then the search for prisoners began. A hold was opened up.

"Are there any Englishmen down there?"
Then come up "The Navy's here."

299 British captives were released and transferred to the Cossack. All the Germans were left behind and at 23.55 Captain Vian and the Cossack sailed out of Jossingford into the world's headlines.

The Cossack returned to the U.K. covered by the Home Fleet, and the released prisoners were landed at Leith, Scotland.



19 year old ordinary seaman James Halliday from Platt Bridge, Wigan was a member of the boarding party. He said "the German captain of the Altmark kept denying he had prisoners on board. When he realised that the Altmark would be boarded, he tried to ram the Cossack."

James helped to rescue 299 British mercantile seamen taken from sunken British ships and held prisoner on the "hell" ship Altmark.

In October 1941, HMS Cossack left Gibraltar escorting a slow, UK bound convoy. On the night of the 23rd October, she was at the rear of the convoy when a U boat torpedoed the ship. This killed Captain Berthon and 158 of his officers and men. A further 29 crew members were injured.

MAY 1940 – WAR IN FRANCE

The British Expeditionary Force, commanded by General Lord Gort, began arriving in France on 9 September 1939. It spent the next seven months training through a bitter winter in readiness for action.

By May 1940 it had been built up to over 394,000 men. This consisted of five regular and five Territorial divisions stationed on the Belgian frontier where the main German attack was expected.

The Maginot Line in Northern France was considered to be impregnable, the 51st Highland Division, part of the British Expeditionary Force, were stationed here with the French army. George Formby visited them in March 1940 and sang his famous song “Sitting on the Maginot Line”.

On 12th May 1940, Adolf Hitler ordered the invasion of France. By 14th May 1940, German tanks had bypassed the Maginot Line and travelled through the Ardennes forest, crossed the River Meuse from Belgium into France and had opened up a gap in the Allied front. Six days later they reached the English Channel. Over one million Germans advanced rapidly towards the French coast and the area around the town of Arras was reinforced with British Expeditionary Force (BEF) troops.

Battle of Arras, Northern France - 21st May 1940

By 20th May 1940, Arras itself was surrounded but still holding out. Viscount Gort, commander-in-chief of the BEF, decided on a counter-attack codenamed “Frankforce”. The attack was supposed to be manned by two infantry divisions, comprising about 15,000 men. It was ultimately executed by just two infantry battalions totalling around 2,000 men, and reinforced by 74 tanks.

The infantry battalions were split into two columns for the attack which took place on the 21st May. The right column initially made rapid progress, taking a number of German prisoners, but they soon ran into German infantry and SS troops, backed by air support, and took heavy losses.

The left column also enjoyed early success before running into opposition from the infantry units of Brigadier Erwin Rommel's 7th Panzer Division. French cover enabled British troops to withdraw to their former positions that night. “Frankforce” was over, and the next day the Germans regrouped and continued their advance.

“Frankforce” took around 400 German prisoners and inflicted a similar number of casualties, as well as destroying a number of tanks. The operation had punched far beyond its weight - the attack was so fierce that 7th Panzer Division believed it had been attacked by five infantry divisions.

The attack also made the German commanders nervous, and it may have been one of the factors for the surprise German halt on 24th May that gave the BEF the slimmest of opportunities to begin evacuation from Dunkirk.

Operation Dynamo - Dunkirk Evacuation

27th May to 4th June 1940

Operation Dynamo will be best known to most people as the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force (the BEF) from Dunkirk. Winston Churchill ordered the start of Operation Dynamo on 26 May 1940.

The British, French and Belgium governments had seriously underestimated the strength of the German forces. As a result the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), as well as French, Canadian and Belgian troops, found themselves fighting against overwhelming odds. The Allied forces had retreated to the harbour and beaches of Dunkirk where they were trapped, a sitting target for the Germans. For some reason Hitler did not advance further for 3 days and this allowed for the rescue of British Expeditionary Force troops from the beaches of Dunkirk.

Between 27th May and 4th June 1940, nearly 900 ships, many of them small, privately-owned boats, responded to the call to help with the evacuation of troops at Dunkirk. These boats had Royal Navy personnel on them. Eight of the Isle of Man Steam packet vessels took part and rescued a total of 24,699 troops. Three of their vessels were lost on 29th May 1940. The Royal Daffodil ferry made five trips and evacuated 7,461 troops. On 2nd June the Royal Daffodil was attacked by 6 German aircraft and a bomb penetrated two of her decks blowing a hole below the waterline, but she managed to get back to Britain. The paddle steamer Medway Queen made seven trips and rescued 7,000 men. The smallest boat to take part in the rescue was the Tamzine, 14.7 feet. The Massey Shaw was a fireboat and went to Dunkirk to fight fires, but ended up making three trips and rescuing 500 troops.

The men waiting on the beaches of Dunkirk endured days of fierce bombardment and heavy fire from German fighter planes, they were demoralised, starving and exhausted. They waited to be rescued, standing in lines in the sand through days and nights. Many of the boats that came to their rescue were sunk, with heavy loss of life. These boats eventually rescued over 338,000 British Expeditionary troops and brought them back to Britain, including 140,000 soldiers of the French Army. All heavy equipment, tanks, artillery and motorised transport was abandoned and left in France.

Over 200 British and Allied sea craft were sunk, with a similar number damaged. The Royal Navy's most significant losses in the operation were six destroyers including 'the Grafton', sunk by submarine U-62 and 'Grenade', sunk by air attack at Dunkirk on 29th May.

11,000 British Expeditionary Force troops were killed at Dunkirk and the rest about 58,000 became prisoners of war (a handful were able to evade capture and eventually made their way back to neutral territory). 18,000 French soldiers died and 35,000 were captured. On 14th June, German troops marched through Paris.

Those left behind after the Dunkirk Evacuation

Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, stated that the last of the British Expeditionary Forces had left France and that now "France stands alone". This statement was not true and in fact approximately 200,000 officers and other ranks were left to fight a rear guard action in France. The 51st Highland Division and the Armoured Division, together with other Battalions of troops that had landed at Cherbourg, were ill-equipped but fought on.

After a week of intense fighting, the town of Abbeville was destroyed. Major General Victor Fortune, commander of the 51st Highland Division, asked to surrender, but Churchill insisted that the British supported the French and kept on fighting.

On 6th June, after Abbeville fell, the Allied troops retreated leaving most of their heavy weaponry and having just machine guns and small arms. Field Marshall Rommel attacked the Highlanders on the 8th June and being far better equipped, forced the troops back to the coast, to the port of St. Valery. They hoped to be evacuated back to England, but the Germans gained the Heights overlooking the St. Valery harbour, making this seem impossible.

However, in Portsmouth, Admiral William James organised a flotilla of over 200 boats to rescue and evacuate the 51st Highland division. Despite being repeatedly told by the Admiralty not to carry out his rescue mission, he continued toward the French coast. Unfortunately, the poor weather and the German defences prevented him from evacuating the troops and the flotilla had to return to England.

On the 12th June the French army, in command of the B.E.F., surrendered to Field Marshall Rommel, but the 51st refused to do so. Eventually, to avoid more slaughter, General Fortune, the British Commanding Officer, handed over the surrender of what remained of the B.E.F. to Field Marshall Rommel.

1,000 men had been killed and 5,000 were injured. 11,000 soldiers were taken prisoner and treated very badly, with very little food and forced to march to the Hook of Holland, where they were transported to prisoner of war labour camps in Germany and Poland.

Clifford Johnson Service No. T/ 157223

Clifford was my mum's (Dora Watson nee Unsworth) uncle from Poolstock, Wigan. He was born in 1917 the son of John Henry and Jane Johnson. He was called up when the war started then sent for 6 weeks training. Clifford came home from leave and married Jean May.

Clifford was in the 51st Supply Royal Army Service Corps and was sent to France with the British Expeditionary Force. He was reported missing presumed dead at Dunkirk. His death was recorded as 11th June 1940 and his name is on the Dunkirk Cemetery Memorial. He was 23 years old.

His sister continued to write for many years asking if he'd been found. His name is on the Wigan war memorial, but on a separate panel as his family couldn't accept his death as he was still declared missing. *Karen Gibson*

Massacres of some members of the British Expeditionary Force

Dunkirk area 27th and 28th May 1940

On May 27th, their ammunition expended, and completely cut off from their Battalion and Brigade Headquarters, 97 officers and men of the 2/Royal Norfolks and 8th Lancashire Fusiliers surrendered to 2nd S.S. Totenkopf (Deathshead) Regiment. They were disarmed, marched into a field, mowed down by machine-guns, finished off by revolver shots and bayonet thrusts and left for dead. By a miracle two of them escaped death, and were hidden and succoured for a short time by the people of Le Paradis, Dunkirk.

Private William O'Callaghan, of Dereham, was one of only two survivors of this infamous massacre.

Despite being wounded himself, Private O'Callaghan was able to carry his injured comrade Private Bert Pooley half a mile to the relative safety of a neighbouring farm. Later they both became prisoners of war and Private O'Callaghan spent five years as a prisoner of war, mainly in Poland. In 1948 he and Private Pooley testified at the war crimes trial of Fritz Knoechlein, the German officer who gave the command for the massacre and he was subsequently hanged.

On 28th May 1940, 100 Allied troops who were captured near Dunkirk by the German SS were marched to Wormhout. The S.S. shot any wounded soldiers who could not keep up with the march. On arrival they were put into a barn where the SS threw grenades into the barn. Sergeant Stanley Moore and Company Sergeant Major Augustus Jennings hurled themselves on top of the grenades, taking the full impact of the explosion and the grenades failed to kill everyone. When the SS realised this they fired into the barn to kill the survivors. Despite being shot, Gunner Brian Fahey and a few others survived and were left for dead. Several British prisoners were able to escape, Private Bert Evans escaped and he was the last survivor of the massacre.

A total of 80 men were killed, 15 more were wounded, their wounds so severe that 9 of them died within 48 hours. After a couple of days, Brian Fahey and several others were found by regular German Army medics and taken to hospital. Their wounds were treated before they were sent to prisoner of war camps.

Operation Dynamo “Where was the RAF?”

The RAF, in spite of all difficulties, had the task of protecting the evacuation at Dunkirk. Many squadrons had been retained in England and were committed to the battle. Nevertheless, it is quite understandable that men on the beaches or battling as members of the rear-guard would ask the question: - “Where is the RAF?” No doubt this was expressed in stronger terms. After all, they were being dive bombed by Stukas, bombed by Heinkels and Dorniers and no doubt strafed by fighters. To the troops on the ground, the Luftwaffe appeared to be having it all its own way. It is believed that on one day bombers dropped 15,000 high explosive bombs and 30,000 incendiaries on Dunkirk harbour, the fleet of Royal Navy ships and the flotilla of small boats. It has even been suggested that RAF men on the beach were pushed out of queues for boats and that some changed blue tops for khaki. I don't know if that is true or if it just makes a good story.

By the time Operation Dynamo began the RAF had already suffered severe losses as previously indicated. However, by now the Hurricanes and Spitfires did have some advantages. For example, the Messerschmitt Bf 109 had a limited range and even from overrun French bases had a limited time over the beaches. Apparently a Spitfire could carry up to 170 gallons of fuel with a range of up to 1,355 miles. German bombers were still flying from German bases. The RAF was therefore able to fly deeper patrols not visible from the town and area around Dunkirk. Despite this advantage the RAF was up against far superior numbers and was still using outdated tactics with many inexperienced pilots who often found themselves alone facing odds of five to one. Squadrons were sometimes putting up less than the squadron strength of twelve aircraft. They also ran the risk of attracting fire from the Navy and ground forces if they got too close to the evacuation. Because of the size of the enemy formations an effort was made on 29 May to try to have four squadrons around Dunkirk at any one time. This meant that there were periods with no cover. Also the pressure meant that it sometimes required aircraft from eight squadrons to make up the four needed for the patrol.

Pressure on Fighter Command eased from the 1 June when it was decided to proceed with the evacuation only at night. Cover was required around dusk and dawn to provide some protection for ships approaching or leaving Dunkirk. However, this led to complaints from the troops on the beaches at the lack of daytime cover. During the last three days of the evacuation, poor weather reduced the effectiveness of the Luftwaffe bombing campaign and thus casualties on the ground were reduced. During the nine days of the evacuation it is reported that the RAF flew 171 reconnaissance flights, 651 bombing and 2,739 fighter sorties. Fighter Command lost 106 aircraft but claimed 262 enemy aircraft destroyed. Some French aircraft were also involved in the battle and the Royal Navy also accounted for a number of enemy aircraft destroyed. The RAF clearly needs to be commended for the vital role it played both in the lead up to and during the evacuation.

It is most likely that many lessons were learned which contributed to the eventual control of the skies which led to success in the “Battle of Britain” and the cancellation of Operation Sea Lion, the planned German invasion.



Dunkirk - soldiers waiting for evacuation



Dunkirk - soldiers being rescued

Memories of Dunkirk

“In April Belgium was attacked and bombed by Germany and we helped to dig people out of wreckage. The Germans entered Belgium and subsequently Belgium surrendered. We then had to fight a rear-guard action into France with the Germans following.

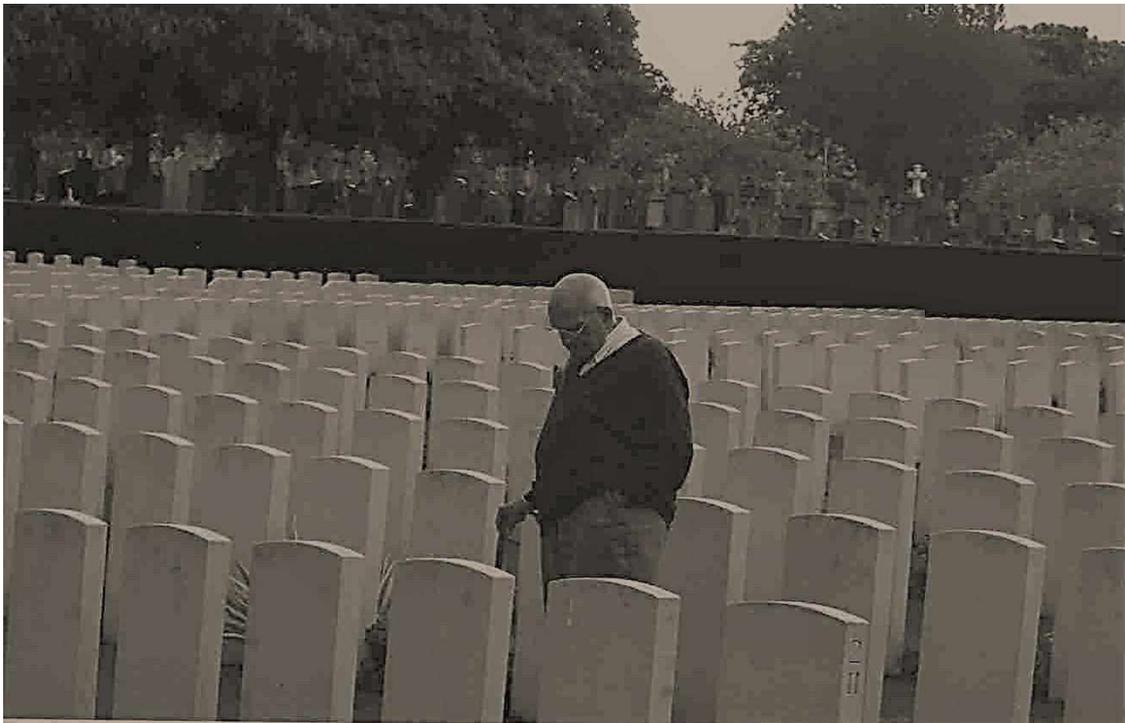
We were told to head for Dunkirk so we could get ships back home. In Northern France we stopped at a farmhouse where the British had set up hot food and we could rest in the barns. While we were sleeping “all hell broke loose” and German tanks had entered the farmyard. The officers shouted “every man for himself” and we all just ran towards Dunkirk. As I ran across the fields, I had just one thought, to get home at all costs.

When we reached Dunkirk we saw all the abandoned army trucks and then the sight on the beach of thousands of soldiers. For three days I waited and finally it was my turn. I swam to a small boat which then took me to the HMS Malcolm and home.

When I returned to England I had to have hospital treatment for my feet. My next tour of duty was in Rotherham and Sheffield where we built decoy steel furnaces. These decoys were bombed instead of the real ones.

I continued to have problems with my feet and was eventually invalided out of the forces in 1942.”

Bob Rawlinson from Wigan



Bob on a return visit to Dunkirk in 2004

Memories of Dunkirk Continued.....

Thomas Causer joined the Royal Navy in 1938. During the evacuation at Dunkirk, Thomas Causer was on the destroyer HMS Grenade when it was struck by a bomb that had gone down a funnel into the boiler room. He managed to escape into the sea, but was badly burnt from an oil spill that had been set alight by the explosion. He described it as a “burning hell”.

Thomas Causer was picked up and taken to a military hospital in Kent. His parents, who could not afford much, were sent rail tickets to visit him; the journey took 36 hours from Glasgow to Kent. During his time in hospital, he spent three months bathing in oil to stabilise his injuries.

During an operation, Causer was blown off the operating table when the hospital was hit by a German bomb. The piece of shrapnel that damaged his right arm was given to him by the medical team as a souvenir and is still in the possession of his family today.

After the war he married, had six children and worked as a supervisor for an insulation company. He died in 1969 from an asbestos-related disease.



Thomas Causer and his family before he left for Dunkirk

I was five years old and at first I couldn't understand why Pete's wife Alice, wept every time the news came on, but I knew it had something to do with 'A flotilla of boats' and Dunkirk.

Soon after, Pete was home on a three-week leave and friends and relatives celebrated his return home, anxious to hear about his ordeal. “Bloody Jerries!” spat Pete. “They could see the boats coming in for us and there we were chest deep in the water, rifles over our heads, twice we waded out and twice we turned back. The bloody jerries weren't satisfied riddling the beaches with bullets, they bloody well dropped barbed wire in the water – that's the jerries for you”.

Then a telegram came before Pete's leave was up and he was mad. “Sod 'em” he said. “They give us a three week compassionate leave because they said we deserved it and now they're taking it off us, they're ordering us back – well they can bloody well wait!”

Elizabeth Rostron, Ontario, Canada, born 1935 in Scholes, Wigan

Memories of Dunkirk Continued.....



John Edwards and his cousin Llewellyn Lewis fought in the rearguard defence with the 1st Royal Welch Fusiliers (RWF). John Edwards was born in Ruthin, north Wales in 1911 and was an officer's groom. Llewellyn Lewis was born near Dolgellau, north-west Wales, in 1919 and was called up in 1939 at the start of the war. He was 20 when he was captured, John Edwards was 28.

On 26th May Edwards and Lewis were far from the beaches of Dunkirk. They had been ordered to stand and fight "to the last round and the last man" in an effort to slow the German advance while others were evacuated. The 1st RWF fought at the small town of Saint-Venant and nearby villages, retaking bridges over important waterways. However, with the Germans still holding other bridges, the Company was surrounded, suffered heavy casualties, and the men who were left were captured when they attempted a breakout that night.

John, Llewellyn and the other captured soldiers were marched towards Germany with little food and water and were eventually taken to Toruń in Poland. John Edwards spent the rest of the war in captivity working as a Prisoner of War farmer. John returned to Britain in 1945 skeletal and was unrecognisable to those who knew him. Llewellyn Lewis died in Stalag XX-A in 1941, aged 21.



Norman Prior of the Lancashire Fusiliers recalls being camped on the Belgium border then being ordered to retreat to protect bridges and aerodromes from the threat of German paratroopers before his unit was switched to Tournai then Dunkirk.

Norman said: "We did not know the names of all the towns and places. We would always only move at night. We had been fighting rearguard actions across France and we were 30 miles outside Dunkirk when the evacuation began. "There were so many people. I never thought I would get on a boat. I remember there being fishing boats loaded with men and making makeshift piers. I remember one night walking on the beach with another chap because we couldn't sleep when a small boat came ashore. We rowed the boat out to sea in the hope of finding a ship and suddenly this huge black shape

materialised in front of us. It was a destroyer." Norman went on to serve in North Africa and Italy with the King's Own Hussars regiment.



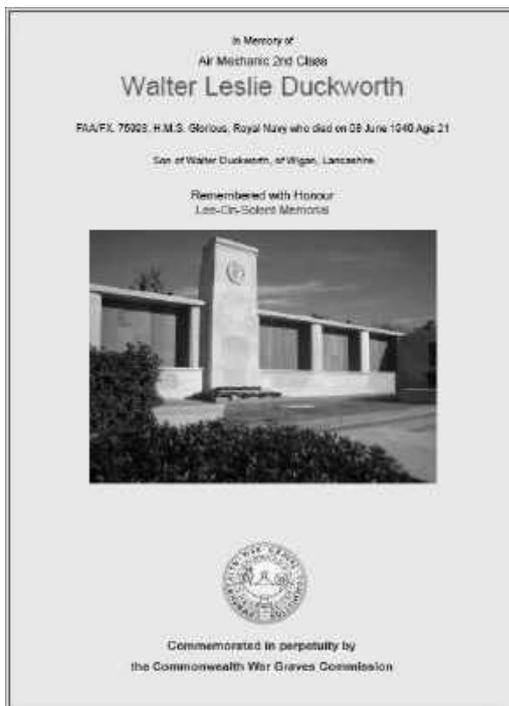
Norman Prior and his mate Tommy Barron who was with 1/5th LF at Dunkirk. Tommy was bitten by an adder at Roman Way Camp Colchester following Dunkirk, and died there. Norman Prior died 24th July 2018

HMS GLORIOUS

On June 8th, 1940, the Royal Navy suffered one of its most devastating defeats of the Second World War. HMS Glorious, one of Britain's largest and fastest aircraft carriers, was sunk along with her escorting destroyers HMS Ardent and HMS Acasta by the German battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. The three British warships were taking part in Operation Alphabet, the evacuation of Allied forces from Norway that had been taking place simultaneously with the rather better known and remembered evacuation at Dunkirk.

Some 900 men went into the cold, northern waters that evening and they faced a horrifying ordeal. Despite saluting their gallant foes, the German battleships did not stop to pick up survivors. The British, on the other hand, unaware that the three ships had been lost until the following day, even continued to radio orders to them until the Germans announced the sinkings. Hour after hour men waited in the water and in open rafts as their shipmates slipped away around them. When Norwegian vessels finally found them nearly three days later, only 40 remained alive. The death toll of 1,519 exceeded any of the other great British naval disasters of the war. Among the dead was Glorious' Captain, Guy D'Oyly-Hughes, a highly decorated submariner whose First World War record was legendary.

One of the Royal Navy's precious few large aircraft carriers had been sunk, along with two destroyers. Also a full deck of Gladiators and Hurricanes, two RAF fighter squadrons all of whom were badly needed with the Battle of Britain in the offing.



Walter Leslie Duckworth from Wigan was an air mechanic with the Royal Navy on the HMS Glorious. He died on 8th June 1940 when the ship was sunk, he was 21 years old.

His father was Walter Duckworth of Wigan.



HMS Glorious

MEMORIES OF EVACUEES

“When war was declared in September 1939, the Government said that children in cities like Liverpool should be evacuated to safer areas of the country.

All my school from Liverpool was evacuated to North Wales and we all went off on the train with our gas masks and a bag of food. We went to the village hall in Wales and local people came and chose us to live with them, I didn't like that, people looking at us and deciding who they wanted. My sister who was 4 years old, myself and another girl from the school were sent to live on a small farm.

When we arrived at the farm we were given an egg each, but that was the last time we saw eggs. I don't think they liked us at the farm and they made us work very hard. We didn't get a lot to eat and were never given eggs or butter even though we saw them making the butter and collecting the eggs from the hens. When they had visitors, we were made to go into the cold room whilst they stayed in the room with the fire.

I developed a sore on my leg and when mother came to visit us she decided to take us home. Back in Liverpool the hospital said the sore was due to me being malnourished. I also found out that my mother and uncle had been sending us parcels with small toys and sweets, but we were never given these parcels.

I think we were just a source of income.” *Sheila Craighen*

The Government paid people 8s 6d per evacuee, per week. If you only had one evacuee you were paid 10s 6d. per week. The local authority paid for any medical care, bedding, shoes or clothes that may be needed.

Some children who were evacuees said that people coming and looking at them and choosing who they wanted was like a slave auction. This system was then replaced by Billeting Officers who chose where the children should go and stay.

72,000 children and 23,000 adults were evacuated from Manchester and 130,000 children and adults from Liverpool in 1939.

REFUGEES ARRIVE IN WIGAN

Wigan Council set up a War Refugees Committee and Voluntary War Refugees Committee to prepare for refugees coming to Wigan. Householders were found who would take in refugees voluntarily or for an allowance. The War Refugees Voluntary Committee's funds were used to supplement the government's allowances for food and shelter. On the 22nd of May 1940 the first wave of 171 Dutch refugees arrived in Wigan. The refugees told of their experience of being machine-gunned by German warplanes as they boarded their boat in Amsterdam. The boat was a small cargo vessel with accommodation for 50 persons, yet 270 people were crammed into every available space, fortunately the sea was calm. The party included German Jews, who had previously fled into Holland, Austrians and Poles, 6 people were "stateless". Also included were a three years old boy whose parents were missing, a blind musician and a Rabbi. They all carried bundles of belongings or suitcases, some little girls were clutching dolls. The children had come from an orphanage in Holland.

A large crowd clapping and cheering welcomed them at Wallgate station. The refugees were taken to the Drill Hall and given a meal then taken to temporary accommodation. The Dutch were housed temporarily in King Street Baptist School (31 persons), King Street Methodist School (24), and the Queen's Hall (33). Distressingly, there were 83 parentless children. These were split between St Michael's Parish Hall and All Saints Institute. Seven empty houses had been requisitioned and generous local organisations such as The British Legion and individuals equipped the houses. Interestingly, four persons were interned. Later a large group of Jewish refugees came from Belgium. The refugees were given free entrance to Prince's Cinema and special tables were set up in the libraries for the French speaking refugees. On the 10th June, despite rationing, the feeding arrangements were altered to include a wider variety of foods due to complaints and to accommodate the dietary needs of Jewish refugees. 75- 80 children were still living in All Saints Parish Room and St Michael's Institute and would need permanent housing.

On 22nd June seven hundred and nine refugees from Hautes Capelles and Vale School Guernsey arrived in Wigan. They were part of a school evacuation scheme every 10 children were accompanied by a teacher and there were some parents. In the party was a complete family, the Windsor's, consisting of father, mother and 10 children. On arrival, all were taken to the Wigan Drill Hall. Four persons were on stretchers and taken straightaway to Billinge Hospital, two persons were intended for Stockport and were immediately despatched there. Some children were sent to hospital as they had chickenpox and measles. Also in the party was a mother with a three weeks old baby boy who were temporarily housed at St Margaret's Home in Goose Green. By the 23rd June all were billeted. The Government decided to move the children from Wigan to other parts of the country despite the Wigan Town Clerk expressing the great disappointment of the large number of foster parents who had taken the Guernsey children into their homes and, indeed into their hearts. The Ministry insisted that the move would be for the good of the children and their teachers, as they were evacuees NOT refugees.

REFUGEES ARRIVE IN WIGAN Continued.....

On July 7th, the Guernsey children were moved out to various places. Of the original 709, 455 were moved to Nantwich and 118 to other areas. 136 were still billeted with Wigan residents or in the empty houses that were offered. The families occupied 70 Mesnes Road and 343 Ormskirk Road, Pemberton, they were given a loan of £10 for furniture. The Windsor family lived in 18 Avondale Road and Mr. Windsor found a job on Government work, one son and daughter also found work.

Wigan started to receive evacuees from the devastated areas, particularly Liverpool and London.

From 10th July 1944. 680 unaccompanied evacuee children arrive from London and were dispersed to rest centres in the town. On 28th July 21 children were at Crompton Street Spiritualist Hall and 7 children at Whelley Methodist School. There was difficulty in finding accommodation so some families had returned to London.

Billeting allowances had recently been raised for unaccompanied children. For a child under 5, 10 shillings and sixpence was offered, between age 5 and 10, it was 11 shillings and sixpence, age 10-12 it was 12 shillings, with the largest allowance being for a 17 year old at 17 shillings and sixpence. Trying to feed an extra mouth or two cannot have been easy, however, with the meagre allowances on offer due to rationing as well as a general lack of clothing. Because of this, it comes as no surprise that the Civil Defence Emergency Sub-Committee at their meeting on 20 July was forced to consider compulsory billeting, since 1600 more evacuees were expected imminently. The Committee finally concluded that they would take that step as soon as it became impracticable to find billets within a reasonable time. Part of this pressure of numbers occurred because of the refusal of certain towns in the country to take in strangers. The National press praised Wigan "Wigan has a warm heart, but in Blackpool business is business". To industrial Wigan the authorities in London sent 700 young children, refugees from the flying bomb. They were a weary, rather scared crowd of children.



A group of refugees from Belgium and Holland reading magazines and darning stockings at their billet in Wigan. The children are due to be adopted by local families.

MEMORIES OF EVACUEES

“Young people from places like Liverpool and Manchester were affected by the bombing in their cities and our family, like other families, opened, not only the door, but their hearts to these children who were evacuated. The first evacuees were from the Channel Islands and were dropped off at the Drill Hall in Wigan. They were carrying their few belongings looking lost and sad, but my mum gave them tea and biscuits, she also helped find them secure accommodation. I remember sleeping on a camp bed whilst our new visitors had my bed.

Liverpool was very badly affected by the war and the city was in a state of devastation. My mum took in two engineers who had come to repair the railways and they stayed twelve months. We also had a brother and sister who came from Liverpool with their aunt. Whilst the children lived as part of our family for over 3 years, their aunt found lodgings close by in Vine Street.

Whilst we didn't have luxuries, my mum and dad created a loving family. They were always warm, welcoming, sympathetic and hardworking.”

Joan Hurst, Wigan, born in 1930

“My mum and I decided we would offer a home to an evacuee. We went up to the Baptist Church Hall in Wigan, but there was only one little boy left.

We only wanted a little girl. *Greta Curnow*

When I was at school in the fifties, our head teacher told us of a girl who had been evacuated from Liverpool. Her name was Anne Rogers and her mother Ellen, was the cleaner at our school in Liverpool. In 1939 at the age of six, she was evacuated to Winsford in Cheshire. She stayed with a couple, James and Jane Galley, they had the means to help her get educated and have singing and dancing lessons.

She never returned to Liverpool or to her parents.

Anne Rogers became very famous especially in London for being a leading lady in musicals. When Julie Andrews went to Broadway, Anne took over from her at Drury Lane playing Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. She also voiced the part of Mrs. Potts for the Disney cartoon *Belle's Magical World*.



Anne Rogers playing Eliza Doolittle.

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN—10th July to 31st October 1940

“The Battle of France is over. The Battle of Britain is about to begin. Hitler knows he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will say – “This was their finest hour.” *Winston Churchill, 18 June 1940*

However history views the successes and failures of Winston Churchill's life, it can never be said that he didn't have a way with words. The truth of the above statement would be revealed during the period between July and September 1940. Had Britain not survived the onslaught thrust upon it by Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring's Luftwaffe the war may have had a different outcome. For Hitler's plans to invade Britain to succeed, the RAF would have to be removed from the equation. His invasion fleet would be protected by the Luftwaffe from the British Navy who would have to operate without RAF protection. If the RAF could not be destroyed, the invasion, Operation Seelöwe (Operation Sealion), could not go ahead.

The Luftwaffe outnumbered the RAF, fielding 2,600 aircraft to the RAF's 640 fighters. The Germans could mount bombing raids with a variety of twin engine bombers, such as the Dornier Do 17, the Heinkel He 111 and the Junkers Ju 87 Stuka dive-bomber. These would operate under the fighter protection of the single-engine Messerschmitt Bf 109 and the twin engine Messerschmitt Bf 110. RAF Fighter Command was equipped with Hawker Hurricanes, which provided a solid gun platform on a rugged and reliable design, and a smaller number of Supermarine Spitfires which could match any of the German aircraft. Despite superior numbers, the Luftwaffe had several disadvantages. The RAF had a network of support by virtue of operating close to home. This included radar and observer corps stations, balloon barrages and anti-aircraft gun batteries. Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding was an efficient and well organised officer in charge of Fighter Command. He had resisted the pressure to pour all his fighter strength into the hopeless Battle for France, a decision that proved to be correct as the Battle of Britain ensued. The Luftwaffe had the problem of operating at a greater range and over British soil. The Bf 109 was limited to about ten minutes combat before having to return to base. The Bf 110 had greater range but was less of a match for British fighters. All of the German bombers were vulnerable to attack if unprotected. The Stuka dive-bombers were eventually withdrawn due to unsustainable losses.

Fighter Command was divided into four groups. Most of the work would fall on 11 Group under the command of Air Vice Marshal Sir Keith Park, based in southeast England. This group would both inflict and suffer the greatest losses in the battle. 10 Group was based further over to the southwest, 12 Group in the Midlands and 13 Group in the northeast. Thus the south and east of the country had a fighter screen to cover attacks from enemy held territory. On the 10 July the Luftwaffe began to attack coastal shipping and ports, and tried unsuccessfully to eliminate the RAF radar stations. This tactic was also an effort to draw the RAF into combat. However, the Germans consistently underestimated the strength and capability of the RAF. This led to a tactical change and the focus shifted to RAF aerodromes and stations. 11 Group bore the brunt of these air raids, the Germans using both high and low level attacks, trying to confuse ground defences.

The Battle of Britain Continued ...

The aim of gaining air superiority by reducing the effectiveness of Fighter Command on the ground came close to fruition. On 13 August the Luftwaffe launched a massive assault (Eagle Day or Adlertag). Although, by early September, these attacks almost brought Fighter Command to its knees, Dowding refused to withdraw his forces from the south and continued the fight. However, the Luftwaffe was also suffering heavy losses. The Ju 87 dive-bombers were withdrawn due to grievous punishment and other losses of aircrew and aircraft were mounting. Surviving RAF pilots were bailing out over friendly soil whereas surviving German aircrew ended up as prisoners of war. One RAF pilot admitted to being shot down five times. On each occasion he was able to bail out or crash land. Not all pilots were so lucky. Arthur Rose Price, the brother of film actor Dennis Price was posted to a fighter station in Kent. The day he arrived he was sent into action. He was killed over Dungeness and his luggage was still in his car unpacked. Aircrew from both sides were being lost in the English Channel.

The attacks on radar stations carried out on the 12 August were of limited effect. They were returned to operational status within a few hours. These attacks would have been more effective had they included infrastructure such as power stations and lines of communication. Adlertag began with attacks on coastal airfields such as Manston and Hawkinge. Over the week they moved inland and tried again unsuccessfully to disable the radar chain. 15 August was "The Greatest Day" when the Luftwaffe launched the largest number of sorties. Convinced that Fighter Command strength lay in the south, the Luftwaffe attacked in the north. Luftflotte 5, based in Denmark and Norway were to bomb British ports such as Hull and Liverpool plus other strategic targets. However, they met strong resistance from northern based RAF squadrons. The Heinkel 111 bombers were inadequately escorted for this mission by Messerschmitt Bf 110s and unescorted Junkers 88s attacked RAF Great Driffield. Heavy losses were suffered and many aircraft irreparably damaged. The Luftwaffe lost 75 aircraft, many bombs were dropped ineffectively, and Luftflotte 5 was so weakened it did not appear in strength again during the campaign.

"The Hardest Day" described 18 August when both sides suffered the greatest number of casualties. After this, operations were scaled back for a few days while the Luftwaffe recovered and considered its tactics. The vulnerability of the Ju 87 was again exposed by attacks from both Spitfires and Hurricanes and so the Stuka force was withdrawn. This put a strain on the German bomber force which would struggle to match the precision bombing capabilities of the Stukas. As mentioned earlier, the Bf 110s could not compete in a dogfight with Spitfires or Hurricanes. Their use was therefore scaled back to escort bombing missions which were beyond the effective range of Bf 109s.

The Battle of Britain Continued ...

In order to protect his bomber force, Göring now ordered his fighters to escort his bombers in close formations. This limited their ability to freely engage with the RAF. Luftflotte 2 would carry out the daylight raids with the support of fighters transferred from Luftflotte 3 whose bombers would concentrate on night time bombing. Attacks on radar chains were now seen as a waste of time because of the lack of success and were therefore stopped. At this stage German fighter pilots thought it a good idea to bring up British fighters so they would be able to destroy the RAF in the air. However, the RAF came to rely on "The Dowding System". Information from radar stations and the Observer Corps was relayed through Group headquarters and on to Sector stations. The Sector stations could, with reasonable accuracy, select and direct squadrons on to a course to intercept the "bandits". They also had control of the anti-aircraft batteries in their area. Gun crews could be ordered when or when not to fire. The success of this system made the RAF far more effective than the random sweeps of the enemy relying on luck to locate their quarry.

Throughout middle to late August many night time raids were carried out in an attempt to cripple aircraft production. Other industrial areas, including harbours, were attacked as far apart as Aberdeen, South Wales, Bristol and Portsmouth. Many raids were carried out on parts of London and the surrounding areas. It is thought that it was in response to civilian casualties that Churchill ordered RAF bombers to carry out a raid on Berlin. This in turn angered Hitler into directing his bombers to carry out attacks on British cities in order to break the will of the people. This tactical change gave Fighter Command breathing space to recover and regain its strength. On 23 August the Luftwaffe was ordered to relentlessly carry out attacks on RAF airfields and the aircraft industry. Most of the attacks were against key sector stations such as Biggin Hill, Hornchurch and several others in 11 Group's area.

Many RAF fighter pilots in the early days had come in from private schools or professional backgrounds. Now they were drawn from much further afield. Pilots were transferred from Fleet Air Arm fighters to RAF squadrons. Former Fairy Battle pilots were also brought in. In total nearly 3,000 RAF pilots served with Fighter Command throughout the battle. The RAF had a large number of trained pilots from the Dominions including Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians, South Africans and Rhodesians plus Free French and Belgians. Even a small number of Americans volunteered. Some Polish and Czechoslovakian squadrons had been held back because of a fear of communication problems. Now they were unleashed against the enemy with great effect. Their pre-war training in their native land had been intensive; but after the Nazi invasion they had a hatred of the Germans which drove their aggression to a level so far unseen. During the battle, 595 pilots from overseas took part.

Fighter Command came very close on occasions to losing the battle; but they only had one objective, the defence of the UK. Göring and Hitler could not, it seems, make up their minds as to the best way to win the battle. German tactical changes were made at crucial times which helped the RAF to maintain its effectiveness. During this time the Luftwaffe was bleeding pilots and air crew at a greater rate than the RAF, with many experienced aircrew being killed or captured.

The Battle of Britain Continued ...

Surviving RAF pilots went back into the fray and many replacements were being found. Aircraft production and repair in Britain was maintained despite enemy raids. By mid- September the Luftwaffe had failed to gain air superiority and winter was approaching. Operation Sealion was therefore dead in the water and Hitler's mind was turning to the Soviet Union. The night time "blitz" would continue, but the "Battle of Britain" was ending.

Combat fatigue was obviously a problem for both sides. At RAF fighter stations, the ring of the telephone in dispersal would be greeted by instant silence with all eyes staring at the offending instrument. Was it a call to scramble? Northern lad Leading Aircraftman Jack Taylor hardly spoke of his experiences at RAF Hornchurch other than to express his continued admiration for the young pilots who would race to their aircraft not knowing if they would return. The average age of a pilot was a mere twenty years. It is hardly surprising that the local pub became a refuge, especially when you were lamenting the loss of a dear friend. Pilots also bailed out suffering terrible injuries. It was said that the cockpit of a burning Hurricane could reach 300°C in 30 seconds. In 1941 plastic surgeon Archibald McIndoe carried out plastic surgery at Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, Sussex. The Guinea Pig Club was formed. Severely burned pilots underwent many operations for facial and hand reconstruction. Patients were allowed to wear their own clothes and go out whenever they wished. They were encouraged to rehydrate by drinking plenty of beer. Locals were encouraged to accept patients around the streets and pubs. East Grinstead became known as the non-staring town. Formed as a drinking club, it began with 39 members and by the end of the war the number had swelled to 649. With members from many participating countries, the club held a reunion every year. Due to dwindling numbers, the last meeting was held in 2007. The Germans were also suffering. The unsustainable losses put considerable stress on surviving crews. It became known to the Germans as "Channel sickness". The classic film "The Battle of Britain" records the moment when Göring asked the distinguished German ace, Adolf Galland, what he needed. His reply, "A squadron of Spitfires" did not go down well.

The figures for men and machines lost in the battle between July and October 1940 tell the story. Fighter Command lost 1,023 aircraft with Luftwaffe losses at 1,887. Fighter Command lost 544 pilots while Luftwaffe aircrew losses amounted to 2,600. After the battle had been won, Churchill used his word skills once more with his famous quote:-

"Never was so much owed to so many by so few."

As time moves on, the few get fewer. At the time of writing this piece, there are only five survivors from those young pilots remaining. Each year "Battle of Britain Day" is commemorated on 15th September or the third Sunday of the month. *Alan Pacey*

The Luftwaffe that attacked Russia was not the Luftwaffe of the Battle of Britain, the RAF had seen to that.

People in Wigan raised £7,886 (The target was £5,000) and bought a Spitfire which was named "Wigan and District".

Memories of a bomb dropping on Wigan

5th September 1940

“The church I attended, Greenough Street Independent Methodist, was bombed in the war and there were two miracles that night. At the end of the street, the local public house was full of men, enjoying a pint and we were in the church cellars playing table tennis. The table tennis tables were kept in the cellar because of the black out (there were no windows, so we could put the lights on) and because of the threat of bombing.

I can remember the caretaker telling us to go home, we wanted to stay longer, but he, I think, wanted to go home himself. He wouldn't let us stay, so off we went. I had been in the house for a few minutes when the largest deafening bang went off. The church had been hit, you could see the flames and smoke rising. If the caretaker hadn't sent us home, we would have been in the rubble and if the bomb had been dropped a little further up the road then all the men in the pub would have died.”

Joan Hurst, Wigan

“Below the flats where we lived in Scholes, was a disused store, once known as Fletchers Emporium and when war broke out the store cellar was designated as a shelter, accessed by service doors that opened out at street level. One night the sirens sounded, mam hustled me and my little brother Freddy out of bed. Air Raid Wardens ran up and down the stairs and pounded on doors shouting “Everybody out, into the shelter, get your gas masks on”. One warden grabbed Freddy and bundled him into a huge Mickey Mouse gas mask while mam helped put mine on. Then we all groped our way down the hallway, joined by other wardens helping Alice with her three small children. Down in the street the noise was deafening, sirens wailing, whistles blowing, wardens and police shouting orders above the din of the crowd swarming slowly into the shelter.

We joined the crush of people with the wardens carrying the young ones, when suddenly a bomb dropped. There was a dull thud and a loud explosion, a blast of warm air swept down the street, shattering windows and sweeping us off our feet. The store window blew out and shards of glass shot into and over the crowd. It was bedlam with everybody screaming and yelling and scrambling over those who fell. Mothers lost hold of their children and old folk were shoved aside as the crush of bodies surged forward in a blind panic to get under cover.

It was pitch dark until Alice switched on her flashlight “put that bloody light out” yelled the warden. “I'm looking for me slipper” whimpered Alice “sod your bloody slipper” he shouted, “Get down them bloody stairs”. The cellar was dimly lit, benches lined the walls, in a corner, behind a makeshift curtain, was a toilet. On the far side a kitchen area where volunteers handed out mugs of tea and came round with grey blankets. Red Cross nurses at a first aid station tended to the injured and helped mothers with babies. Old folk sat or lay on the benches, while others, like us, lay on the floor. /continued...

Memories of a bomb dropping on Wigan Continued.....

When the sirens faded away and all was quiet, we drifted off to sleep, while mam and Alice sat resting against a support beam watching over us. Suddenly we were awakened by a loud voice demanding "Who lives upstairs?" It was a bobby and he sounded mad. "We do" said Alice "why?" "Who left the tap running?" he snapped, taking out a notebook from his top pocket. "Oh, it's me" said mam "I was washing a few things out in the sink". "That's wasted water madam, there's a fine for that, what's your name?" Mam gave it. "Husband's name?" she gave that too. "Where is he?" Mam was annoyed, probably thinking about the fine she couldn't afford. "He's overseas in this bloody war" she snapped. "Nuff said" replied the bobby and flipped his notebook shut. He looked around at the sleeping children on the floor and murmured "My, my, just like babes in the wood".

The next morning we woke up to the wail of the 'All Clear sirens' and made our way upstairs to mop up a flood of water before breakfast.

Later on we walked up Scholes to see where the bomb dropped. Shopkeepers were sweeping up dust and broken glass. One man stood gazing at the gaping hole in his shop and called out to his neighbour "Well that's another one for glass works". "Aye, St. Helens will not be short of work if owd Hitler has owt to do wi' it" replied the man. This prompted me to ask mam "What's Saint got to do with a bad man like Hitler?"

It was the church at the top of Scholes that took a direct hit, three walls were left standing, the surrounding houses suffered little or no damage. Mam said it was a blessing, the walls took the brunt of it."

Elizabeth Rostron, now living in Canada

"One night a German bomber dropped a stack of bombs on St. Paul's graveyard in Goose Green. The Warden called in and the telephonist tried to ascertain if this was an exercise where-upon she was told in a loud voice "Nay missus this is a real un".

The next bomb to drop destroyed an Independent Methodist chapel in Greenough Street. I think the sirens went after the bomb and one of the volunteers who lived nearby dashed out to get on duty and ran right through the incident arriving at Report & Control with a black face and a very startled look!"

Joan Johnson from the Air Raid Precautions Report and Control Centre Wigan

Sinking of The Children's Ship 'City of Benares'

In June 1940 the Government founded the Children's Overseas Reception Board CORB, for the evacuation of children from Britain to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. These countries had promised help and households in each had offered to take in British children. British families had to weigh up the real dangers of bombings and invasion at home against the risk that ships leaving Britain were subject to U-boat threat. CORB received 210,000 applications for just 20,000 places. Families from areas deemed most at risk were prioritised. Children would have adult escorts (1 to 15 children); parents were not allowed to travel with their children under the scheme.

Children's evacuation ship 'City of Benares' left Liverpool for Canada on the 12th September 1940 and after 5 days believed to have passed beyond the range of U-Boat activity. The 90 child evacuees, (aged from 5 years), on board had undressed for bed for the first time that night since leaving Liverpool and their naval escort had departed earlier in the day. The ship was hit at 22:03 on the 17th September 1940. The ship sank fast, about thirty minutes after impact, and the crew struggled to safely launch the lifeboats in the middle of an Atlantic storm at night. Even those fortunate enough to find themselves in a lifeboat found their boats almost completely waterlogged. The lifeboats' floatation allowed them to remain afloat even after flooding, but the occupants sat in icy water and in danger of floating out of the boat. Royal Navy Destroyer HMS Hurricane did not arrive until the following afternoon. Sadly, after hours in dreadful conditions, many of the survivors of the attack had died from exposure. Hardest hit were the evacuee children, of whom the eventual death toll was 77 of the 90 on board.

There was universal praise for all of the children's escorts, who devoted themselves to the children's care during the voyage and after the torpedo hit. One of these escorts was 23 year old Theology student, Michael Rennie, a keen sportsman, newly graduated from Keble College Oxford. He was hoping to follow his father into the Church. Michael was extremely popular with the children. A surviving child recalled that after the sinking: "...he dived in again and again to rescue them [the children]...the other men warned him repeatedly not to do so as he would get exhausted; but he said 'There are still children in the water, and I must get them'". Sadly his heroic efforts took their toll and he died through exhaustion and exposure. Just two of the children in his lifeboat survived, but in many other boats none survived at all. The master, the commodore, 3 staff members, 121 crew and 134 passengers, including 77 children, were lost. Philip, aged 8 years, son of Richard and Ethel Mollard of Liverpool was one of those who died. Two year old John Croasdaile together with his mother Florence and sister Patricia from Southampton died. After this tragedy no more children were evacuated by ship.

Isabel aged 6 years and Winifred Morris aged 8 years had tickets to go on this ship to Canada, but were unable to go. *Dora Watson*

170,000 children were evacuated to the British Dominions or the US during World War II.

RESISTANCE TO GERMAN OCCUPATION

The Netherlands - Holland

The Netherlands was invaded in May 1940 and 2,000 Dutch soldiers died fighting the Nazis as well as over 800 civilians in Rotterdam. Hitler had ordered Rotterdam to be destroyed and 25,000 homes were flattened in February 1941, the majority of Dutch Jews were deported to concentration and extermination camps. Dutch communists, social democrats and Catholics started the Resistance movement and held the first general strike against the occupying forces – the only such strike in Nazi-occupied Europe. Unarmed crowds were fired upon and many people taken prisoner, but this made the resistance against German occupation even stronger. The Resistance movement involved counter-intelligence, sabotage and communications networks – ration cards and money were forged, underground newspapers published, intelligence collected, telephone lines and railways sabotaged. The country's terrain with a lack of wilderness made it very difficult to conceal illicit activities. Many civilians between 18 and 45 years were forced to work in German factories and this gave the opportunity for sabotage of goods for the war effort – a very dangerous activity for those carrying it out.

The failure of Operation Market Garden to seize the bridge across the Rhine at Arnhem halted the Allies liberation of the Netherlands. From November 1944 the Dutch people were subjected to starvation tactics by the Germans in the cities of the Western Netherlands. Food stocks soon ran out with the adult rations being below 1,000 calories per day and by the end of February 1945 down to 580 calories. The winter of 44/45 brought the 'Hongerwinter'. Canals and rivers froze, denying transport of food. At least 18,000 Dutch people died from malnutrition between late 1944 and liberation in May 1945.

It is estimated that 300,000 people, many of them Allied airmen, were hidden and helped by the Dutch resistance in the autumn of 1944. Harsh reprisals followed resistance attacks – one in the village of Putten involved an attack on German troops. This led to much of the town being destroyed and seven people shot. The entire male population were deported to forced labour camps and out of 550 men only 48 survived.

Operation Manna on 29th April 1945 when RAF Lancasters dropped 535 tons of food at 5 Dutch locations, followed by 1,021 tons on the 30th. On 1st May until 8th May, the RAF dropped a further 5586 tons of food. The American operation, "Chowhound", from 1st to 7th May delivered 3,770 tons of food by B17's onto 10 Dutch drop zones in 2,189 sorties. In total, almost 11,000 tons of food was dropped in 5,391 successful sorties, but 3 B17s and 1 Lancaster were lost in accidents, which caused the death of 12 American crewmen.

The Netherlands were liberated on May 5th 1945 and Liberation Day is still celebrated every year on this day.

France

Germany invaded France in May 1940 and the Vichy Government led by Marshal Petain collaborated with the Germans, surrendering on the 22nd June 1940. French Resistance began immediately and soon became organised supported with weapons and information from Britain through the Special Operations Executive. Leaflets against the Nazis were printed and distributed, communication lines cut and German trains carrying equipment and supplies were sabotaged. In June 1941, all the communist groups within France joined forces to create one group thus making it a far more potent force. To fight back against the Resistance movement the German S.S. tortured many suspected resistance members either killing them or sending them to concentration camps. Many Allied soldiers and airmen were helped to escape and Jewish people hidden from the Nazis. By the Spring of 1944 there were 60 intelligence cells whose task was to collect intelligence as opposed to carrying out acts of sabotage. This intelligence gathering was vital in the build-up to D. Day and information passed on by resistance radio operators – they were said to have an average life expectancy of just 6 months. There were 220,000 officially recognised members of the French Resistance. Retaliation by the Nazis against resistance activities was often brutal – on occasions entire villages would be totally destroyed as a deterrent. The village of Oradour-sur-Glane was wiped out by a Waffen SS Company on the 10th June 1944 and its 642 inhabitants, including women and children massacred. The ruined village of Oradour remains as a memorial to all those who died.

Resistance fighting climaxed on 22 Aug. 1,500 resistance fighters lost their lives before Paris was liberated on 25th August 1944. Three days later, de Gaulle called for the disbanding of resistance groups and for them to join the new French Army under his direct control. In October 1944 Britain, United States and the Soviet Union officially recognised de Gaulle's regime as the Provisional Government of the French Republic. The Vichy State government fled into exile in Western Germany and at the end of the war Marshall Petain stood trial and was condemned to death, later commuted to life imprisonment.

"I visited the village of Oradour sur Glane and was told that six people survived and this is their story: The women and children were locked in the church and the village was looted. The men were led to six barns and sheds, where machine guns were already in place. The SS men then began shooting, aiming for their legs, when victims were unable to move, the SS men covered them with fuel and set the barns on fire. Only six men managed to escape. One of them was later seen walking down a road and was shot dead. In all 190 Frenchmen died.

The SS men next proceeded to the church and placed an incendiary device beside it. When it was ignited, women and children tried to escape through the doors and windows, only to be met with machine-gun fire. 247 women and 205 children died in the attack. The only survivor was 47-year-old Marguerite Rouffanche. She escaped through a rear window, followed by a young woman and child. All three were shot, two of them fatally. Rouffanche crawled to some pea bushes and remained hidden until she was found and rescued the next morning." Pat Jackman

Other Resistance Groups

There were resistance movements in every occupied country, notably, Poland, Yugoslavia, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, Greece, Albania, Czechoslovakia, China. The resistance covered a variety of means, from non-cooperation to spreading propaganda to hiding crashed aircrew and sabotage.

Norway

The first mass outbreak of civil disobedience occurred in the autumn of 1940, when students of Oslo University began to wear paper clips on their lapels to demonstrate their resistance to the German occupiers and their Norwegian collaborators. A seemingly innocuous item, the paper clip was a symbol of solidarity and unity ("we are bound together"), implying resistance. The wearing of paper clips was outlawed and could lead to arrest and punishment.

Vidkun Quisling founded the Norwegian fascist party and became Prime Minister of Norway under German occupation. At the end of the war he was tried and executed by firing squad. The word quisling is used for traitor or collaborator in many languages. The communist Osvald Group was the leading sabotage organisation in Norway during most of World War II. One of the major successes of the resistance was the crippling of the German nuclear Programme through the destruction of the heavy water plants. During the war years, the resistance movement in occupied Norway had 1,433 members killed, 255 were women.

One of the worst German atrocities in Norway was on 30th April 1942. As a reprisal for the death of two German Gestapo officers, all men in the village of Telavag were executed except for 72 who were deported and 31 of them were murdered in captivity. Women and children were imprisoned for two years. 18 Norwegians held at an internment camp were executed.

Information from a visit to the Norwegian Resistance Museum, Oslo



This was a mock execution in October 1944. They were attempting to get the resistance fighter, Georges Blind, to talk – this failed as Georges did not divulge any information. They placed him at the corner of the building rather than against a flat wall. This must have been to prevent

ricochet injuries to the firing squad members. This was a mock execution, but it was probable that they used the same site for real executions. Georges Blind was eventually sent to a concentration camp, where he was to be executed on arrival, he died sometime in late November 1944.

THE LIVERPOOL BLITZ TOLL 1940

	People killed	Seriously Injured
AUGUST	69	106
SEPTEMBER	277	484
OCTOBER	136	67
NOVEMBER	316	202
DECEMBER	702	671

MANCHESTER BLITZ

Manchester had 7 air raids – including an Old People’s home at Hope Hospital with one woman killed and 3 injured. Two people were killed and 12 seriously wounded in Pendleton.

In the late afternoons the people of Manchester and Liverpool went to the air raid shelters and awaited the nightly bombing raids. Workers joined them when they finished work.

DECEMBER 22nd, 23rd, 24th – Very heavy bombing in Manchester

Manchester Cathedral, The Shambles and Manchester city centre badly damaged by bombs.

On 22nd December 1940 during a heavy air raid on Manchester the Cathedral was bombed. The Lady Chapel, the Ely Chapel and much of the regimental chapel were destroyed.

Harold Appleyard from Canada collected fragments from the windows of 125 British churches/cathedrals and some from the Manchester Cathedral. The fragments were taken to Canada and made into 4 memorial windows, one of these is in Christchurch, Meaford, Ontario.



Manchester Cathedral bombed



Manchester Royal Infirmary bombed October 1940

A total of 576 people were killed and over 1800 people injured in the Manchester Blitz.

Liverpool Air Raid Shelter; bombed 1940

Durning Street Shelter

An estimated 300 people were sheltering in the basement of the three-storey Ernest Brown Junior Instructional College on Durning Street when it took a direct hit from a parachute mine. on the night of 29th November 1940. As well as local residents, workers from nearby factories and passengers who had left trams during the air raid sheltered here.

The bombed building crumpled into the shelter with the college furnaces exploding and people scalded by boiling water and steam. Burst gas pipes were set alight while above the basement fire raged amidst the bombed out building.

Wardens, firemen and volunteers worked tirelessly to recover survivors and it took two days to pull the bodies out from the shelter. 166 bodies were recovered. Finally, with the fear of disease, body parts that had not been recovered were covered with lime and the basement was sealed. During the 8 hours bombing raid 2,000 people were made homeless in the neighbouring Picton area.

Joe Lucas was just four years old at the time of the raid. He had been due to spend the night in the shelter alongside his brothers and sisters, but was kept away due to a bout of whooping cough. His brothers Frankie, nine, and Georgie, 11, and sisters, Winifred, seven, and Florence, 17 died in the shelter.

Bentinck Street, Vauxhall Railway Arches Shelter

On the night of 20th December 1940 the air raid sirens went off and people crowded into 5 railway arches on Bentinck Street used as unofficial shelters. The area was hit hard that night and sadly the shelter took a direct hit resulting in the collapse of the arches. Many people were trapped beneath the rubble and concrete blocks.

The work of rescue was exceptionally difficult, since the blocks of concrete could not be moved. After many days, when the work was complete, 42 bodies had been found.



Blackstock Street, Vauxhall Road Shelter

On 21st December 1940 up to 200 people were sheltering in Blackstock Street shelter. The names of 72 people killed including a 5 month old baby and 3 year old twins are on a memorial erected by the community in Blackstock Street. Billy Bellis was rescued from the rubble by his father, but his mother Sarah, 36, sisters Catherine, 14, Joan, 7, Patricia, 4, twins, Robert and Cecilia, 3, and baby Edward 6 months all died. Billy was 11 years old.

This is Billy looking at the memorial to those who died.

Empress of Britain sunk 28th October 1940

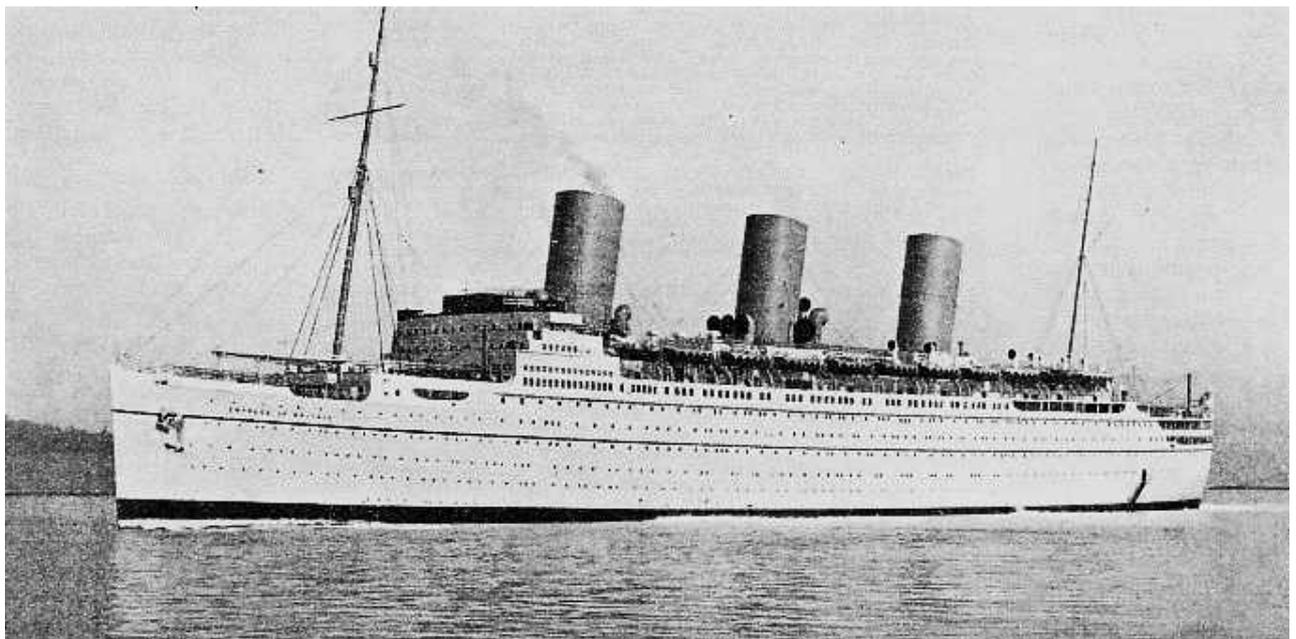
On 26th October 1940, RMS Empress of Britain was bombed in the Atlantic by a German plane and sank about 70 miles off County Donegal, Ireland. After the ship had been set on fire, the German plane machine-gunned those on board.

The German submarine U-32 began to shadow the slow moving convoy and fired three torpedoes of which two hit the target. RMS Empress of Britain began to take water and list. The ropes were loosed, the remaining crew removed and on the morning of October 28, 1940 she sunk north west of Bloody Foreland in County Donegal. All in all, 25 crew members and 20 passengers died in the two attacks.

The Empress of Britain was the largest ship sunk by a U-boat during the Second World War, 643 passengers and crew, 598 rescued

There have been rumours that the Empress carried gold as was the case with many ships traveling at that time towards America. The rumours were probably true. However, when the wreck was eventually discovered and explored in 1995, there was no gold in the bullion room. Whatever gold might have been on board, it would surely have been removed in the time between the initial bombing attack and the sinking of the ship two days later.

Mr Cyril Livesey, 35 years old from Wallgate, Wigan was a member of the crew on board the Empress of Britain. Cyril survived in a lifeboat for many hours until rescued.



Empress of Britain

Memories of 1940 and Rationing

"I was born in 1935 and lived in Fletchers Flats, Scholes. Although I was young when the war started, I remember most things in vivid detail. Like being hushed when the news came on the wireless, father polishing boots and whitening spats, talking about his khakis and the Drill Hall, then he was gone. Brass bands and soldiers marching down the main road, as crowds clapped and called out to them.

I remember a train ride to Rhyl, where it stopped in the countryside by a field full of tents and soldiers ran to greet us. This family reunion lasted an hour or so, then we had to leave. Soldiers and wives clung to each other and children wept and wailed as we boarded the train. Soldiers were ordered to stand to attention, but when the train pulled away, they broke rank and ran alongside shouting and waving their last goodbyes.

We had identity cards and ration books, gasmasks and a list of instructions regarding air raids. We taped the windows and added blackout blinds. At St. George's school we practised air raid drills and I remember the terror of being accidentally locked in the classroom when the sirens did go off. After this, head counts were done and all doors were left unlocked.

When our neighbour, Pete, was called up, it left us with no men in the flats. At night time tramps prowled the hallways, knocking on doors and sleeping in an empty upstairs flat. We put rows of empty bottles on the stairs and in the night we would hear the clinking of tumbling bottles and sounds of running feet, eventually we got a dog." *Elizabeth Rostron, Ontario, born 1935 in Scholes, Wigan*

"I was a child of 5 years in 1940 so I don't remember much about when the war began or why. In those early years I was taken into Manchester by my grandmother. On one of those mornings near Christmas 1940 it was after the Germans had bombed the city. I remember all the bombed-out buildings, roads with big holes and burning rubble everywhere.

The skies at that time seemed to be full of aircraft. My mum got to know the sounds of the German planes going over so we knew when the next sirens would go off.

About that time I started school and we were all issued with gas masks and identity cards. We had to carry these at all times, if we went to school without them, we were sent home. Luckily we lived in a very quiet place and did not see any more of bombing. I remember every evening the sirens going off and we all had to go into the air-raid shelters with the rest of the people in our street. It was a happy atmosphere and all the people shared their food. If the sirens went during the day while we were at school, we all had to file into school air-raid shelters. We all thought it was very amusing.

We seemed to have a very happy childhood, we didn't know anything different. I can recall everything being rationed, we had a Ration Book each, oatmeal coloured for adults, blue for school children and green for babies. If you had a child under five, you got rations of fruit, but if you were over that age, you got none. I and many other children hardly knew what fruit was, I never had a banana until I was eleven." *Molly Blay, Wigan.*

Memories of 1940 and Rationing

“The Court Hall in King Street, Wigan was made into a British Restaurant and you could get a 3 course meal for 1/- (one shilling). In the Fish and chip shops a bag of chips cost 3d (old pence). Fish and chips were not rationed, but were sold on a first come first served basis, many times we could only get chips and peas. Not every food was rationed, you could get liver and other offal, but again on a first come first served basis. Bread was a funny colour, not white and not brown.

One time Canada sent us all a present of drinking chocolate and all the children were given a 1-lb (500g) bag each. We didn't know what to do with it, then all the children started coming into school with small tins of the chocolate powder and eating it like kali (sherbert).” *Theresa Mather, Wigan, born 1932*



A British Restaurant

F. W. WOOLWORTH & CO. LTD.

Bank Hey Street and Promenade, Blackpool

Aug. 4, 1939

LUNCHEON MENU

Served 11-30 a.m. to 2-30 p.m.

SOUPS

Cream of Tomato and Roll 3d. Thick Vegetable 3d.

FISH

TO-DAY WE RECOMMEND
Grilled Cod Steak & Parsley Butter 6d.

Fried Fillet of Cod 6d.	Crab Salad 6d.
Fried Fishcakes (2) and Chipped Potatoes 6d.	Salmon Salad 6d.
Boiled Salmon and Parsley Sauce 6d.	Fried Fillet Pilchard 6d.

ENTREE

TO-DAYS SUGGESTION
English Lamb Stew 6d.

Beef or Pork Pie and Chipped Potatoes 6d.	English Beef Steak & Kidney Pie 6d.
Fried Lamb's Liver, Bacon and Onions 6d.	Grilled Pork Sausage and Tomatoes 6d.
English Lamb Stew 6d.	Cottage Pie and Peas 6d.
	Braised Egg, Steak and Carrots 6d.

JOINTS

YOUR LUNCH TO-DAY
Roast Ribs of English Beef & Yorkshire Pudding 6d.

ROAST RIBS OF BEEF (National Mark) and Yorkshire Pudding 6d.
Roast English Lamb and Mint Sauce 6d.

VEGETABLES

Dressed Spring Cabbage 3d.	Baked Beans 3d.
Potatoes Mashed, Boiled, Baked or Chipped 3d.	Green Peas 3d.
	Butter Beans 3d.
	Mashed Carrots and Turnips 3d.

HOT SWEETS

TO DAY'S SWEET
Black Cap Pudding & Custard Sauce 3d.

Fresh Strawberries and Ice Cream 6d.

Baked Bread and Butter Pudding 3d.	Fresh Plum Tart & Custard Sauce 3d.
Rice Pudding 3d.	Fresh Bilberry Tart, Custard Sauce 3d.
Typical Baking 3d.	Red Currant Tart and Custard 3d.
Cottage Pudding and Custard Sauce 3d.	Apple Tart, Custard Sauce 3d.

TEA MENU

Served 2-30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

BEVERAGES

Tea 2d. and 3d.	Coffee 2d. and 3d.
Horlick's Malted Milk 4d.	Hot Milk 3d.
Bovril and Biscuit 3d.	Cold Milk 3d.
Oatmeal 3d.	Minerals (Various) 5d.

FISH

YOUR TEA TO-DAY
Fried Fresh Fillet of Codling 6d.

Fish Cakes (2) and Chipped Potatoes 6d.	Fried Fillet of Whiting 6d.
Salmon Cutlet and Green 6d.	Fried Fillet of Plaice 6d.
	Fried Fillet of Codling 6d.

GRILLS AND SAVOURIES

WE RECOMMEND
Grilled English Lamb Chop 6d.

Grilled Ham 6d.	Hot Meat or Pork Pie & Chips 6d.
Grilled Pork Sausage (2) 6d.	Sausage Roll and Peas 6d.
Spaghetti and Fried Egg 6d.	Cottage Pie and Tomato 6d.
Welsh Rarebit 6d.	Savoury Rissole and Peas 6d.
Grilled English Lamb Chop 6d.	Fried Fresh Egg 3d.

SUNDRIES AND SWEETS

FOR YOUR SWEET
Fresh Cream Layer Cake 3d.

Egg Custard Flan 3d.	Fruit Salad 6d.
Various Pastries 2d.	White Bread and Butter 3d.
Fruit Fills and Cream 3d.	Brown Bread and Butter 2d.
Blanc Manger 3d.	Poll and Butter 2d.
Fresh Fruit Tart or Flan 3d.	Currant Bread and Butter 2d.
Cream Layer Cake 3d.	Biscuits, Butter, Cheese 3d.

ICIS—Strawberry or Vanilla 3d.

COLD BUFFET

SERVED ICE COLD
Cold Salmon, Lettuce and Cucumber 6d.

Lobster Salad 6d.	Crab Salad 6d.
Hot Mayonnaise 6d.	Spading Salad 6d.
Sea Pie and Salad 6d.	Tomato Salad 6d.
Cold Roast English Beef 6d.	Cx Tongue 6d.
Cold Roast English Lamb 6d.	Cold Ham 6d.

All Popular Brands of CIGARETTES may be obtained at the Kiosk.

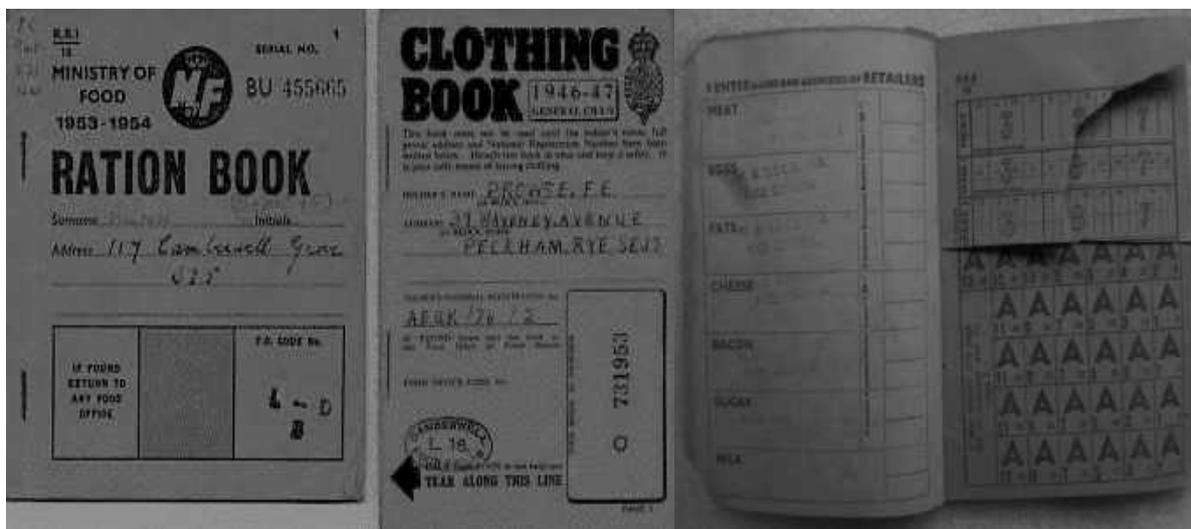
Rationing in World War II



Everyone was issued with ration books and you had to register at your chosen grocers, butchers, greengrocers, this meant you couldn't shop around. Weekly food rations per person were:

- Butter 2 ounces
- Margarine 4 ounces
- Bacon and Ham 4 ounces
- Sugar 8 ounces
- Meat to the value of 1s 2d
- Milk 3 pints
- Cheese 2 ounces
- 1 fresh egg and a ¼ of a packet of dried eggs
- Tea 2 ounces
- Jam 2 ounces
- Sweets 3 ounces

Rationing in Great Britain lasted 14 years. Clothes rationing finished in 1949 and food rationing finished in 1954, when meat and sweets came off ration.



Rationing

The Black Market came about in response to rationing. Those who had the money could buy anything, albeit illegally, this included food, clothing and petrol. Parliament introduced fines of up to £500 for those convicted of black marketeering.

“Under the counter” meant that a shop really did have certain goods without rations, but only if you had the means to purchase them.



Latimer's Grocery Shop 1940's

PRICES OF FOOD and some other items in the 1940's

Old Money – s = shilling, one shilling was 12 old pence (12d) 20 shillings = £1.
 lb = pound in weight. 16 ounces to one pound.

Porridge Oats	3½d (1 1/2p)	per lb
Meat (average price)	1s.2d (6p)	per lb
Potatoes	7d (3p)	for 7 lbs
Sugar	4d (1½p)	per lb
Cheese	1s 1d (5½p)	per lb
Bacon	1s 10½d (9p)	per lb
Bread	9d (4p)	per 4lb loaf
Eggs	2s (10p)	per dozen (12)
Milk	9d (4p)	per quart or 2 pints
Bournville cocoa	9½d (4p)	per 8 ounces
Cadbury's Dairy Milk	9d (4p)	per 4 ounces
Bovril	1s 4d (6½p)	8 ounce jar
Fairy Soap	6½d (2½p)	per tablet
Persil	4d (1½p)	per small packet
Vim	6d (2½p)	per cannister
Cigarettes	9d (4p)	packet of 10
Shirt with spare collar	6s 11d (35p)	
Flannel trousers	15s 9d (78p)	
Pair of all leather shoes	13s 9d (68p)	
Man's Lined raincoat	£1. 1s (£1.05)	
A small bungalow	£250	
10 hp Vauxhall saloon car	£169.	
Rent of 3 bedroomed house	£1 per week	

The Scottish Motor Traction Co Ltd advised that the fare from Glasgow to London was £1/10/- (£1.50p) and the return fare was £2/10/- (£2.50p).

120 Wills 'Gold Flake' cigarettes could be sent to the British Forces in France for 3/9 (18½p).

Seats in London's 'His Majesty's Theatre' to see Stanley Lupino, Florence Desmond & Sally Gray in 'Funny Side Up' cost from 1/6 to 10/6 (7½p to 52½p).

Wages

British Army private – 2s to 5 shillings a day - 14s to £1.15 shillings a week.

Average weekly wage of USA army private serving in UK = £9

Women in domestic service average weekly wage 5 shillings

Average weekly wage for skilled factory workers = men £3.10s women £2.15s

School leaving age 1940 to 1946 was 14 years, in 1947 this was raised to 15 years.

In 1940 I was a schoolboy and I remember going to the butcher's in Scholes at 8 am to queue and buy a half-shoulder of lamb, this cost 2s and 6d. This would give us many meals in the week. Besides the ration book, we had to show our identity card. *Eric Watson*

Women at War

The majority of men were called upon to fight in the armed forces. This created a vast labour shortage and in December 1941, The 'National Service Act' was passed by Parliament. All unmarried women between the ages of 20-30 were called up, later this was also extended to include married women. Women with young children and those that were pregnant were exempt. The United Kingdom was the first country to implement conscription for women. By mid-1943, almost 90 per cent of single women and 80 per cent of married women were working in factories, on the land or in the armed forces.

There were over 640,000 women in the armed forces, including The Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), plus many more who flew unarmed aircraft, drove ambulances, served as nurses and worked behind enemy lines in the European resistance in the Special Operations Executive. The most notable member of the ATS during the Second World War was the then Princess Elizabeth. In 1944 she trained as a driver and mechanic and reached the rank of Junior Commander.

Women could choose from: Women's Royal Naval Service; Women's Auxiliary Air Force; Women's Voluntary Service; Women's Land Army; Entertainment National Service Association; Auxiliary Territorial Service; Women's Timber Corps. Women were on an equal footing with the men, (apart from pay - they received 2/3rds of the male pay).

A lot of the work was centred on the war effort, munitions, tank and aircraft factories. Women were called upon to drive trains, operate anti-aircraft guns, civil defence, nursing, transport and other key occupations. Most of this had been seen as 'men's work' prior to the war.

The Women's Land Army filled the vacancies left by the men going to war, over 45,000 men had left the agriculture industry by mid-1940. This coupled with the fact that crop production increased by 50% meant that many of the women often worked 14-hour days. More than 80,000 women joined the Land Army, they would be involved in all aspects of farm work.

In 1939 some women joined the RAF Air Transport Auxiliary, their flying duties consisted of ferrying aircraft from factory airstrips to RAF bases, many times flying across the Atlantic. Amy Johnson, the pioneer aviator was on one of these routine flights on January 5, 1941, when she crashed into the Thames estuary and was drowned. A tragic and early end to the life of Britain's most famous woman pilot.

Women were also recruited for Special Operations and Violette Szabo joined Special Operations Executive after her French husband was killed. She was captured in June 1944, tortured and sent to Ravensbruck Concentration camp in Germany. She was shot in the head on 5th February 1945 aged 25 years. The SOE had fifty five female agents of which 13 were killed in action, 12 executed, 1 died from typhus and 1 died from meningitis.

All the operatives who died whether in camps, by execution or otherwise were listed as killed in action.

THE WORKING WOMEN OF WW2

Written by Neve Walsh

With thousands of men gone to serve in the armed forces, the women of Britain adopted a working role to keep the country running and, by 1943 almost half a million women were working. These jobs include the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), Air Transport Auxiliary, Civil Nursing Reserve and First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY). Alongside these jobs women also played a vital role on the home front as they fought a constant battle of rationing, reusing, recycling, cultivating foods in garden, raising children with no father. In 1941 it became compulsory for women aged between 18 and 60 to register for war work. While many women worked, for pregnant women and women with children under 14 work this was not compulsory however many women chose to volunteer anyway. It was a constant struggle as the women of this time balanced their work with raising their families.



When war broke out in 1939 the RAF was in desperate need of increasing numbers of planes and pilots. Despite this, they still refused for any pilots to be female. However, thanks to Pauline Gower—an MP's daughter and experienced commercial pilot – female pilots were allowed to fly and the Air Transport Auxiliary was formed. These women would fly new fighting machines from factories to the RAF airfields and in January 1940, 8 female pilots flew open-cockpit training planes in harsh, winter conditions from Hatfield up to Scotland. This was the start of a group of women who would eventually grow to 168 in total and would be at the control of fighter planes and engine bombers. (Pauline Gower in her plane)



Among these pilots includes women like Mary Ellis and Amy Johnson, who were experienced commercial pilots, became war pilots when the war broke out. Mary Ellis joined the ATA in 1941 and during her 4 years of service she flew around 1,000 planes, including 400 Spitfires and 47 Wellington bombers. When the war finished, Ellis even went on to continue her flying career by managing Sandown Airport until 1970. She died in 2018 and the head of the RAF described it as “another terrible loss”.



Eleanor Wadsworth, who lives in Bury St Edmunds, is now the only surviving British female pilot from World War 2.

continued.....

The Working Women of World War Two continued.....



Amy Johnson was also an experienced commercial pilot and even visited Wigan before the war to lecture on one of her most famous flights to Australia. She, like Ellis, also joined the ATA and she rose to the status of First Officer during her time. However, in 1941 while flying an Airspeed Oxford from Prestwick to RAF Kidlington Amy Johnson went off course due to bad weather conditions and in the end had to bail from the aircraft after running out of fuel. A convoy of wartime vessels spotted Johnson's parachute coming down and saw her alive in the water calling for help. A ship was navigated in a rescue attempt however Johnson's body was lost under the ship. The following poem was written about Amy Johnson's death and describes the awful loss of such an experienced pilot:

Death of AMY JOHNSON by Harry Hargreaves

When the last all clear is sounded over
these ravaged lands, and the victory parades
follow the sound of marching bands,
You will not be there.

You will be lying here asleep, in England's
all protecting keep, and the ever moving
waves will wash gently o'er your grave.

In such honourable company.

In the years that follow, on each Remembrance Day,
the mourning multitudes will stand silently to pray,

The plaintive notes of the last post will
echo through the land, and the waves will
sound your threnody over the golden sand.

Then you will be there.

The Civil Nursing Reserve allowed women as young as 17 to join up and their intention was to support civilian hospitals and first aid posts. Some women who joined were already trained to be nurses however many women had no training whatsoever and after just 2 lectures they had to begin work on the wards. The other nursing division was the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) who were chiefly a service of ambulance drivers. However, in the second world war, women in this division moved abroad to serve as nurses and set up hospitals like, the nurses in Calais who set up a hospital based in 2 old schools with only 100 beds. Many of the thousands of female FANY members were also recruited for special missions and espionage.



This includes women like Madame Therese Gondrée of Café Gondrée who was both a nurse and a member of the French Resistance. Madame Gondrée even helped to perform an operation on my Great Grandad Albert Knott when he was wounded during the No. 3 Commando D-Day at Pegasus Bridge. Just before D-Day Madame Gondrée was arrested and taken to Gestapo Headquarters for questioning. Fortunately, she was released (she had hidden

RAF men in the basement of her café).

continued.....

The Working Women of World War Two continued.....

During the War women often worked in factories too helping to manufacture and pack supplies like munitions, tanks and parachutes. Women in munition factories were known as 'Canary Girls' and around 950,000 women worked in this industry. Munitions work is described as well-paid but involving long hours. There was also a serious risk to the lives of the women as they worked with dangerous machinery and highly explosive material. In 1944, there was a very serious incident at a factory in Kirkby, Lancashire when one of the mines exploded setting off multiple others. There were 19 women working in the building, filling trays of anti-tank mine fuses when one exploded. The girl who was working on that tray was instantly killed and although the two females behind her were partly shielded by her body they too suffered injuries, one fatally.

The Chute Girls (as the parachute girls were known as) had a very difficult job as they battled the complicated contraptions of silk and leather. It was vital that the parachutes were packed correctly because folding the parachutes correctly meant the difference between life and death for a man falling from the sky. My Great Grandma Eileen was a Chute Girl herself folding parachutes for soldiers like her future husband (Great Grandad Albert Knott) who would parachute from the sky during a commando operation.

When referring to their work in the war many women claimed there was nothing special about them and that they were just 'doing their bit' for their country. However these modest women faced danger, sudden death, serious injury or bereavement on an almost daily basis. These women are the people who kept the country running during World War 2 and in 2005 Queen Elizabeth II revealed a monument on Whitehall in London commemorating the often dangerous work these strong, powerful women completed.

I personally am extremely proud to learn of the incredible work of women like my Great Grandma Eileen, Madame Therese Gondrée and Amy Johnson who risked and gave their lives for their country during the war and I believe these women deserve recognition for this vital work. *Written By Neve Walsh*



Monument in Whitehall, London

Memories of Women at War

“My Auntie said that she used to work in Munitions during and up to the end of the Second World War.

She said that in her home they had blackout curtains on the windows. Everyone had Identity Cards to get from place to place.

Auntie said that during the Second World War, all people were given ration books. These were used to buy their food and clothes, you paid for what you bought and the shopkeeper took the stamps from the ration book.

When the sirens went off, Auntie said that everyone went off running to the air raid shelters.” *Phillip Rogers, Golborne, Wigan*

“Dad went into the army at the start of the war. My mother took a job in the Beech Hill ammunitions factory making casings for bombs. My grandparents looked after me while mother was at work.”

Theresa Mather, Wigan

“When I became 18 years I received my conscription papers which meant I had to join the Forces or do war work. I became a conductress on the buses.

Even during the Liverpool Blitz the buses still ran and I had to walk in front of the bus to tell the driver where the pot holes were and if there was any debris or unexploded bombs for him to avoid. At the end of the war the men came back and I lost my job.” *Lilian Berry*

“My mum, Eileen Gribbin, worked in the Littlewood’s Parachute Factory in Liverpool folding parachutes which was very precise work. The factory managed to produce over 5 million parachutes for the war. During a few Commando operations my dad used some of these parachutes. “

“Mam had to work, she couldn’t manage on the Government grant, even so she wasn’t allowed to work overtime, only the men could. Like many other kids whose mother worked during the war, I wore the door key on a string around my neck. We got ourselves off to school, went to the shop for pies and a bottle of pop for our dinner. After school we stayed indoors ‘till mam came home. I suppose we were the first generation of latchkey kids, but I never heard the term until after the war and I didn’t like it.”

Elizabeth Rostron, Wigan now living in Canada

Memories of Women at War

“My Auntie Kitty lived in Liverpool and when she was 18 years old she was sent to Bedford in the Land Army.

The work was very hard and throughout her life she suffered with painful joints. She was paid £2. 15s for working a 60-hour week. Out of that she had to pay £1. 8s to the farmer for her keep.”

Auntie Kitty met and fell in love with a Polish soldier Michael Janowski, they married and they stayed in Bedford.

LAND GIRL

For Kitty Knott Janowski, landgirl from Knotty Ash

For her country she did a trade –
The Jam Butty Mines for the Welsh countryside
Drawing down the moor from an indigo sky, she took up arms
Threshing, hacking, thrashing the corn
The daily Pamplona encierro in the bull field and climbing mountains of hay
To rival Snowdonia, whilst nursing a pitch-fork as sharp as her wit.
Finding strength and sense from the gut she had to find newborn lambs lost
In the night – the invisible pelt of hail and rain, only a spark
Of light from above to guide
Panicked bleating thundered in her ear her staff dowsing for tender life
Ready to hook innocence by the neck through a salty blur of relief
No time for weeping she said, no time to be unhappy
So she sang, made hay and danced
Through a busy life of doing nothing, working the whole day through.
For Grandma, Love from Yvette xxx



Auntie Kitty with the medal she finally received in 2008 and (Front middle) in the Land Army .

Air Raid Precautions Report and Control Centre Wigan

“We in Wigan were very fortunate in that we did not suffer from many air raids. Nevertheless precautions had to be taken such as Wardens, Demolition, First Aid etc. These services were controlled from the Report and Control Centre situated underneath the Municipal Buildings. This Centre was ‘manned’ by three shifts 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. and 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. The personnel consisted of telephonists, shorthand-typists and volunteers, mostly from Local Government offices who took turns on the night shift and were ‘called out’ on sirens. Exercises took place, the Wardens called in and the telephonist took down the message after ascertaining that this was an exercise!

We were expected to go to the office the following day, so we got very little sleep during this time, but at least our homes were safe.

As a matter of interest, the man in charge of Demolition was Mr. McKellan, Deputy Engineer and Sir Ian McKellan’s father.” *Joan Johnson, Wigan*



Greenhough Street Methodist Church, Wigan - bombed

Horwich Locomotive Works and the Matilda Tank

Horwich Locomotive Works, near Bolton, opened in 1887 and soon became famous for building a range of steam locomotive, producing its 1,000th engine by 1907. During World War Two the role of the works changed and many thousands of shells and parts for guns and aircraft were produced. Between May 1942 and April 1943 2 million shells were produced. Most importantly, the skilled workers built tanks and spares – 406 Matilda MkII tanks, 45 Centaur tanks and 30 Cruisers tanks. Also, in the erecting shop 33 American locomotives were modified in 1943.

As they did in World War One, female workers were employed during World War Two, taking over the jobs previously carried out by the men who were now on active service. All jobs were carried out by the women – welders, fitters, machinists, riveters etc. The works were camouflaged to help hide them from enemy bombing attacks and escape damage. On May 2nd 1940 the King and Queen paid a visit to Horwich Loco works to recognise all the sterling work that was carried out there.

The first Englishman to build and fly his own aeroplane initially worked as an apprentice at Horwich Loco Works. Alliot Verdon Roe founded the Avro aircraft builders, together with his brother. Aircraft were built by the company in World War One and then World War Two, particularly the Lancaster bomber, used in the famous Dam Busters raid.



The Matilda tank now in the Imperial War Museum of the North, Salford.

Women working on the Matilda tanks at Horwich Loco Works.





Beech Hill Munition workers



Western Approaches



Parachute Factory



"Clippies"

Margery Booth – Opera Singer and British Spy

By Faye Walsh aged 11 years



Margery Booth was born in Hodges Street, Wigan. In 1936 she made her debut at Covent Garden opera house in London. Her full name was Margery Myers Booth. Her mother's maiden surname was Tetley, sadly she died aged only 41 in 1947. It does make you wonder if those war experiences took their toll.

Margery married a German industrialist, Dr. Egon Strohm, before the Second World War and went to live with him in Germany. Margery was one of many beautiful and talented opera singers chosen to perform before Adolf Hitler as part of his efforts to demonstrate the cultural superiority of the German nation. Margery sang for Hitler who sent her dozens of roses. Margery was with Hitler on his birthday when he was presented with the new Tiger tank. Margery was able to get valuable information back to London which eventually resulted in a Tiger tank being captured in North Africa. This was taken back to London under Churchill's personal orders.

Margery was now totally trusted by the leading Nazis and she was even allowed to sing to British PoWs at prisoner of war camp Stalag IIIID. When



she sang at Stalag IIIID, Margery wore a full length poppy dress. It was here that Margery made many useful contacts, especially with another operative John Brown.

Unaware of her activities, the Nazi leadership held Margery in high regard and she once sang in the presence of the Fuhrer Adolf Hitler with secret information hidden in her underwear.

John Brown was found out towards the end of the war and Margery was arrested and tortured by the Gestapo, but was released after they failed to prove anything.

Margery escaped Berlin during a bombing raid and returned to Britain. The information Margery provided helped in the Old Bailey trials of traitors William Joyce, known as Lord Haw Haw, and John Amery, who were both hanged for treason. Margery also gave evidence against SS officers at The Old Bailey.

Margery died from breast cancer in 1952 aged 47 years. There was a film made called "Margery Booth: The Spy in the Eagle's Nest", starring Anna Friel as Margery.

It has just been the 80th anniversary of the start of World War Two and we've been remembering all the brave people to whom we owe so much. I am proud to be able to write about one of those heroes who is not so famous. *Faye Walsh*

Lend Lease Scheme

During the Battle of Britain in September 1940, the British government sent a British Technical and Scientific Mission to the United States of America. The aim of the British Technical and Scientific Mission was to obtain the industrial resources to exploit the military potential of the research and development work completed by the UK up to the beginning of World War II. Britain itself could not exploit these due to the immediate requirements of war-related production.

The British shared technology included the cavity magnetron (key technology at the time for highly effective radar; the American historian James Phinney Baxter III later called this "the most valuable cargo ever brought to our shores"), the design for the VT fuze, details of Frank Whittle's jet engine and the Frisch–Peierls memorandum describing the feasibility of an atomic bomb. These were considered to be the most significant, but many other items were also transported, including designs for rockets, superchargers, gyroscopic gunsights, submarine detection devices, self-sealing fuel tanks and plastic explosives.

Under the lend-lease programme, which began in March 1941, the then neutral United States provided countries fighting Adolf Hitler with war materials. The United States joined the war soon after - in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbour - and the programme ended in 1945.

The US loaned \$4.33bn (£2.2bn) to Britain in 1945, while Canada loaned £607million in 1946, at a rate of 2% annual interest.

Equipment left over in Britain at the end of hostilities still needed to be paid for.

By 1945 Britain owed the United States around £3.4 billion. The last payment of the Lend Lease Scheme was made to the U.S.A. on 29th December 2006 in the sum of \$83.25 million (£42.5million). £11.6 million was also paid as a last instalment to Canada. The amount paid back was nearly double that loaned in 1945. Britain paid back a total of £3.8 billion to the United States and £1 billion to Canada.



U.S. President Roosevelt signing the Lend Lease Bill 1941

1941

JANUARY - Germany continues to bomb Britain. Liverpool and Manchester heavily bombed.

FEBRUARY 22nd S.S. Kantara torpedoed and sunk by u boat.

MARCH - 1,328 ships carrying food, war supplies sunk by Atlantic U boats. **Lend Lease Act**

APRIL – 6th Adolf Hitler gave orders for German forces, backed by Italian, Romanian, Hungarian and Bulgarian Axis allies, to invade Yugoslavia and Greece. Hitler launched the assault in order to secure Germany's Balkan flank for Operation Barbarossa, his planned spring 1941 invasion of Russia.

MAY - **'The May Blitz'**-very heavy bombing in Liverpool.
1,741 people killed by German bombing
St. Luke's church destroyed
Liverpool town centre heavily bombed
Liverpool Museum bombed
Lewis's bombed, Mill Road Hospital bombed

14th Albert Edward Stones of Atherton killed in an accident at Chanters Colliery No.2 Coal Pit

17th George Formby's uncle, Eugene Fawcett, died in a Merseyside air raid.

23rd HMS Kelly bombed and sunk

26th The German battleship Bismark was sunk by British ships

JUNE - 22nd Germany invades Russia – Operation Barbarossa.

16th John Counsell of Atherton killed in accident at Chanters Pit

AUGUST 25th to 17th September – Joint British Soviet invasion of Iran

SEPTEMBER- First Auschwitz victims, mostly Russian prisoners of war, are killed in the gas chambers.

12th Two men were killed and five injured in an explosion in Wigan Coal Corporation's John Pit, Standish Lower Ground

NOVEMBER 4th Pilot Officer Harry Alec Nicholson was killed when his Wellington Bomber crashed. He was 25 years old and Physical Training Instructor at Wigan Grammar School

DECEMBER 7th - Japanese bomb Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, (United States of America). USA and Britain declare war on Japan.
Germany declares war on USA.

8th - Japanese attack Singapore

19th -HMS Stanley torpedoed and sunk by u boat

25th – British surrender Hong Kong to Japanese



Liverpool City Centre Blitzed



St. Luke's Church



Liverpool World Museum

The 1941 Blitz on Liverpool

	People killed	Seriously injured
January—	53	41
February -	2	7
March -	518	532
April -	44	125
May -	1,741	1,154

During the May Blitz alone 76,000 people were made homeless, more than half of the homes in Liverpool were damaged.

In just 7 days in May 681 German planes dropped 870 tonnes of high explosives and 112,000 firebombs, both day and night.

The air attacks did not close the docks or seriously disrupt shipping, but did cause a lot of damage to the city of Liverpool and her people.

On May 14th a mass funeral was held at Anfield Cemetery where 1,000 victims were buried in a common grave.

The Liverpool May Blitz lasted from 1st to 8th May 1941. On 3rd May 500 enemy aircraft pounded the area for 7 hours. 453 people killed in Liverpool, 257 in Bootle, 28 in Birkenhead, 3 in Wallasey. 1,065 seriously injured in Liverpool, 26 in Bootle, 44 in Birkenhead, 19 in Wallasey 4,400 houses destroyed in Liverpool, 16,400 seriously damaged, 45,500 slightly damaged, 51,000 people made homeless in Liverpool, 25,000 in Bootle.

Memories of The Liverpool Blitz

“My family lived in Hayward Street, Everton when the bombing of Liverpool by the Germans started. We used to go to the public shelter, but my dad had been in the First World War and was worried about our safety in the shelter. He spoke to a friend of his and found out that we could go to the shelter underneath St. George’s Hall in Liverpool town centre.

The shelter in St. George’s Hall was for at least 200 people and there were benches and camp beds. In the shelter we met sailors and soldiers who were from foreign countries and they were on leave in Liverpool and had been told to shelter in St. George’s Hall. When we were there I thought it was like one big party.

One time we came out of the shelter after a bombing raid and found that our house had been damaged. A house opposite had been bombed and the people, who had been sheltering under their stairs, were killed. The only survivor was their son who was asleep upstairs and he was blown out of the window and badly injured.

Dad decided to send us to our family near Sheffield by the reservoirs. A decoy town had been built and every night lit up to fool the German pilots into thinking it was Sheffield. They did eventually bomb Sheffield.” *Sheila, Wigan*

Memories of The Liverpool Blitz

"I remember May 1941 and looking at Liverpool burning. I live in one of the high parts of Wigan and from my door I can see in the general direction of Liverpool. During the evenings of May 1941, the sky over Liverpool was all lit up bright orange.

I knew that this was Liverpool burning because of the bombing. I felt so helpless because we could do nothing to help, only pray." *Mrs. Ella Leary, Wigan.*

"We had moved to Worsley Hall and one night we were roused out of bed and, with the neighbours, climbed a nearby slag tip, about 4 storeys high, where a crowd of spectators stood in silence looking at Liverpool being bombed.

In the far distant horizon a small orange glow lit the night sky and with every faint sounding boom it flared brighter and brighter, then dulled to a steady glow. "Bloody Jerries", shouted an old man "they're killing babbies". Liverpool was burning and we left as quietly as we came, too stunned for words.

Mam caught the morning train to Liverpool where her old aunt owned a boarding house near the docks. When she got there, the whole area was blitzed, not a house left standing. A fireman searching for bodies said that her aunt's house took a direct hit and for mam to go home because there were no survivors."

Elizabeth Rostron from Wigan, now living in Canada

RAY CURSLEY – Schoolboy memory



Ray told us this story when we visited him at the Wigan Borough Armed forces Community H.Q. Molyneux House.

I was born in 1929 and when I was a schoolboy in Wigan I heard planes overhead. I looked up and there was a German bomber coming over me and it was closely followed by a Spitfire. The planes were flying so low I could see the numbers on them.

I think the German bomber was headed to Liverpool to bomb the city.

I remember a bomb being dropped by a German plane on New Springs, Wigan. This was just by a young girl, fortunately the bomb didn't go off. My dad was a Fire Watcher in the war.

This photo of me was taken when I was in the Army cadets.

A few years later I worked on making Spitfires and Lancasters.

My Great Nana Sal Cleary saved a little girl's life

by Molly Powner

Sarah Farrell (Sal) had just had her 18th Birthday in February 1941 and remembers vividly the May Blitz of that year.

On the night she lost her Father and her home, she recalls: "Dad had been working at Tate & Lyle each day and as an ARP each night. On (Nana Sal thinks) the 3rd night of the May Blitz, 3rd May 1941, Dad (James Farrell) had just got into bed after an exhausting few days, when the sirens went off again. I shouted to Dad come down and go to the air-raid shelter with us (her Mother and 3 younger sisters). He said he was so tired, he was going to stay in bed and sleep. We decided we'd stay too and have a night in our own beds instead of going to the dank, crowded shelter.

Just then our neighbour knocked. She said her little girl was frightened and crying and she needed help to get her daughter to the shelter. The little girl said she'd go if I came with her." Sal, her Mother and Sisters reluctantly put on their oldest coats and shoes and went with their neighbour and little girl to the shelter.

Shortly after their home in Aspinall Street took a direct hit, killing her father instantly. Added to this, the houses either side of their home collapsed onto their house. It took 3 days to dig James Farrell's body out.

Sarah's Mother was in shock and so it fell to Sal to try to find them somewhere to live, clothes to wear and food to eat. None of their belongings survived.

James Farrell was a great Everton Fan and had a fantastic collection of EFC memorabilia (all of which was lost in the bombing). He was also friends with most of the players, who regularly visited the house – Nana remembers the famous Dixie Dean and Alex Stevenson being two of them. We have no photographs of James Farrell, as these too were lost.

Nana Sal lived on, had 6 children, 12 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren and she died at the age of 92.



Sal and Jim Cleary her future husband.

Memories of The Liverpool Blitz

“My mum, Eileen Gribbin, lived with her mum (my grandmother Caroline) and two sisters in a tenement flat, Great Richmond Street Dwellings, in Liverpool city centre. It was only a ten minute walk from Blackstock Street, Vauxhall where 200 people were killed on 21st December 1940 when the public shelter received a direct hit.

During the blitz they had to go to a public shelter whilst the air raids were on. Sometimes her mum, Caroline, wasn't well enough to go out so they sheltered under the solid kitchen table. Bombs dropped all around them, but they were lucky that their block of flats wasn't bombed although the windows blew out a few times.

I was born in 1947 and when I was little in the 1950's we lived in this same flat and I remember playing nearby on what we called “bommies”. These were bomb sites and there were plenty of bricks lying around so we played at building houses. I also remember when we went shopping locally in Great Homer Street seeing the walls full of strafed machine gun holes which had come from German planes.

After the 1941 May blitz my grandmother, Caroline was so ill that she decided to try and get away from the bombing. The local priest contacted a priest he knew in St. Benedict's in Hindley and he found rooms above a shop in Hindley. They managed to rent these rooms for my mum and Grandmother.

My mum's oldest sister Annie, her husband and two children also rented rooms in Hindley out of the blitz.

My uncle continued to commute to work on the Liverpool docks. Unfortunately not long after arriving my Auntie's son James age 6 years was taken ill and died in Leigh infirmary. My auntie always said he had caught something in the public air raid shelters.

Later in December 1941 my Grandmother Caroline was so ill she was taken to Wigan infirmary where she died aged 56 years. My mum returned to Liverpool where my grandmother was buried.”



Liverpool public air raid shelter covered by rubble from bombed houses.
All those in the shelter came out safe

A Narrow Escape – Isobel and Winifred Morris



Isobel and Winifred's Dad was William Morris and lived in Cauldwell Place, South Shields. William tried to enrol for the forces, but his occupation was a "Ships Plater", building and fixing ships on Tyneside. This was a reserved occupation and prevented him being able to join up. Isobel's mum was Winifred Morris.

To protect their daughters from the bombing of the docks, sisters Isobel and Winifred, were evacuated to the North Yorkshire village of Osmotherley, staying with Aunts Margo and Lilly Morris.

One afternoon in 1941 Isobel aged 10 years and Winifred aged 12 years volunteered to take a neighbour's baby out for a walk. They were pushing the baby in its pram up Clack Bank, heading back to the village, suddenly a low flying German Messerschmitt appeared, swooping down behind the girls. The pilot then opened fire and a hail of bullets bounced up the village road leaving a trail. The scared girls took cover by diving into a ditch at the side of the road. Through sheer panic, they left the pram and baby. Isobel claimed she could see the pilot laughing as it flew overhead. The sisters and the baby luckily escaped injury.

This memory always upset Isobel as she tried to understand why the German pilot was so cruel as to shoot at two innocent school girls and a baby.

"As a young woman living in the centre of Liverpool, I was walking home from work one evening when the sirens sounded.

Almost immediately I saw German planes overhead and I saw the face of one pilot who was firing on the civilians in the street. I banged on the door of a nearby pub and eventually they opened the door and let me in.

I felt this was a very narrow escape." *Kathleen Gribbin.*



Newspaper depiction of German pilot firing on civilians



Liverpool family made homeless after bombing raid



Liverpool Children being evacuated



Durning Road public shelter bombed, 166 people killed and 2,000 homeless

BRITISH ARMY COMMANDOS

The Commandos were formed after the British Expeditionary Force was evacuated from Dunkirk in 1940. Prime Minister Winston Churchill called for a force to be assembled and equipped to inflict casualties on the Germans and bolster British morale. Churchill told the joint Chiefs of Staff to propose measures for an offensive against German-occupied Europe, and stated, "they must be prepared with specially trained troops of the hunter class who can develop a reign of terror down the enemy coast". The first commandos were all army volunteers and rigorously trained in Achnacarry, Scotland.

Commando Raid on Norway-Operation Claymore March 1941

The Lofoten raid by No. 3 and No. 4 commandos on 4th March was successful in spite of the bitter cold. The objective was to destroy the fish oil factories, this was used in the manufacture of glycerine for use by the German munitions industry. Most German aircraft were grounded on the north Norwegian airfields—without ski-landing gear. No plane could take off to interfere with the raid. Armed German trawlers worked the area, but no heavier naval units were reported. And so, when the Commandos appeared out of a murky dawn, they were unopposed. A single German armed trawler was quickly battered into surrender by the destroyer HMS Somali. Most of the German crew died or were wounded.

The raiders fired the oil factories, destroyed 11 ships and some 800,000 gallons of oil, and returned to Britain unchallenged, taking with them more than 300 volunteers for the forces of Free Norway. They also took home more than 200 German prisoners, including the head of the local Gestapo, some 60 Quislings (Nazi collaborators), and a captured trawler. The Commandos also captured a set of spare rotors for a German Enigma coding machine, these were dispatched to Bletchley Park.

To add further insult to the injury inflicted on the Germans, the commandos found the local post office and sent a telegram addressed to A. Hitler, Berlin:

HERR HITLER

REFERENCE YOUR LAST SPEECH!

THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT WHEN EVER BRITISH TROOPS LAND ON THE CONTINENT OF EUROPE GERMAN SOLDIERS WILL FACE THEM WELL WHERE ARE THEY.

On 7th October 1942, Hitler was so enraged with the success of the Commando operations that he gave the following order:

Order, therefore:-

"From now on all men operating against German troops in so-called Commando raids in Europe or in Africa, are to be annihilated to the last man. This is to be carried out whether they be soldiers in uniform, or saboteurs, with or without arms; and whether fighting or seeking to escape; and it is equally immaterial whether they come into action from Ships and Aircraft, or whether they land by parachute."

Harry Wildgoose – S.S. Kantara

On 22nd January 1941 the German battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau sailed through the Denmark Straits and broke out into the Atlantic Ocean to attack allied merchant shipping.

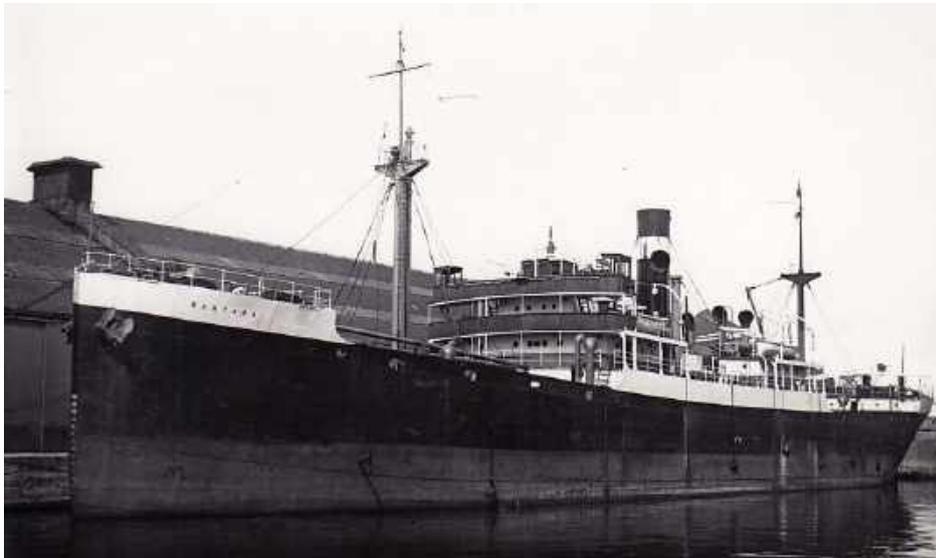
On 22nd. February 1941 they sank four ships, including the S.S. Kantara and a tanker east of Newfoundland, Canada. On 22nd. March 1941 they returned to Brest, France after sinking twenty two ships.



Harry Wildgoose, Officer, Merchant Navy. This photo was taken at 28 Holme Avenue, Swinley, Wigan 1939. Harry married Evelyn Hallmark 1940.

On 22nd February 1941, his ship, the SS Kantara, was sunk by German battleships and he was captured.

Harry was repatriated on V.E. day May 1945 and taken to Wigan Infirmary. Harry died 3 weeks later on 18th June 1945, aged 28 years.



S.S. Kantara

After suffering dreadful conditions, malnutrition and dysentery in Stalag XB, the Merchant seamen were then marched 30km south to Westertimke, where they were forced to build their own camp – ‘Marlag und Milag Nord’. Marlag for Royal Navy and Milag for Merchant Navy.

There were several escape attempts made (as depicted in the film ‘Albert R.N.’), but most were to remain in the camp until its liberation in 1945.

Michael O'Dwyer – S.S. Kantara

Michael was a merchant seaman on board SS Kantara when it was sunk by a German U boat on 22nd February 1941, in the North Atlantic.



Michael and the Kantara's crew along with 150 other merchant seamen who had been taken prisoner were transferred to the German supply ship Ermland and then taken to La Pallice in France and transported by rail to Sandbostel/Stalag XB. All merchant seamen prisoners were relocated from Sandbostel to the

merchant seamen's internment camp Marlag (known as MILAG) Nord at Westertimke by the end of 1942.

On January 27, 1943 Michael and 31 other Irish born merchant seamen were selected by the Gestapo and attempts were made to get the Irishmen to work on Nazi merchant ships. They all refused and as a punishment the 32 Irishmen were moved to a slave labour camp in Bremen-Farge and forced to work on the U-Boat Bunker Valentin. During their time in the Arbeitslager Bremen-Farge, five Irishmen lost their lives. Michael was returned to the UK in May 1945 following liberation.

In 1947 a war crimes trial was held in Hamburg to adjudicate on offences against Irishmen. However due to legal issues surrounding the question of neutrals, war crimes perpetrated against the Irishmen in Bremen-Farge had to be reframed by the British prosecutor to read as war crimes against allied nationals and as the Irishmen were not regarded as allied nationals, offences against them were excluded; however their evidence was admissible. Michael O'Dwyer was one of the three Irish witnesses.

Michael, who was predeceased by his wife Edith, whom he met in Hamburg during the war crimes trial, is survived by his son Michael, daughter Jacqueline. Michael died on December 30th 2012.

He was the last surviving Irish witness who gave evidence at the Bremen-Farge War Crimes Trial held in Hamburg 1947.

There were over 5,000 Allied Merchant seamen captured by the German forces during WWII. Some 4,500 of these mariners were held at the Merchant Navy Internment camp at Westertimke, near Bremen, Germany.



HMS Kelly and HMS Stanley



My brother, Gordon Rogers, was in the Royal Navy during World War II and served on HMS Kelly which was Earl Mountbatten's ship. On 23rd May 1941, HMS Kelly was off the coast of Crete and was bombed by German airplanes.



HMS Kelly was sunk and as her survivors struggled in the water, the German planes machine gunned them. Gordon was lucky and survived, he later joined me on HMS Kelly's sister ship, HMS Kelvin.

Les Rogers, Wigan



Harry Sutton died on 19th Dec 1941, aged 24, when his ship HMS Stanley was hit by a torpedo from a German u-boat, U-574. Out of a crew's complement of 145, only 25 survived.

According to Eric McPherson's 'Roll of Honour', he was the son of Henry & Sarah Elizabeth Sutton, and is commemorated in Wigan on the Wigan Cenotaph and on the Whelley School Old Boys' Memorial which is now in St Stephen's Church.

Able Seaman Harry Sutton, Service No. D/JX 272499

He is also commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial; Column 3, Panel 48.ta.

HMS VICTORIOUS and the Sinking of the Bismark



My Uncle George Parkinson from Orrell served as a Petty Officer on the aircraft carrier HMS Victorious in World War II.

The Bismark and her sister ship, the Tirpitz, were the largest battleships ever built by Germany in WWII. In May 1941 during the Battle of Denmark Strait, the British battlecruiser H.M.S. Hood was sunk by the Bismark, leading to the death of all her crew bar three men – a casualty rate of 99.8%. It took only three minutes for The Hood to sink with this terrible loss of life. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, ordered all warships in the area to pursue the Bismark and sink her. Six battleships and battlecruisers, two aircraft carriers (one of which

was HMS Victorious) thirteen cruisers and twenty-one destroyers were involved in the chase. Bismark now making for Brest in France – a fact that was discovered by British code breakers decrypting some of the German signals. The French Resistance confirmed that Luftwaffe units were moving to Brest to provide air cover for Bismark. On the 27th May 1941, Bismark was finally sunk and out of a crew of over 2,200 men only 114 survived.



Sinking of the Bismark

In late December 1942, HMS Victorious was loaned to the US Navy and served as part of the British Pacific Fleet, taking part in raids on Japanese oil and port installations in Sumatra. The Fleet made its home base in Sydney Australia and joined the 5th US Fleet to support the American assault on Okinawa. HMS Victorious was attacked by Kamikaze suicide aircraft and 3 men were killed and 19 injured, but Victorious was able to return to Sydney.



HMS Victorious



Statue of Frederic Walker at Pier Head Frederic Walker Liverpool Museum

Western Approaches, Liverpool

A top secret deep underground command centre in the middle of Liverpool from where the battle of the Atlantic was planned.



FREDERIC “JOHNNIE” WALKER R.N.



On 3rd September 1939 Britain declared war on Germany, Karl Doenitz German Submarine, (U-boat) Fleet Commander had already deployed his entire fleet of 57 U-boats in the water surrounding the British Isles. They were ordered to observe Prize Regulations which stated “A U-Boat should surface and then halt to examine its prize and cargo. If satisfied it was entitled to sink the ship having first ensured safety of those on board the target ship.” On the first day of the war, German submarine U30 ignored these orders and torpedoed and sank the liner Athenia without warning. There were 1100 passengers on board of whom 300

were Americans. 112 people lost their lives 28 of whom were American.

Frederic Walker was appointed Staff Officer Ops to Vice-Admiral B.H. Ramsay, a shore based posting. Frederic was born On 3rd June 1896 and was a veteran of WW1. The Dunkirk evacuation in May 1940 was followed by an intense period of scouring all commercial ports and fishing centres for trawlers and drifters to set up a system of patrols to ensure that no surprise channel crossing in strength could take place. If not prevented it could at least be detected. In these tasks Frederic Walker saw the emergence of air power as the dominant factor in naval sea power in all its branches. He also came into contact with a huge mass of reservists who would come to man the ships which he would command in the Western Approaches. There was a sparse scattering of experienced seamen among reservists, but they were untrained in the skills of war and the Service.

Deskbound Frederic was desperate to get back to sea and in 1941 he was appointed command of HMS Stork based in Liverpool under Sir Percy Noble at Western Approaches in Liverpool. This was the command centre for the Battle of the Atlantic. At the end of 1941 when Frederic finally returned to sea, he was charged with protecting a convoy bound from Gibraltar. During this voyage the convoy was attacked by wolf-packs, but rather than just defend the merchantmen, Walker took his faster ships in pursuit of the enemy. The Royal Navy had been using defensive tactics against the U-boats. By the time the convoy reached Liverpool it had lost two merchant ships, a destroyer and an improvised aircraft carrier. But five U-boats had been sunk. Frederic assumed command of 36 support group consisting of 2 sloops and 6 corvettes. Every ship spent 1 month training in Tobermory, Scotland, but Frederic preferred to train his own group in his own tactics to ensure that each would be able to act on their own initiative in any circumstance. Frederic Walker called his initiative “The Creeping Attack” which was used against a deep U-boat.

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CAPTAIN FREDERIC “JOHNNIE” WALKER R.N. Continued.....

The method of “The Creeping Attack” had the following advantages:

1. It gave no warning to U-boats of an impending attack and thus no opportunity to take evading action.
2. The attack was carried out at speed where the noise of the propellers could not be picked up by GNAT – Acoustic Torpedo.
3. It was extremely accurate as to bearing and range.
4. It had proved to be most effective by Frederic’s practical experience.

A devastating variation of the “Creeping Attack” was the “Plaster Attack” in which three ships stationed close to each other delivered the attack. Frederic Walker’s methods enabled many German U-boats to be sunk between 17th December 1941 and 5th May 1944. There were no warships or merchant ships sunk in convoys supported by Frederic and his 2nd Support Group (Sterling, Wild Goose, Cygnet, Wren, Woodpecker and Kite) in this period, except for Woodpecker whose crew was safely transferred to other ships.

Jonathan Dimbleby in his book ‘The Battle of the Atlantic’ states “if the submarines had prevailed, the maritime supply lines across the Atlantic would have been severed, mass hunger would have consumed Britain and the Allied armies would have been prevented from joining in the invasion of Europe, there would have been no D-Day”.

Captain Walker never left the bridge when the convoy was in enemy waters, even taking his meals there. Frederic’s final task was to protect the fleet from U-Boats during the D-Day invasion of France. In two weeks, no enemy ships penetrated his vessels and many U boats were destroyed or damaged in the process. In August 1943, Frederic was informed that his son, Timothy, had been killed whilst in action in a submarine in the Mediterranean.

Frederic was the Royal Navy’s most effective weapon against the German U-Boats and he sank more U-boats during the Battle of the Atlantic than any other British or Allied commander. According to the Admiralty, “Frederic Walker did more to free the Atlantic of the U-boat menace than any other single officer”

The strain eventually took its toll on Frederic’s health. During the middle watch on Sunday 9th July 1944, the ships were at sea on patrol in the Channel when they received the following signal: “The Admiralty regrets to inform you of the death of your Senior Officer, Captain F. J. Walker which took place at 0200 today”. Frederic had suffered a cerebral thrombosis which was attributed to exhaustion. More than 1,000 people attended his funeral at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. The coffin was draped in the Union Flag and carried on a gun carriage through the streets of Liverpool to the docks and embarked the destroyer Hesperus. When clear of the entrance, Frederic’s body was committed to the deep and a single wreath was thrown after it by his wife Eileen.

The statue of Captain Frederic “Johnnie” Walker at Liverpool’s Pier Head, was unveiled by Prince Philip, who himself undertook anti-submarine training at the nearby Western Approaches.

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

THE GERMAN INVASION OF RUSSIA (Soviet Union)

In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union had signed a non-aggression pact, but Hitler had a long standing hatred of Soviet Communism so it seemed unlikely that this pact would hold. Hitler believed that Germany needed more living space (Lebensraum) and he was convinced that Russia would provide this space after the indigenous population had been removed to then be replaced by Germans. So on the 22nd June 1941, Hitler sent his armies into the Soviet Union – the invasion being codenamed Operation Barbarossa. The name was originally Operation Fritz, but Hitler greatly admired the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa who had founded the first German Reich in the 12th century.

Three million Axis Troops – German, Finnish and Romanian – 150 divisions and three thousand tanks moved speedily into Soviet territory and it was hoped that victory would come in a matter of months. This victory would be followed by the 'Hunger Plan' which was to wipe out Soviet cities, industries and most of the 30 million population. The people of the Soviet Union were regarded as 'subhuman' by the Nazis and this attitude was prevalent in the numerous atrocities to men, women and children, carried out during the invasion. Orders were issued to the Nazi soldiers by General Erich Hoepner:

“The war against Russia is a fundamental part of the German people’s struggle for existence. This struggle must aim to smash the Russia of today into rubble and, as a consequence, it must be carried out with unprecedented harshness”.

Any type of resistance was to be dealt with and this involved the mass murder of civilians and destruction of entire villages. One SS Commander, Kurt “Panzer” Meyer, was responsible for many such atrocities including the destruction on the 17th February 1943 of the villages of Yefremowka and Semyonovka, killing 872 men, women and children with 240 burned alive in the local church. Meyer’s Battalion was given the name the “Blowtorch Battalion”.

The brutality of the invaders continued with the treatment of Soviet POW’s – In Gros-Rosen concentration camp, for example, the SS killed more than 65,000 Soviet POW’s by feeding them only a thin soup of grass, water and salt for 6 months. Many of the soldiers were shot immediately after being taken prisoner, but those who were transferred to PO camps faced an equally dreadful fate. 3.1 million Soviet prisoners died in German captivity and on a given day in autumn 1941 more Soviet prisoners died in German camps than American and British prisoners did during the whole of World War 2.

The following chart shows the percentage of deaths in the POW camps of various nations

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Operation Barbarossa Continued.....

Deaths of POWs in Prisoner-of-War Camps during World War II	
Soviet POWs held by Germans	57.5%
British POWs held by Germans	3.5%
German POWs held by Soviets	35.8%
German POWs held by British	0.03%
German POWs held by French	2.58%

In September 1941, Soviet POW's in Auschwitz were executed as an experiment using Zyklon B – the gas which has since become the symbol of Nazi genocide and used to murder millions of Jews, along with other “enemies of the state” such as officials of the Soviet Communist Party, Sinti and Roma.

Siege of Leningrad and Stalingrad

Germany had no long-term plan for the invasion of Russia, presuming that the campaign would be over before the harsh Russian winter set in. The plan was to advance from the port of Archangel in northern Russia to the port of Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea – the so-called A - A line. However, the people of Russia would defend their country with such determination and courage and this, combined with the intense cold of the Russian winters, held up the advancing armies. The city of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) came under siege for 880 days, resulting in the deaths of more than a million civilians and 300,000 Soviet soldiers who died defending the city. It was not until January 1944 that the Red Army raised the siege of Leningrad.

In August 1942, the city of Stalingrad (now Volgograd) became the main focus of attack by the German Army, along with their Hungarian, Romanian, Italian, Croatian and Finnish allies. Intense Luftwaffe bombing reduced much of the city to ruin. There was a total 1,000 tons of bombs dropped in 48 hours, more than in London at the height of the Blitz. Lieutenant General Vasily Chukov said “we will defend the city or die in the attempt”. Joseph Stalin would not allow the evacuation of the civilian population (400,000) and he also stated that any commander who ordered a retreat would be subject to military tribunal. The burden of the initial defence of Stalingrad was by the 1077th Anti-Aircraft Regiment, a unit made up of many young female volunteers. Civilians, including women and children, built trenchworks and protective fortifications to defend their city. More than a million Russian soldiers were killed or injured and it was said that the life expectancy of a Soviet soldier at Stalingrad was only 24 hours. Thousands of civilians living in the city died and over 700,000 Axis soldiers were lost during the battle.

In November 1942 the Russian Red Army launched Operation Uranus attacking the Romanian and Hungarian armies who were weaker than the powerful German 6th Army. This led to a turning point in the battle for Stalingrad.

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Operation Barbarossa Continued.....

750,000 women and girls from the Stalingrad area who had finished military or medical training served in the battle. Three air regiments at Stalingrad were entirely female. At least three women won the title "Hero of the Soviet Union" whilst driving tanks at Stalingrad and women wireless and telephone operators suffered heavy casualties when their command posts were attacked. The German 16th Panzer division were shocked to find they had been fighting female soldiers after all 37 anti-aircraft guns were destroyed or overrun.

Women played many roles in the Red Army – a famous female sniper, Lyudmila Pavlichenko, was credited with 309 kills by the age of 25 and then toured the USA as a wartime propagandist to raise support for the war effort. She became close friends with Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the United States President.

Two thousand plus women trained as Russian sharpshooters, Tanya Baramzina credited with sixteen kills on the Belorussian front, was parachuted behind enemy lines where she killed another twenty before being captured by the Germans and executed. Roza Shanina, credited with fifty-nine confirmed kills, chose to go to the front line after the death of her brother in 1941 during the siege of Leningrad. She was severely injured whilst shielding a wounded artillery officer and died from her injuries.

The battle of Stalingrad lasted 5 months, 1 week and 3 days – street by street, house by house fighting of such ferocity that the invading German army did not expect and by February 1943 the Axis forces had run out of food and ammunition and the remaining units surrendered. This battle, seen by many as the turning point of the war, was the largest confrontation of WW2. After their defeat the German High Command had to withdraw vast military forces from the Western Front to replace their losses.

An estimated 26 million Soviet citizens died during World War 2, including as many as 11 million Russian soldiers.

"According to Nazi ideology, Slavs were useless sub-humans. As such, their leaders, the Soviet elite, were to be killed and the remainder of the population enslaved or expelled further eastward. As a result of these racist fantasies, millions of Soviet civilians were deliberately killed, starved, or worked to death. Millions of others were deported for forced labour in Germany or enslaved in the occupied eastern territories. German planners called for the ruthless exploitation of Soviet resources, especially of agricultural produce. This was one of Germany's major war aims in the east." *From U.S. Holocaust Museum*

As the war was coming to an end and the Russians were advancing towards Berlin, many atrocities were perpetrated by their soldiers towards the civilian population of Germany in retaliation for what had been done to their families and country and Berlin became a divided city.

At the Tehran Conference on 28th November 1943, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin agreed among other things, that Operation Overlord (invasion of France) would occur by May 1944. There was a shared view that Germany would need to be divided after the end of the war.



Leningrad



Stalingrad



Lyudmila Pavlichenko, Sniper



Aleksandra Samusenko – Tank Commander

ARCTIC CONVOYS – August 1941 to May 1945

After the German invasion of Russia in June 1941 the Atlantic convoys became not only the means of ensuring Britain's survival, but also that of the Soviet Union. Britain immediately agreed to send some of her precious American Lend Lease supplies direct to Russia.

The first Russian convoy sailed under Royal Navy escort from Reykjavik in Iceland to Archangel in northern Russia in late August 1941. Many others, including ships of several Allied nations, followed regularly throughout the rest of the war

The 2,500-mile voyage to northern Russia took convoys to within 750 miles of the North Pole, where temperatures could be as low as 50 degrees of frost. On reaching journey's end in winter the ships concerned, in addition to their original cargoes, were often carrying an extra load of 50 to 150 tons of ice. Because of the extreme Arctic weather conditions often experienced on convoys to Russia, seamen had to undergo a special medical examination before sailing. If passed fit, they were then issued with extra-thick clothing to help them to withstand the cold. Duffle coats were lined with lamb's wool and had extra hoods, with only slits for the eyes and mouth.

Many of the convoys were attacked by German submarines, aircraft and warships. Convoy PQ17 was almost destroyed. The merchant ships were attacked by U-boats and aircraft, and only 11 out of 34 reached Russia. In all, 153 merchant seamen died. Conditions were among the worst faced by any Allied sailors. As well as the Germans, they faced extreme cold, gales and pack ice. The loss rate for ships was higher than any other Allied convoy route.

The Soviet tanker Azerbaijan, whose mainly female crew saved their ship after it was bombed and set on fire.

Over four million tons of supplies were delivered to the Russians. As well as tanks and aircraft, these included less sensational but still vital items like trucks, tractors, telephone wire, railway engines and boots.



JOHN (JACK) WALSH – MERCHANT NAVY



My father, John, known as Jack, Walsh, was a coal miner. When he was 16 years old he was caught in a mine collapse, he promised himself that if he got out he would never go down a mine again. He was rescued and joined the Merchant Navy. Dad served in the Merchant Navy during the war. He sailed across the Atlantic on P & O ships, such as the Stratheden and Strathnaver. They brought food and supplies to Britain from Canada and the United States.

Dad also sailed to the Arctic bringing supplies to North Russia through extremely cold weather conditions. The decks would be full of ice.

Unlike the Royal Navy, Merchant seamen were not paid from the minute the ship was sunk until they were able to start work on another ship.

Merchant Seamen didn't wear uniform, they just wore a badge. One night he was home on leave and was out with my mum Helen and her mum. In the pub a woman came up to him and gave him a white feather. Dad had just returned from an Arctic Convoy. My grandmother was so incensed that she hit the woman. As in the First World War, some women gave out white feathers, a sign of cowardice, to men they thought were not serving their Country. *George, Wigan.*



Merchant ship on Arctic Convoy

1942

JANUARY 5th Six men killed in an explosion at Bickershaw No. 4 Coal Pit.

FEBRUARY 15th JAPANESE INVADE SINGAPORE and MALAYA
Soldiers, women and children are marched to prison camps.
Japanese treat prisoners very badly and use them as slave labour.

GERMANS DECIDE TO KILL ALL JEWS. Auschwitz and other concentration camps are set up for the mass extermination of Jews using gas chambers.

FEBRUARY— BRITISH RAIDS ON FRANCE - BRUNEVAL RAID -
Paratroopers, Royal Navy and Commandos capture vital German radar equipment.

MARCH 27th— ST. NAZAIRE RAID -Commandos blow up St. Nazaire docks, using an old ship full of explosives.

MAY— RAF BOMBS GERMANY. 1,000 bomber raids by the RAF on Cologne in Germany.

JUNE— AMERICAN TROOPS ARRIVE IN BRITAIN.
Burtonwood set up as a United States Airbase.

JUNE— U BOATS SINK 1,159 ALLIED SHIPS – A handful of German U Boats sink 1,159 Merchant and Royal Navy ships in the North Atlantic Ocean.

JULY—1st -27th The First Battle of El Alamein North Africa

ARCTIC CONVOY TO RUSSIA—Out of 33 merchant ships, 23 were lost and they were carrying 430 tanks, 210 planes, 3,350 vehicles and nearly 100,000 tons of cargo.

AUGUST—19th RAID ON DIEPPE – Britain, America and Russia are desperate for a victory in Europe. They order British and Canadian troops to attack the French coast at Dieppe from small boats. Many troops are killed by German guns, but some manage to escape. Lessons are learnt for the D Day invasion.

OCTOBER 23rd The Second Battle of El Alamein.

24th Joseph Hall aged 35yrs. Injured in accident at Chanters Colliery. He died 25th November 1942.

NOVEMBER 11th EL ALAMEIN VICTORY—British win battle against Germans
15th Government Decree Church Bells rung to celebrate victory.

NOVEMBER— STALINGRAD – Russian troops stop German army advance in Russia at the city of Stalingrad.

10th The SS Cerinthus was torpedoed.

United States of America joins WW2

First Americans arrive at Burtonwood

After the attack on Pearl Harbour, the American naval base in Hawaii, by the Japanese on 7th December 1941, the USA declared war on Japan, Germany and Italy.

American servicemen were stationed in many bases in Britain from Scotland to Cornwall. Sent in advance of the planned invasion of Europe, these troops were anxious to join the fight against Hitler. Sailors, airmen and soldiers were ferried over in convoys by the thousands and 1.5 million were stationed in Great Britain or would pass on through to fight towards Germany.

Although the British (for the most part) were glad to see the American servicemen, there were complications and resentments. The British had been at war for over two years and were well used to going without and making do. When the Americans arrived their stomachs were full (and so were their pockets).

Many of American servicemen had never been abroad before so the War Department gave them a pamphlet called "Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain". This pamphlet was designed to familiarize them with life in Britain, the history, culture, even the slang. The pamphlet also encouraged the men to get along with the British to help defeat Hitler. It is filled with great advice like "Don't be a show off," "NEVER criticise the King or Queen" and "The British don't know how to make a good cup of coffee, you don't know how to make a good cup of tea". The pamphlet concludes by telling the servicemen that while in Great Britain, their slogan should be "It is always impolite to criticize your hosts; it is militarily stupid to criticize your allies."

On 11th June 1942, the RAF at Burtonwood was handed over to the United States of America Air Force. The base was 2 miles northwest of Warrington in Lancashire and was the largest airfield in Europe during the war with the most USAAF personnel and maintenance facilities. It was known as the "Gateway to Europe" where the first transatlantic military flights landed. Burtonwood was also known as Base Air Depot 1 (BAD1) and was a centre for servicing Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Force aircraft. There were 1,636 buildings including the largest warehouse in Europe and throughout the war thousands of aircraft were being built or repaired there. In fact, 11,575 planes were built or repaired there. In fact, 11,575 planes were built in just 32 months.

Burtonwood received many famous visitors including General Eisenhower and General Patton. Famous American entertainers who came to entertain the troops – Glen Miller and his band, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope.

There were an estimated 7,500 marriages between US servicemen and local British girls.

/Continued.....

First Americans arrive at Burtonwood (Continued)

The influence of the base in Warrington and the local community was very significant and people who lived nearby found work on the base or American servicemen using the local shops, pubs etc.

Many local musicians found work on the base and the American music influence was extensive on the British music scene. This continued post-war as Burtonwood was still an important US base. Ringo Starr's stepfather worked at the base and brought home many comic books and records from the United States.

Virtually all of Burtonwood has now been demolished, but there is a RAF Burtonwood Heritage Centre at Gullivers World which is well worth a visit.



Chapel now part of Burtonwood museum. American servicemen Burtonwood



Joe Loss (British Band Leader, Vera Lynn and Glen Miller at Burtonwood

13th Liverpool Kings – ‘The Chindits’ in Burma

The 13th Liverpool King's sailed for India in December 1941, coinciding with Japan's entrance into the war. Intended for garrison duties, the battalion's strength contained many men who were of an old or medically downgraded condition. After Burma was occupied by Japan in 1942, a unit was formed to penetrate deep behind Japanese lines from India. The 13th Liverpool King's provided the majority of the British contingent for the unit, which was designated as the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade (the 'Chindits') and commanded by Orde Wingate.

The Chindits operated deep behind enemy lines in North Burma in the War against Japan. A Chindit carried his home on his back. The typical weight of a Chindit heavy pack, small pack and weapons was around 72lb (80lb for a Bren Gunner). The men were carrying half their body weight. The weight increased when their equipment was wet - which it was for most of the time, as North Burma is the wettest region on earth. They operated, for the most part, in the dim green light under the jungle canopy, with visibility often 30 ft or less. They lived with the constant fear of ambush. The men also lived with the fear of disease, such as the deadly cerebral malaria and scrub typhus. Typical temperatures were 110-112 deg.F., with extreme humidity. Clothes and webbing rotted in the rain and sweat. A Chindit required 12 pints of water daily, but often had to go without. They subsisted almost entirely on air-dropped K rations. Each man was supposed to receive three meal packs per day for five days. Airdrops were often cancelled or were unsuccessful, with stores missing the drop zone, and five days' rations had to last eight days or longer.

Organised into two groups, the Chindits' first operation (codenamed Longcloth) began on 8 February 1943. No. 2 Group, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel S.A. Cooke, was formed from the 13th Liverpool King's and divided into five independent columns, two of which (Nos 7 and 8) were commanded by majors from the battalion. No Japanese opposition was encountered initially, allowing the Chindits to cross the Chindwin River and advance into Burma unimpeded. Operation Longcloth consisted of 3,000 men who marched over 1,000 miles during the campaign.

'Operation Thursday', in March 1944 was on a much larger scale. It was the second largest airborne invasion of the war and consisted of a force of 20,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers with air support provided by the 1st Air Commando USAAF. Tragically their leader, General Orde Wingate, was killed a few weeks after the launch of Operation Thursday. The Chindits had suffered heavy casualties: 1,396 killed and 2,434 wounded. Over half had to be confined to hospital and prescribed a special nutritional diet whilst hospitalised.

Uncle Jack (John William Knott) joined the Liverpool King's regiment in 1940 at the age of 18 years. After basic training he was sent to India then Burma and didn't return home until October 1945, 'they were known as the forgotten army'. When he returned home his hair was white, he was 23 years old. Whilst in Burma he was a member of the Chindits and involved in jungle warfare with the Japanese. He, alongside most others, got malaria, luckily they were given quinine. Uncle Jack came back to Liverpool with a Japanese officer's sword.

ALBERT KNOTT – No.3 COMMANDO



My Dad, Bert Knott from Liverpool, joined the Army when he was 18 years old. He volunteered to join the Commandos and passed his training and became a member of No. 3 Commando, 4 troop in January 1942 at the age of 19 yrs. He trained at Achnacarry, Scotland and did his parachute training at Tatton Park, Ringway (Manchester) airport.

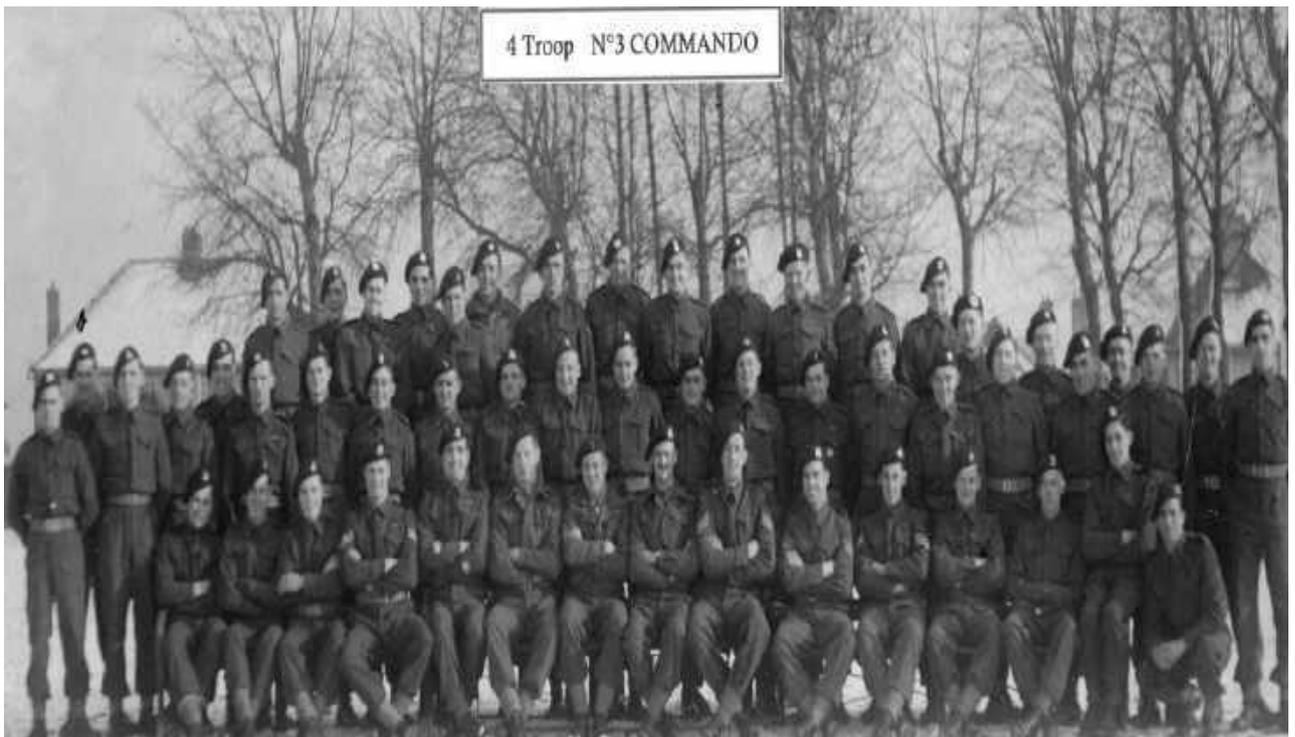
Commando units consisted of six troops of 65 men, 390 men altogether. He stayed in the Commandos until February 1946.

He didn't speak about the war, except for some little amusing tales. He told me that whilst training in Scotland they used to run

up and down Ben Nevis carrying their field packs.

At Spean Bridge, Scotland, there is a memorial to the Commandos and a museum at a pub/hotel where the Commandos used to socialise.

Dad took part in Commando raids in Africa, Libya, Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, including Dieppe, St. Nazaire and D. Day. For D day the commandos became part of the 1st Special Services Brigade under Peter Young and Lord Lovatt.



Dad is 13th on the back row L to R

ROBERT SMYTH and the DUKE OF KENT



Leading Aircraftman Robert Smyth from Liverpool was in the 307 Squadron, Royal Air Force, Polish Nightfighter Squadron, Fighter Command.

Easter 1942, the Duke of Kent visited the Squadron in Exeter. The Duke was a pilot and he was greeting Squadron members. At the end of the row was Bob (Robert) Smythe.

This is the conversation between Bob and the Duke:

- Duke : Where do you come from?
Bob: Liverpool Sire, where men are men and women are glad of it
Duke: Liverpool? I didn't know there was a Polish community there.
Bob: I am British
Duke: So why does the badge on your sleeve say 'POLAND'?
Bob: Without the badge girls would ignore me.
Duke: I hope you will loan me your jacket tonight!!!!

The Polish airmen were very popular with the ladies.



Bob at his wedding
10th January 1942 at
St John The
Evangelist, Rice
Lane, Walton.



His Royal Highness, Prince George, The Duke of Kent, was the younger brother of King George VI.

In 1929 the duke earned his pilot's licence. He was the first of the royal family to cross the Atlantic by air. On 28 July 1941, he was given the rank of Air Commodore in the Welfare Section of the RAF Inspector General's Staff. In this role, he went on official visits to RAF bases to help boost wartime morale

On 25th August 1942 the RAF Short Sunderland Flying Boat W4026 he was flying in crashed into a hillside near Dunbeath, Scotland. The Duke of Kent and 13 others died, he was 39 years old. It was said he was flying to Iceland on non-operational duties.* Princess Marina, his wife, had given birth to their third child, Prince Michael, only seven weeks before.

** Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince alleged in their book "Double Standards" that the Duke of Kent was on a secret mission to Sweden as he had a suitcase full of Krona.*

OPERATION CHARIOT - St. Nazaire Raid

28th March 1942 –“The Greatest Raid of all”

Operation Chariot was an audacious British Combined Operation raid on the port of St. Nazaire in German occupied France. St. Nazaire was the only place the large battleships could dry dock and it was a dry dock for the U-boats. The Campbeltown was an old ship given to Britain by USA as part of the Lend Lease Scheme. The Campbeltown was disguised as a German ship.

At 23.30, British bombers began attacking the port, drawing German searchlights and anti-aircraft fire. Unusual behaviour by the bombers caused the Germans to suspect that something was amiss. At 01:00 on 28th March, the guns ceased firing and spotlights were shut off, rather than help the British identify where the port was in the darkness.

It was too late. The Campbeltown had already entered the Loire estuary. At 1.22a.m., the German spotlights were switched on again, this time illuminating the Campbeltown and convoy. Using the Nazi flag and identifying themselves as friendly German ships, the British approached, but after passing a number of German gun emplacements, the Germans saw through the deception. Every gun on the docks then opened fire on the British. The Campbeltown lost two helmsmen as it approached the shore – one dead and one wounded. At 1.34a.m. Campbeltown hit the dock gates at a speed of 19 knots, the impact driving her 33 feet onto them. The explosives, timed to trigger after British personnel had escaped, were in the bow.

The Commandos poured off the Campbeltown and spread out along the docks. Assault teams engaged in firefights with the German defenders, while demolition teams set about destroying important equipment like the dock pumping machinery and other installations with explosives, many facilities on the docks were destroyed.

Hours after the fierce fighting ended, 214 were captured and were gathered around the dock, they knew what was going to happen. The explosives aboard the Campbeltown were meant to trigger at 4:30 a.m., but did not. Around noon, a group of senior German officers and civilians were inspecting the Campbeltown, unaware of the danger she contained. Without warning, the bow exploded, killing them and 320 others. The dry dock was destroyed and remained out of action for the rest of the war.

Only 228 men returned to Britain after the raid, 168 were killed and 214 made prisoners by the Germans. 22 commandos escaped back to Britain in motor Torpedo Boats and five escaped to the Spanish border. Well planned and I think extremely daring, the Saint-Nazaire raid is justifiably known as “the greatest raid of all”.

My great-grandad Albert Knott was in No. 3 commando and took part in this raid, fortunately he escaped back to Britain. I just about remember my great-grandad and I am incredibly proud of him and all who played such vital roles in ensuring our future and the life we have today. RESPECT. *James Frost*

St. Nazaire Raid photos



HMS Campbeltown



Raid on St. Nazaire painting by David Rowlands Military Artist

Battle for North Africa and El Alamein

The First Battle of El Alamein was fought 1st to 27th July 1942.

This was a battle of the Western Desert Campaign of the Second World War, fought in Egypt between Allied and German and Italian (Axis) forces. The Panzer Africa Army, (Panzerarmee Afrika), which included the Afrika Korps under German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel fought against Allied Forces under Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck (Britain, India, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand) - the Eighth Army .

The British Eighth Army was badly defeated by Italian and German forces at Gazala in June 1942. The British Eighth Army then retreated east into Egypt and assumed a defensive position near El Alamein. Pursued by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel of Germany, the Axis chief, the British constructed an elaborate array of defences. On 1st July, Axis forces attacked, but proved unable to break through the British Eighth Army. Subsequent British counterattacks failed to dislodge the Axis enemy and by late July a stalemate ensued. Auchinleck asked Churchill for more men and supplies. In August 1942 command of the Eighth Army was given to Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery, as well as more men and supplies.

Second Battle of El Alamein fought 23rd October to 5th November 1942

Having been driven east by Axis forces in 1942, the British had established a strong defensive line at El Alamein, Egypt. Recovering and reinforcing, General Montgomery on the British side commenced planning an offensive to regain the initiative. The British prevented a second advance by the Axis forces into Egypt. Axis positions near El Alamein, only 66 miles (106 km) from Alexandria, were dangerously close to the ports and cities of Egypt, the base facilities of the Commonwealth forces and the Suez Canal. However, the Axis forces were too far from their base at Tripoli in Libya to remain at El Alamein indefinitely, which led both sides to accumulate supplies for more offensives, against the constraints of time and distance.

British forces ground through the enemy defences before shattering the Axis lines. Short on supplies and fuel, Axis forces were compelled to retreat back into Libya. The victory ended the threat to the Suez Canal and provided a significant boost to Allied morale.

The Allied victory at El Alamein led to the retreat of the Afrika Korps and the German surrender in North Africa in May 1943.

Allied Casualties - 4,800 dead, 9,000 wounded of 195,000 troops

Axis Casualties - 9,000 dead, 15,000 wounded, (30,000 captured of 110,000 troops)

MEMORIES OF 1942

William joined the RAF in 1940 and served for 5 years. His team fitted wireless transmitting stations along the route of Khartoum to Freetown.

He qualified as a meteorologist in Egypt. He was posted to the 4th Durham Survey Regiment and was with them at El Alamein to Tunis. William was then sent to Sicily before D Day.

William Pennington Johnson from Wigan



William and Joan Pennington Johnson

My dad, Ted Jackman, joined the Territorial Army in 1939 at the age of 18 and was called up in August 1939 into the Royal Artillery.

He spent the first part of the war in North Africa and took part in the bombardments at El Alamein and Tobruk. After the campaign in North Africa he was shipped to Sicily and then Italy. *E. Jackman*



This photograph was taken of my dad Ken Gibbon in 1939.

He served in the Royal Artillery in Egypt- Suez Canal, Cairo and Alexandria in 1942. He was also stationed in Damascus, Aleppo and Homs in Syria.

The photograph of my dad on a motorbike was taken when he was in Cyprus in 1943. *Yvonne Forvargue M.P.*

During the Second World War, I was a prisoner of war for three years. At first we were in camps in Italy and then we were moved to Austria. In the Prisoner of War camps we were kept in huts – 50 men to each hut.

One day a fellow soldier got a letter from home, his wife had taken up with a United States soldier. His tears stay with me to this day. *Tom Jones from Wigan*

BERNARD WHITE – TANK REGIMENT EGYPT

Bernard told us his story at the age of 98 years when we visited him at the Wigan Borough Armed forces Community H.Q. Molyneux House.



Bernard White was born in 1921 in London and at the age of 15 years joined the Tank Regiment Musicians Band at Bovington, Dorset.

“In 1941 eight of us musicians asked to leave the band to see action and join tank training.

After training I, Trooper Bernard White, known as Chalky, was sent to Egypt first, with the third Royal Tank Regiment, the Fourth Armoured Brigade known as the Desert Rats.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East was General Sir Claude he issued us with new United States General Grants and Stewart tanks.

My first action was in Bir Hakeim in the Libyan Desert, this was part of the Battle of Gazala (26th May to 21st June 1942). We went into action against the enemy and within 10 minutes our tank got knocked out. We bailed out, but one got killed and two were taken prisoner. Three of us escaped, the tank commander, myself and one other we were picked up by one of our tanks. The tank commander was later killed in action.

Whilst on duty I had my 21st birthday. The tank crew I was with clubbed together and bought a bottle of whisky for us to celebrate. I was the only one who didn't have a drink because I don't like whisky.

We saw a lot of action and three months later, I was in another Grant tank and we engaged the German tanks. With a bang and a flash, an anti-tank shell pierced our tank, I was full of shrapnel and lost half of my left hand. I was sent to Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa. After recovering I was sent back to the U.K. and discharged.”

The Imperial Military Hospital, Baragwanath, Soweto was built in 1942 for convalescing British and Commonwealth soldiers from the Middle East. Field Marshal Jan Smuts opened the hospital and said that after the war the facility would be used for the area's black population. It is now the third largest hospital in the world.

El Alamein Battles



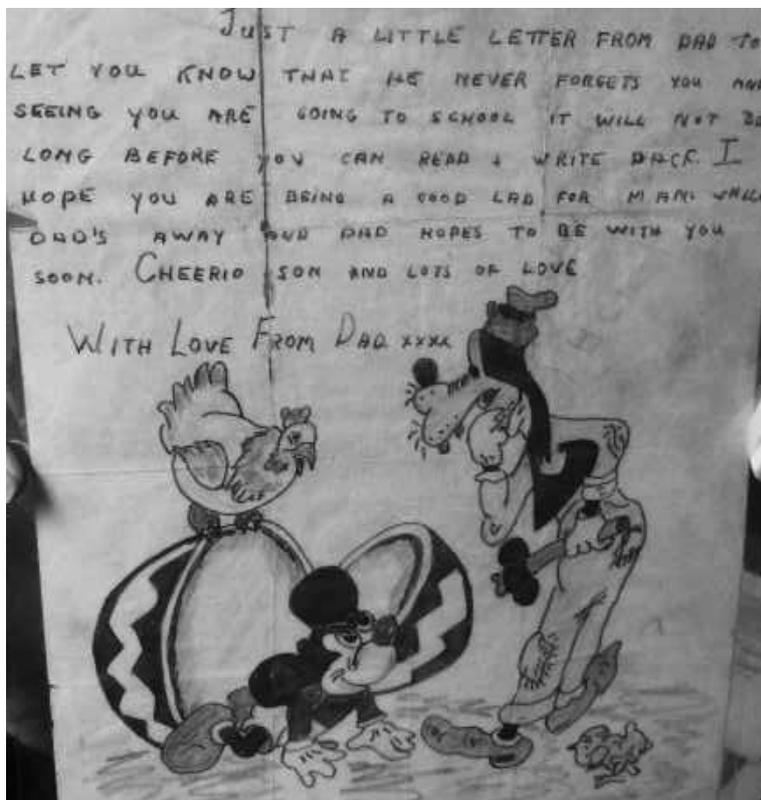
JACK MARTIN



Jack Martin was the son of Hannah Martin. He married Elsie May and they had two children and lived in Higher Ince, Lancashire. He enlisted into the army on 30th September 1940.

Their first son was Jack and their second son Cliff Martin who was born in 1940. This photograph shows Jack with his wife Elsie and his sons Jack and Cliff. The photograph was taken before he was posted to North Africa.

Jack Martin was a Corporal in the Royal Artillery, part of the First Army. He served in North Africa - Egypt, Beirut and Syria from 18th January 1943 until 6th September 1944.



Whilst serving in North Africa, Jack wrote to each of his two boys and drew a cartoon of Mickey Mouse on the letter.

"Just a little letter from dad to let you know that he never forgets you and seeing you are going to school it will not be long before you can read and write back. I hope you are being a good lad for mam while dad's away and dad hopes to be with you soon. Cheerio son and lots of love. With Love From Dad xxx"

Dieppe raid



Lord Lovat speaks to returning Commandos and Canadian Troops after the Dieppe raid.

DIEPPE - Operation Jubilee

1942 was the worst year of the war for the Allies. At the time of Operation Jubilee, the UK could not boast a single victory against the Germans in the field (excluding Commando 'pin-prick' raids) and British and Commonwealth troops in North Africa were being contained and driven back by the Africa Corps.

In the Far East, the Japanese were occupying substantial parts of the former British Empire, the Americans were still feeling their material losses at Pearl Harbour and struggling to maintain what was left of their Philippine Army and the Russians were under pressure as Hitler's thrust into the Caucasus took hold. The immediate outlook was bleak.

Dieppe Raid, 19th August 1942

Five thousand troops of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, along with a thousand British troops, many of them commandos, attacked the French port of Dieppe on the English Channel Coast. The force was supported by ships of the Royal Navy and aircraft of the RAF and RCAF. The purpose was to make a successful raid on German-occupied Europe over water, and then to hold Dieppe briefly. The results were disastrous.

The German response was so carefully planned and co-ordinated that it has been speculated that French double-agents warned Germany of Britain's interest in Dieppe. For whatever the reason, the Germans were ready and had plans in place to combat just such an attack. Unluckily, at 3.35am on 19th August, when No.3 Commando was approaching the shore they ran into a German convoy. Shots were fired, alerting all the ground troops of approaching trouble. No.3 Commandos' landing vessels were scattered in the scuffle that ensued. Only 17 men, with their three commanding officers, landed bang on time, though 140 eventually made it to shore.

The German defences were on the alert. The Canadian landing on the Dieppe beach and flanking attacks at Puy and Pourville failed to reach any of their objectives. Only the commandos enjoyed any success.

6,090 men, including 5,000 Canadians, landed at Dieppe and on four adjacent beaches with the objective of destroying German coastal defences as well as some strategic infrastructure.

The raid was a disaster: a lack of sufficient strength, insufficient fire support from aircraft and artillery and inadequate training of troops for their first test of battle. Of the 6,090 Allied troops that took part in the Dieppe Raid, 1,027 were killed and 2,340 were captured.

Despite the bloodshed, the raid provided valuable lessons for subsequent Allied amphibious assaults on Africa, Italy and Normandy.

Major –General Roberts at a pre-raid briefing said “Don't worry boys, it will be a piece of cake”. Each year on 19th August Major-General Roberts received a small box in the post, containing a piece of cake.

The only thing my dad, Bert Knott, No. 3 Commando, said about Dieppe was: “They were waiting for us”.

WILLIAM COLBON LIFEBOAT SURVIVOR



At 00.02 hours on 10th November 1942, the SS Cerinthus was hit by one of three torpedoes from U-128. The ship was 180 miles southwest from the Cape Verde Islands. At 01.45 hours the U-boat opened fire from all guns until the tanker capsized to starboard and sank at 02.25 hours.

A lifeboat containing Chief Officer Hawkins, 15 crew and 3 gunners was picked up on 1st December by HMS Bridgewater. They landed at Freetown, Sierra Leone on 6th December 1942.

Twenty seamen scrambled into a second lifeboat. After seventy-six days adrift in the lifeboat, only one seaman was left alive. Liverpool Merchant Seaman William Colbon at 25 years, was the only survivor on this lifeboat.

An American steam merchant, Kentuckian, saw the lifeboat at 14.30 on 24th January 1943. The American ship thought it was a German booby-trap, so fired on the lifeboat.

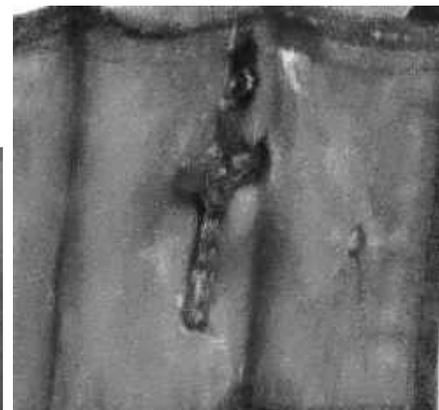
William Colbon was very weak, exhausted and looked like a skeleton, he was surrounded by six dead men. William had survived for 76 days, keeping alive by eating raw fish and barnacles. He had lost 6 stone in weight, weighing only 5 stone 4 lbs. He was landed at Port of Spain, Trinidad on 31st January 1943.

The master of the SS Cerinthus, 16 crew and 3 gunners were lost

William returned to his parents' home in Soho Street. Liverpool. Earlier in the war his wife, father-in-law and mother in-law had been killed and his Bootle home destroyed during a German bombing raid.

William Colbon, after the end of the war, with the British Empire Medal he was awarded for exceptional courage and endurance that he had shown during 76 days survival.

Wallet with the Crucifix William carried throughout his 76 days ordeal.



Lifeboat tools

SOME BRITISH SOLDIERS' DARING ESCAPES

Stalag Luft III - Zagan Poland - At the height of the camp's use, about 10,000 commissioned/non-commissioned mostly RAF officers were in the camp.

Wooden Horse Escape October 1943

Prisoners made a vaulting horse from Red Cross parcels' plywood. This was designed to hide men, tools and containers of soil. Each day the horse was carried out to the same spot near the perimeter fence and while prisoners conducted gymnastic exercises above, a tunnel was dug under the horse. At the end of each working day, a wooden board was placed over the tunnel entrance and covered with surface soil. The gymnastics disguised the real purpose of the vaulting horse and kept the sound of the digging from being detected by the German microphones. For three months Lieutenant Michael Codner, Flight Lieutenant Eric Williams and Flight Lieutenant Oliver Philpot dug over 30m (100 ft) of tunnel. They used bowls for shovels and metal rods to poke through the surface of the ground to create air holes. No shoring was used except near the entrance.

On the evening of 19th October 1943, Codner, Williams and Philpot made their escape. Williams and Codner were able to reach the port of Stettin where they stowed away on a Danish ship and eventually returned to Britain. Philpot, posing as a Norwegian margarine manufacturer, was able to board a train to Danzig (Gdansk) and then stowed away on a Swedish ship headed for Stockholm, from where he was repatriated to Britain.

The Great Escape – 24th March 1944

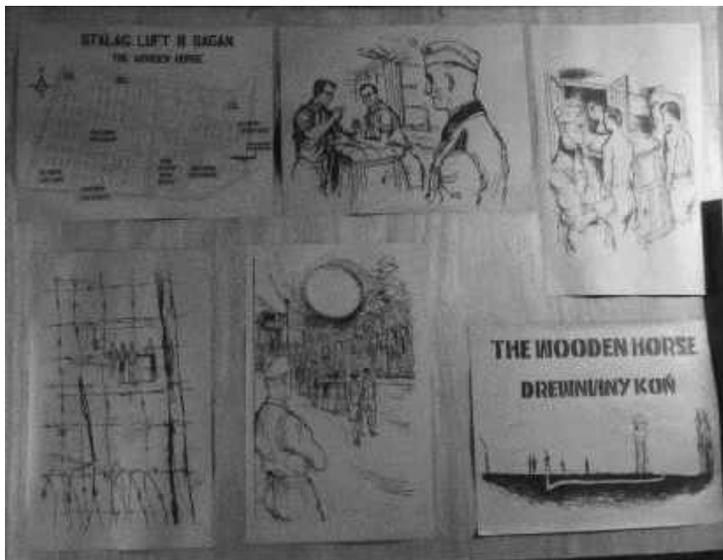
Codenamed Big X, Roger Bushell headed an Escape Committee and planned to get over 200 men out from the camp in one attempt. Three deep, long tunnels – Tom, Dick and Harry were constructed by over 600 Allied prisoners. Hidden under a stove in hut 104 was the entrance to Harry and after a whole year of construction, the "Harry" tunnel was completed in March 1944. Unfortunately the tunnel was not long enough to reach into the forest. 76 prisoners escaped before the 77th escapee and tunnel were discovered. Only three men managed to return home, of the rest, 50 were executed by the Gestapo.

Colditz -

Colditz castle in Germany was a prisoner of war camp for allied officers who had a history of escapes. Colditz was seen as escape proof, but 130 escape attempts managed to clear the fortress grounds. A total of 32 prisoners managed to reach the frontier without recapture.

Lt. Airey Neave was the first British Officer to escape and returned to England in April 1942 via Switzerland, France, Spain and Gibraltar.

Group Captain Douglas Bader lost both his legs in an air crash in 1931, however with two artificial legs, he re-joined the RAF at the start of the war. He took part in the Battle for France, Dunkirk, and the Battle of Britain. He was captured after baling out of his aircraft in August 1941 and after a number of escape attempts was sent to Colditz castle. Lt. Mike Sinclair, was the only prisoner to be killed by the Germans during an escape attempt at Colditz.



Drawings of Wooden Horse Plan. Michael Codner, Eric Williams, Oliver Philpot



Site of the "Harry" Tunnel



Roger Bushell



25 of the 50 murdered escapees



Escape items belonging
To Oliver Philpot



RAF Prisoners of war at Stalag Luft III



Allied prisoners in Colditz castle, Douglas Bader in the front middle



Colditz Castle

Brigadier William James Eastwood FRC\$.Ed

William James Eastwood was the son of Arthur and Wilhelmina Eastwood. For thirteen years he was an orthopaedic surgeon at Wigan Infirmary and Alder Hey Children's Hospital Liverpool. On 19th September 1942 he enlisted for war service and became a Brigadier, he was sent to North Africa with the Royal Army Medical Corps.

On 1st May 1943, William was killed on active service in North Africa, he was 40 years old. He is buried in the Tel El Kebir War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt.

On 13th June 1943, a chapel at the 8th Army Hospital in North Africa was dedicated to him.

On 10th February 1944 a memorial bed at Wigan Infirmary was dedicated to Brigadier William James Eastwood.



El Kebir War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt



Malta GC



My Uncle George Parkinson served on board HMS Victorious which was part of Operation Pedestal to relieve the siege of Malta. Malta was of strategic importance because of its airfields and it being the only British Harbour between Gibraltar and Egypt.

From 1940 the Italians and Germans tried to bomb Malta into submission. Between 1941 and 1942 there were more than 3,000 bombing raids and many people were killed and injured. During 6 months of 1942, there was only one 24 hour period that did not have an air-raid.

During these years, there were severe shortages of food and fuel as well as the continuous bombing raids —disease soon spread and nearly 1,500 Maltese people died and over 3,600 were injured. The Merchant Navy lost 31 ships trying to get supplies through to Malta, the island was virtually cut off. Malta would not give in even though her only defences were 3 Gladiator bi-planes, Faith, Hope and Charity.

In August 1942 HMS Victorious joined the convoy to relieve the siege of Malta. HMS Victorious was attacked by Italian bombers but was able to carry on. Eventually the convoy of Allied ships got through, bringing food to the starving population and fuel for the 'planes. Operation Pedestal was successful though a destroyer, two cruisers, an aircraft carrier and nine merchant ships were sunk with the loss of 400 Allied lives. King George VI awarded the George Cross to Malta and its people in April 1942 in recognition of their courage and determination not to give in to the enemy. The Luftwaffe continued to attack Malta till 1943, but not with the same success as before because the relief convoy had brought ammunition and aeroplanes. The siege of Malta ended on August 15th 1942.

Whilst based in Australia with HMS Victorious, George met his future wife, Norma, and at the end of the War they returned to England, but later went back to live in Australia, in Mudgee, New South Wales. (In the early 1990's George was sent his Malta medal which was issued to all those who had served in Operation Pedestal).



HMS Janus was adopted by Wigan. In 1940 to 1942 HMS Janus was involved in Malta convoy duties. On 20th January 1944 HMS Janus

was also involved in the Anzio landings. On the 23rd January she was sunk by a German aircraft torpedo, with heavy loss of life.

A Young Lad's Thoughts on the Siege of Malta From Cheshire Military Museum

“My family arrived in Malta on posting in 1937, father was a Captain in The Royal Signals but working for Rediffusion establishing a radio by wire service for the colony. The war saw to it that he remained in post and rapidly promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. I was very young at the time so war was exciting. Food became in very short supply and the family had to queue at the Victory Kitchens which were set up in each area. You had to appear in person to get your ration of watery soup and slice of bread. Cats and dogs became noticeably fewer – we all reckoned they were in the soup.

The bombing became very heavy. The island is only 14 x 7 miles, the built up area a lot less. Raids were taking place at one time nearly every 20 minutes around the clock. My father subsequently told me that in late 1942 they expected to have to surrender. However in the nick of time a convoy, despite heavy losses, was forced through to the Grand Harbour of Valetta. This was Operation PEDESTAL, a relief convoy for Malta that arrived 15th August 1942. 14 merchant ships had loaded at Birkenhead and left England with 85,000 tons of supplies. Only 32,000 arrived in Malta. Everyone turned-to to unload the cargo ignoring the bombing. One ship was sunk at the dockside full of ammunition and they still managed to unload most of her precious cargo even though underwater.”



Kingsway (now Republic Street) Valetta, Malta 1942



Oil Tanker Ohio arrives in Malta as part of Operation Pedestal – she had been torpedoed on 12th August 1942

1943

JANUARY 23rd British Eighth Army (Desert Rats) take Tripoli, North Africa from Germans.

18th Leningrad (St. Petersburg) liberated by the Russians.

27th Herbert Seymours Miller, injured by a coalcutter in Chanters Collery, died in Leigh Infirmary 28th January 1943.

FEBRUARY 2nd Germans defeated by Russians and surrender at Stalingrad.

The Chindits begin guerrilla operations against the Japanese in Burma.

MARCH— United States victory over Japanese in Guadalcanal and the Bismarck Sea.

APRIL— Revolt of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto begins. 60,000 Jews decide to fight In the Warsaw (Poland) Ghetto. Fighting continues for over one month.

MAY— Germans are defeated by the Allies and surrender in North Africa.

16th The Dambuster Raid.

Nazis liquidate the Warsaw Ghetto and the Jews are taken to Treblinka Concentration camp to be gassed.

41 German U boats sunk. Germans recall all U boats from North Atlantic.

JUNE- Himmler orders liquidation of all Polish Jewish ghettos.

United States begins submarine warfare against Japanese in the Pacific.

JULY— **10th** Allies land in Sicily, Italy. Allies bomb Rome, Italy.

25th Mussolini is arrested in Rome.

SEPTEMBER 3rd The Allies land in Southern Italy.

8th Italy surrenders. The Germans occupy Italy and release Mussolini.

The Siege of Malta ends after 3 years. The people of Malta endured over 3,000 air raids by the Italians and Germans.

OCTOBER— Allies enter Naples, Italy.

NOVEMBER— 11th Seth Webster killed when a stone fell from the roof and hit his head at Gibfield Collery, Atherton.

28th First meeting of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin who met in Teheran, Iran. They confirm plans to invade Western Europe in Spring 1944.



Eder Dam after being struck by the bouncing bomb



Mohne Dam after being struck by the bouncing bomb

Commandos and the Safecracker

My uncle told me about a special commando operation that my dad Albert Knott took part in.

In 1943 a small number of Commandos had to take a “safe cracker” to steal some documents from a heavily guarded house in France occupied by the Germans. The “safe cracker” had been released from prison and offered a pardon if he joined the commandos and helped the war effort.

The commandos arrived by small boat from a British submarine and were met by a young boy from the French Resistance. The boy took them to the house. The safe was opened and the documents taken. They all got back to the submarine then to England safely and the “safe cracker” earned his release from prison.

Other commando raids with the safe-cracker were behind enemy lines to Rommel’s headquarters in North Africa and the safe-cracker opened the safe to retrieve important documentation. They parachuted into Germany and went to Hermann Goring’s home in Carinhall near Berlin where they took important German documents, code books and maps. During the Italian campaign, 14 embassy safes were opened in only one day.

Unfortunately after the war the safe cracker went back to his life of crime, he was caught and ended up back in prison.

A few years ago my brother met a work colleague in Scotland who told him about his eccentric uncle. His uncle had told him a story about how he had been on operations with the commandos in the war. His uncle was a retired safe cracker. We now know his name was Johnny Ramensky.



Johnny Ramensky (far right) with fellow commandos

ROBERT HUBERT MAKIN and ARCHIBALD WALLACE **RAF PATHFINDER, 35 SQUADRON, HALIFAX BOMBER JB785**

On June 11th 1943 at 23:39 Halifax II JB785 takes off from RAF base Graveley together with 29 Lancasters, 21 Stirling and 21 Halifax bombers they fly towards their target, the railroad emplacements at Münster in Germany. The JB785 functions as a "pathfinder" which means that it flies ahead of the formation to mark the target with flares for the approaching bombers. After missions to Essen, Duisburg, Bochum, Dusseldorf, Wuppertal yet another dangerous mission for the crew. It would be their last. The mission was successful. On the journey back the formation was picked up by German radar and nightfighters were sent to intercept the Bombers. Amongst these nightfighters was Messerschmitt Bf-110 piloted by Hauptmann Werner Baake stationed at the Luftwaffe airbase at Gilze-Rijen in Holland.

At 01:10 Luftwaffe Hauptmann Werner Baake shot down a Wellington bomber which crashed at Neeroeteren in Belgium. He landed at Gilze-Rijen, took off again and shot down Halifax JB785 at 02:40 which crashed at Giessenburg, Netherlands. Pilot Officer G.R Herbert, Flight Sergeant E. Cassingham, Flight Sergeant F. Greenwood, Sergeant R.H. Boone and Sergeant F. Stewart, were all killed, Pilot Officer Archibald Wallace and Sergeant Robert Makin managed to bail-out.

The story of Sergeant Robert Makin

He was born on 23 February 1923, joined in June 1941, and was an accountant clerk before he joined the R.A.F.. He was a member of No. 35 Squadron and air gunner when he was shot down. Wartime address was "Grange View", Common Road, Newton-le-Willows, Lancashire.

Sergeant Robert Makin was severely wounded when he parachuted down. The diary of Mr. Herman Bakker from Hoogblokland contains the following entry. "Saturday June 12th, that night an English bomber crashes behind the Lage Giessen. One crewmember survived, but was wounded. Because of his injuries he decided to hand himself in and knocked on the door of Mr. de Krey who lived at Muisbroek. The people there were afraid of German reprisals so they brought him to Mr. C. Beuzekom. Doctor den Duin than arrived and treated him after which the notified Germans collected him and brought him to hospital in Gorinchem. From there he was taken to the Luftwaffe hospital in Amsterdam and after recovery he was transported to a POW camp in the east of Germany. Towards the end of the war as the Russians approached all prisoners were marched off to camps in the west of Germany. During this march Robert managed to escape but captured again in April 1945, taken to Stalag XIB. In May 1945 he was liberated by American troops.

JB 785 Continued.....



The story of Archibald Victor Wallace JB785

Archibald was born on 16th October 1918 and joined the RAF on 20th October 1936. When the Wellington plane JB 785 was hit Pilot Officer and air gunner Archibald Wallace bailed out and landed near Hoogblokland in the dark of night. At that time he was unaware of the fact that five of his friends just died. He buried his parachute and decided to walk to a North-West direction until daybreak when he hid in a cornfield.

When it was dark he walked again but this time towards the south. Somehow he managed to cross the rivers Merwede and Bergse Maas and at 08:00 in the morning he arrived at a farm near

Waalwijk, almost 26 miles from where he landed by parachute.

The farmer gave him food and civilian clothes together with instructions to go to a hideout at Tilburg. Archibald arrived there the next day. The resistance there informed him of a hideout at an Abbey in Turnhout, Belgium. He walked to Turnhout, but was spotted by a German patrol and captured. Via prisons in Antwerp and Brussels he was transported to POW camp Stalag IIIa in Luckenwalde from where he was liberated in May 1945 by Russian troops.

Memorial in Giessenlanden, Holland



BATTLE FOR SICILY – 3 COMMANDO BRIDGE



MAC / BERT / KEN - 1943

Dad, Bert Knott, was in No. 3 Commando and they were amongst the first to land on Sicily on 14th July 1943, he was 20 years old. This small advance force had to hold and keep the Malati bridge, Catania intact for when the main forces arrived.

They had been told that the only resistance would be from scattered Italian defenders, but the commandos ran into the 3rd Battalion of the Hermann Goering Regiment. This meant that all the way to the bridge there was intensive fighting, but their objective was reached by 0300 on the 14th July. The Italians guarding the bridge were quickly overcome and it came under British control. The demolition charges were removed and the commandos now had the

task of holding the bridge until the arrival of the 50th Division which was fighting its way up Highway 11

Then the Germans arrived with support of Tiger tanks and inflicted heavy casualties on the exposed men of No.3 Commando. The commandos' only cover was to hide under the bridge and return fire. They fought bravely and succeeded in holding the bridge and stopped it being blown up, although 153 commandos were killed or badly injured. After this, the remaining commandos were told to disperse into the hills in small groups until the main allied force had landed and secured the beachhead. Then they would all meet up. 59 commandos were captured but my dad and two friends managed to escape into the hills. They had to survive on what little rations they had, which were mostly 'hard tack' biscuits. Eventually they went towards the allied meeting place and could smell something strange. This turned out to be coffee and doughnuts as they had reached the American lines. After a couple of nights' rest and some square meals, they were ready for their next action.

In recognition of No. 3 Commandos' success through their tenacious fighting in holding the bridge, General Montgomery ordered that a stone was carved with the words '3 Commando Bridge' and cemented onto the bridge. The stone is still there today and the bridge is known as '3 Commando Bridge'.

In 38 days of fighting in Sicily, (9th July to 17th August 1943) Allied forces had killed or wounded roughly 29,000 enemy troops and captured more than 140,000 more. The British had nearly 13,000 casualties, including 2,700 killed. The US lost over 2,200 troops killed and about 6,500 more wounded or captured.

Battle for Sicily Operation Husky

9th July to 17th August 1943



Malati Bridge now called 3 Commando Bridge



Sicily Landings



Battle for Catania 5th August 1943

Lawrence Herbert Nicholson Reed

My granddad, Lawrence Herbert Nicholson Reed, was the son of James Nicholson Reed and Bertha May Reed. He married Ada and they had three children. He joined the Lancashire Fusiliers and went to join the war.

In 1943 Granddad was a Lance Bombardier in the Royal Artillery, 64 Medium Regiment and was sent to Catania, Sicily and joined the Allied landings.

On the 7th August 1943 Granddad drove an officer back to Headquarters in a jeep. Whilst the officer was delivering his report, Granddad went to speak to the soldiers who were in the following jeep. The jeep was hit by a bomb and three of the five soldiers were killed, including my Granddad – he died instantly.

Granddad was 23 years old and left behind his widow Ada and three children, the youngest, a son, was only six weeks old and born whilst Granddad was in Sicily so he never saw him. Ada was from Pittenweem, Fife. *Alison Knott*

Granddad is buried in Catania Military Cemetery, Sicily and the inscription on his grave states:



914294 L. BDR
L. H. REED
ROYAL ARTILLERY
7th AUGUST 1943 AGE 23

GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL
TEARS FROM THEIR EYES:
THERE SHALL BE NO MORE
PAIN



Jeep in Catania, Sicily.

Sydney Horton and Robert Parkinson RAF 103 Squadron



Syd and Bob from Aspull, flew a total of 16 successful operations from the 24th June 1943. Sydney was the wireless operator and Bob the rear gunner. On 5th September 1943 their Lancaster was shot down over Manneheim and the crew were forced to bail out over occupied France. Bob and Syd landed close together in a wooded area near the crash site. Shortly after landing Bob saw a German motorcycle that had seen the plane crash but did not search the area for long soon disappearing. The crew had been taught a special whistle that would be useful to contact fellow crew

members which Bob used and after a few attempts received a whistled reply from Syd Horton. The two men opened their "emergency" food pack in search for a cigarette, but due to the darkness and shaking hands the tobacco fell out of the paper and onto the floor.

Syd and Bob buried their parachutes and set off in a south westerly direction carefully walking alongside a road in order to get a clue to their location. They soon spotted a bus stop that indicated a village called Bar-le-Duc. Two hours later they were taken prisoner by two German soldiers who took them to a guardhouse. They were handed over to two young soldiers (17 or 18 years old) and told to go with them by the corporal in charge. The two guards were very casual and after 10 minutes or so near a ditch, Bob asked if he and Syd could smoke, then Bob asked for a light, whereupon Bob hit one of them whilst Syd knocked the other one over. They then pushed the guards into the swampy ditch and ran for the woods.

After many exhausting hours of walking through woodland they spotted a Public House and decided to go in for a drink!! The bar maid served them but seemed to get increasingly agitated with the two aircrew! It was when she started to speak in German, that they decided to drink up and find shelter for the night. About 02.00hrs on the 7th they stopped at Villotte-Sur-Aire where they slept on top of a haystack that night and much of the following day. After resting they struck out for Rupt-St. Mihiel keeping off the road to avoid being seen here when they encountered an elderly farmer. He, after giving them bread and water, soon made off apparently not wanting to be seen with them. On reaching Rupt-St. Mihiel they came across a French lad walking with a horse and cart and beckoned to him. Being still in battle dress and flying boots he obviously recognised them as RAF and told them to lie low as there was a working party nearby whose supervisor would give them away if he saw them. The boy with the horse and cart left and they eventually heard the supervisor leave on his motorcycle but stayed where they were for a while.

A young French couple with two children appeared, having learned about them from the lad with the horse and cart, with food and took them to a house where they received a cooked meal and beer. They were given civilian clothes and a haversack containing hard boiled eggs, bread, butter, sugar and milk in their own water bottle. *Continued.....*

Sydney Horton and Robert Parkinson RAF103 Squadron Continued

At 21.00 hrs on the 8th they decided to move on and walked to Bar-le-Duc. They did not see anybody along the way and lay low until daylight the next morning when they went into the town intending to catch a train to Paris. Seeing a German guard at the station they withdrew to their hiding place just outside the town.

They later saw a cyclist who when beckoned stopped and after enquiring if they were 'Engleesch' agreed to get them tickets to Paris for which they gave him French francs from their purses. An hour later he was back with not just tickets but shaving kit, fruit and wine. He came back again later in a car driven by a well-dressed man who brought them civilian clothes and shoes into which they changed and were driven to the station in Bar-Le-Duc.

At the station they were introduced to the station master, ticket collector and signaller as being English. The train was not due until 02.20 hrs the following morning so they were hidden in the control room of the signal box where they slept until 01.20 hrs. With their haversacks having been filled with fruit they were taken by a porter to a carriage in which there were some French civilians to whom he explained their identities.

The train went straight through to Paris which they reached at 09.00hrs on 10th September. They left the station with no difficulty and attempted to reach the suburbs. They walked the streets of Paris, until finally at about 06.00hrs they approached a Roman Catholic priest. Luck was certainly with them as the priest took them to a school where another priest inspected their identity discs and verified they were British.

The priests helped them obtain railway tickets to Brittany from Paris and they eventually arrived in Quimper in Brittany, to a small fishing boat operated by the resistance under the code name Dahlia. They were hidden beneath the deck among the fish. Bob and Syd held their breath as they could hear the boots of a German soldier inspecting the boat before allowing it to set sail.

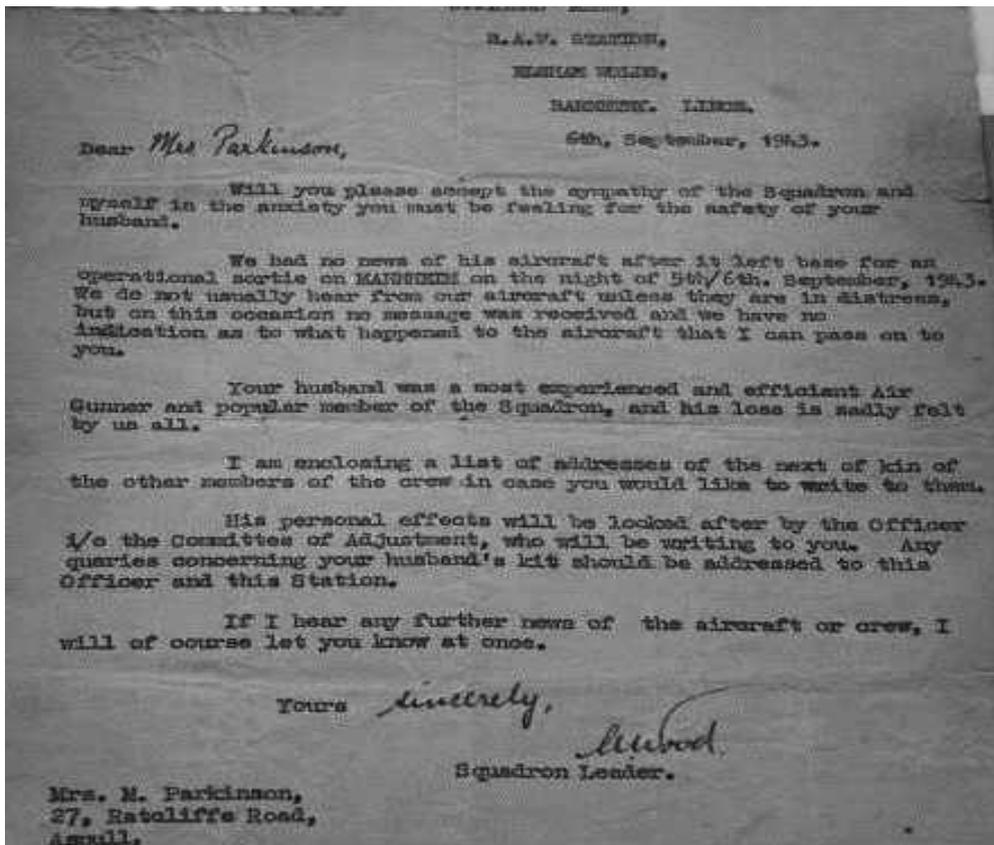
After a day or two in the water, they heard an aircraft and instinctively dived for cover! It was however, a Hawker Hurricane that seemed to be expecting the fishing boat. Upon sighting them, it immediately performed a "victory roll" and headed back home. The fishing boat was then escorted by the Royal Navy into Falmouth to a hero's welcome on the 18th September 1943 just 13 days after the crew left Elsham Wolds.

Bob's wife received a letter from the Squadron Leader saying Bob had been killed in action on the 6th September 1943. On 20th September 1943 his wife received a telegram from the Air Ministry saying Bob was alive and had arrived in the United Kingdom.

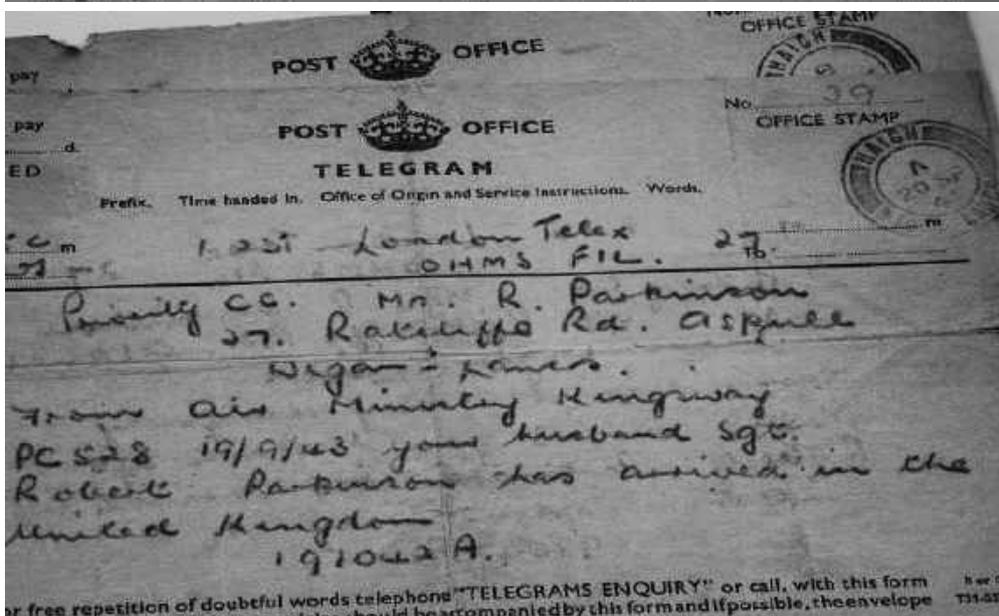
Information from Andrew Caley and wiganworld.co.uk



Sydney Horton and Robert Parkinson with their Lancaster and other members of 103 squadron



Letter to Mrs. Parkinson dated 6th September 1943 from the Squadron Leader saying her husband Robert was missing presumed killed.



Telegram to Mrs Parkinson from the Air Ministry on 20th September 1943 saying her husband Robert is alive and in the United Kingdom

1944

- JANUARY—** British and United States forces land at Anzio, Italy.
- Russians enter Poland.
- 17th** Battle for Monte Cassino in Italy. The Germans are entrenched in the Monastery on top of Monte Cassino which overlooks the road to Rome. The fighting is fierce.
- MARCH—** "The Great Escape", 76 allied prisoners of war escaped from Stalag Luft a German prison camp. The tunnel had taken nearly two years to build. 73 escapees were captured and the Germans executed 50.
- APRIL —** 1st prefabricated houses (prefabs) are erected for homeless families in London. 500,000 to be built after the war.
- MAY** **19th** German surrender at Monte Cassino. The monastery is practically destroyed, but the way to Rome is now open for the Allies.
- JUNE** **6th** The Allied forces invade France in Operation Overlord. The Normandy Landings - D-Day - took place on five French beaches code-named Utah, Juno, Sword, Gold and Omaha.
- JUNE 10 -** Nazis massacred nearly everybody in the French village of Oradour-sur-Glane. Fewer than 10 people survived.
- U.S. troops welcomed by Italian people in Rome.
- JULY—** Plot to kill Hitler by some of his generals fails.
- AUGUST—** **4th** Anne Frank and her family arrested in Holland.
- 15th** Paris liberated from the Germans on the 15th.
- SEPTEMBER 17th –26th** There was a devastating defeat for the Allies at Arnhem in Holland. The plan was to capture 8 bridges along the German Dutch border to shorten the war and march into Germany. 16,500 paratroopers and 3,500 troops in gliders were dropped into Arnhem. After defending the final bridge for nine days, nearly 6,000 from the 1st Airborne Division were captured, 1,174 killed. Almost 1,900 men escaped.
- DECEMBER —** The Battle of the Bulge, December 16th to January 28th 1945.

RAF FL/ SGT. FREDERICK JOSEPH PATRICK JERVIS DFM



Fred was the son of Frederick and Annie Jervis and attended St. Patrick's School, Wigan and then worked at Uncle Joe's Santus Toffee Works. Later he joined Pendlebury's Department Store. When the war started he joined The Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and to Squadron 156, The Pathfinders. He became a Flight Sergeant, Flight Engineer.

On 2nd August 1943, Fred married Rosaline. After a brief honeymoon he returned to duty. Fred was awarded the DFM. He had taken part in 47 sorties, 302 Flying hours.

His citation read:

Flight Sergeant Jervis had carried out a continuous tour of 47 operations against the majority of heavily defended targets in Germany and enemy occupied territory. His unfailing reliability and coolness have been of the highest order. Throughout he has shown commendable knowledge and skill, always setting a very high example to the rest of the squadron. His outstanding devotion to duty as a member of an exceptional Pathfinder Force crew makes him a very worthy recipient of the award of the Distinguished Flying Medal, 2nd November 1943.

He was posted to Upwood Air Base Lincoln, to train new volunteers as Pathfinders. Shortly after receiving news of his DFM, Fred was told by his wife Rosaline that he was about to become a father.

On the 25th January 1944 in a training accident, Fred's plane crashed killing all ten men aboard. Just after receiving the news of her husband Fred's death, Rosaline lost the baby.

Rosaline and Fred's mum Annie went to Buckingham Palace to receive his Distinguished Flying Medal. As it was the DFM, the travel warrant sent for them to receive the award was third class if Fred had been an officer and receiving the DFC, the travel warrant would have been first class. Officers were



awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses, but other ranks Distinguished Flying Medals. In 1993, after a review, the RAF discounted the DFM and the DFC is awarded to all cited for bravery regardless of rank.

Fred and Rosaline on their wedding day

Battle for Monte Cassino, 17th January to 18th May 1944



Monte Cassino monastery was occupied by the Germans and became a stronghold. It was the German army Regional headquarters.

There were four Allied assaults on Monte Cassino. The battle resulted in heavy loss of life, 55,000 Allied casualties and 20,000 German casualties. The Monastery was completely destroyed, but has now been re-built.



My dad, Ted Jackman (front row first right), served at Monte Cassino for the whole of the siege. His job was to load the shells into the breach of his unit's Howitzer field guns. As the fighting reached its climax his unit fired their guns continuously for 6 days and nights. His unit was attacked by German fighter planes on several occasions. In one incident his friend was killed whilst taking cover beside him. The blast from the guns was so severe that his ears bled and he was deafened for several weeks, he

suffered hearing problems for most of his life.

After the Germans had retreated he helped to bury the dead from both sides. Using bottles to mark the grave. (they would write the name of the dead soldier on a piece of paper scroll it up and place it in the bottle which would be inverted and pushed into the soil). Dad said it was easier to see a German grave as the beer bottles were better. Shortly afterwards he was wounded in both legs by shrapnel from a German shell. Once he recovered he was transferred to the Military Police, one of his duties was to guard supplies of mechanical spares against stealing from American troops. *E. Jackman*



William Heyes came from Aspull, he was a Gunner with the 70 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery. Billy was married to Mary Elizabeth Heyes. He was killed in Italy on the 7th January 1944 and is buried in the Cassino War Cemetery. The cemetery is in a very quiet part of the town below Monte Cassino Monastery. The inscription on his grave stone: "IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY DARLING BILLY, WHO GAVE HIS LIFE. DUTY NOBLY DONE. R.I.P." His name is also on the Aspull War memorial.

Timeline of D Day 6th June 1944

00.16 The British 6th Airborne landed by gliders and parachute. The gliders were towed by Halifax bombers and landed a few feet from Benouville bridge (later known as Pegasus Bridge after the emblem of the British airborne forces). After ten minutes of fierce fighting they took the bridge.

00.30 Café Gondre, near Benouville Bridge, became the first building to be liberated in France

American paratroopers of 82nd and 101st Airborne make night jumps into the Cherbourg Peninsula at the western end of the beaches. Because of the cloud, a number missed their target and drowned in flooded swamps.

02.45 Men began to climb down from their ships into their landing craft. "The landing craft was rolling in every possible direction; the sea-sickness pills had failed. Lying still only made one feel worse." Eric Broadhead, Durham Light Infantry heading for Gold Beach.

03.30 The 6th Airborne land at Ranville to attack the Merville battery

04.30 St.Mère-Eglise was the first French town to be liberated. "(American) paratroopers began jumping out by the hundreds. I saw one paratrooper land in the road but a German killed him before he could get untangled from his parachute. Another (paratrooper) was killed near me. I will never forget the sight." Raymond Paris, resident of St. Mère-Eglise

05.30 Nearly 200 Allied ships began bombarding German defensive positions along 80km (50 miles) of coast. The bombardment lasted two and a half hours, continuing as the first landings began.

06.00 Aerial bombing of German fortifications at Omaha and Utah started.

06.30 Allied aircraft flew over northwestern France dropping leaflets. These told the French civilians that liberation was at hand and those living near to the coast should make their way inland, or if that were impracticable, avoid the roads and seek safety in open country.

06.30 American forces landed at Omaha and met stiff opposition. They suffered heavy casualties. 'Swimming' tanks, on which the Americans had placed great faith, sank out at sea due to the unexpected swell and because they were landed too far out.

07.25 British landings began on Gold Beach. The success of the landing was aided by 'swimming tanks' that did get ashore. British troops landed on Sword Beach. Troops were supported by tanks, the tide was high, leaving fewer metres of beach to traverse. Although mines sunk a number of boats, soldiers succeeded in silencing German machine guns within half an hour.

07.30 Canadians landed on Juno Beach, aided by Sherman tanks.

09.15 General Omar Bradley thought about abandoning the landing at Omaha because extra men could not be landed as the beach and sea was crammed with dead bodies.

12.00 The Americans had made successful advances up Omaha Beach aided by gunfire from small naval vessels that sailed as close to the beach as they could.

Commandos led by Brigadier Lord Lovat and his piper joined up with the men at Pegasus Bridge, 2½ minutes late from the planned meeting time.

D Day facts

In the years since the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Hitler had seized control of most of Western Europe. The D Day plan was to make the Germans believe an invasion would come through Calais, then launch an all-out airborne and marine assault miles down the coast in Normandy. The assault would target five main beaches, aiming to gain a foothold on the continent through which men and supplies could be shipped in to begin the re-conquest of Europe.

On 6th June 1944, the Allied forces stormed the Normandy coast in the biggest amphibious invasion in history. The aim of 'Operation Overlord' or D Day was to push the Nazis back to Berlin. It would take a further eleven months for the Allies to defeat the Nazis.

On D Day 83,000 troops from Britain and the Commonwealth landed on the Normandy coast. 156,115 troops altogether landed on the Normandy coast with the help of more than 5,000 ships, crewed by 195,700 personnel from the Allied navies and merchant navies.

The D-Day landings would go down in history as one of the biggest success stories of the war for the Allies. Once German counter-attacks had failed to drive the Allies back into the sea, the Allies had the bridgehead they required to push on.

Casualties on D Day:

Allied troops killed – 4,400

Allied troops injured – 7,088

Thousands of French civilians died.

Sword beach – 61,715 British Troops (Sword and Gold)

This was a British landing beach for the 3rd Division together with French and British commandos.

The aim was to capture the town of Caen which was at the centre of the local road network. The commandos would move inland and meet up with the airborne Allied troops who had taken over important bridges a few miles in from the coast.

About 29,000 soldiers landed on the beach on D-Day and there were 630 casualties, dead or wounded. They finished the day four miles short of the town of Caen but were successful in linking up with the airborne units.

Juno beach – 21,400 Canadian troops (Juno and Gold)

This was a Canadian landing beach for the 3rd Canadian Division, joined by tanks from the British Hussars. The aim was to cut the road from Caen to Bayeux, link up with the British forces at Gold and Sword beaches and take an airport west of Caen.

The Canadian troops suffered a lot of casualties. There were 1,200 dead or wounded out of the 21,000 troops who landed at Juno on D-Day. Casualty rates in the first hour were very high, with half of the first assault teams killed or wounded.

Gold beach

This was a British landing beach. The British 50th Infantry Division, and the 47th Royal Marine Commando, led the attack. The aim was to cut the important road from Caen to Bayeux and take over the small port of Arromanches. It was hoped they could link up with the US troops at Omaha Beach and the Canadians at Juno Beach.

There were 400 casualties as the beach was secured. The landings took place from 7.25am onwards. Landing craft dropped armoured vehicles onto the beach, some of these were damaged by land mines. A naval bombardment in the morning weakened the German positions and the town of La Rivière was taken at 10am. By the end of the day 25,000 troops had come ashore at Gold beach.

By the end of D-Day the Canadians had linked up with the British from Gold beach. They took the towns of Bernières and Saint-Aubin. Some of the tanks managed to cut the Caen-Bayeux highway.

Omaha beach – 73,000 troops (Omaha and Utah)

This was an American landing beach for the US 1st infantry division with the 116th regiment of the 29th division. The aim was to capture the coastal villages and then cut off the important road from Bayeux to Isigny.

This was the toughest place to land. The US soldiers had to fight really hard to get ashore and 2,400 were killed or wounded. There were problems even before the first soldier landed on the beach. The German defences on the beach were supposed to have been damaged by an attack from bombers and warships, but these had missed their targets. The defences were intact, so troops had to advance 600m up the beach under heavy fire from German machine guns positioned on a cliff.

Thirty amphibious tanks that would have helped protect the American troops nearly all sank because the waves were too big. The conditions on the beach were recreated in the film Saving Private Ryan. Despite all this by the end of the day 34,000 US troops had been landed here and the push inland had begun.

Utah beach

This was an American landing beach. The US 4th Infantry Division came ashore here at 6.30am on D-Day. The aim was to break out and split up. Most of the troops would push north towards the important harbour at Cherbourg.

Small landing craft were launched from bigger ships several kilometres offshore. This was a problem as 2m high waves meant some soldiers were injured or even drowned as they climbed down into the smaller boats. Twenty three thousand troops were landed and 210 were killed, missing or wounded.

The waves and strong winds meant the first soldiers landed 2km to the south of their target. This turned out to be a good thing. They found there were fewer German defences there - so the rest of the troops also came ashore at the "wrong" place.

Jim Radford was in the Merchant Navy at D Day, he was just 15 years old. He helped to build the Mulberry Harbour.

Shores of Normandy by Jim Radford

In the cold grey light of the sixth of June, in the year of forty-four,
The Empire Larch sailed out from Poole to join with thousands more.
The largest fleet the world had seen, we sailed in close array,
And we set our course for Normandy at the dawning of the day.

There was not one man in all our crew but knew what lay in store,
For we had waited for that day through five long years of war.
We knew that many would not return, yet all our hearts were true,
For we were bound for Normandy, where we had a job to do.

Now the Empire Larch was a deep-sea tug with a crew of thirty-three,
And I was just the galley-boy on my first trip to sea.
I little thought when I left home of the dreadful sights I'd see,
But I came to manhood on the day that I first saw Normandy.

At the Beach of Gold off Arromanches, 'neath the rockets' deadly glare,
We towed our blockships into place and we built a harbour there.
'Mid shot and shell we built it well, as history does agree,
While brave men died in the swirling tide on the shores of Normandy.

Like the Rodney and the Nelson, there were ships of great renown,
But rescue tugs all did their share as many a ship went down.
We ran our pontoons to the shore within the Mulberry's lee,
And we made safe berth for the tanks and guns that would set all Europe free.

For every hero's name that's known, a thousand died as well.
On stakes and wire their bodies hung, rocked in the ocean swell;
And many a mother wept that day for the sons they loved so well,
Men who cracked a joke and cadged a smoke as they stormed the gates of hell.

As the years pass by, I can still recall the men I saw that day
Who died upon that blood-soaked sand where now sweet children play;
And those of you who were unborn, who've lived in liberty,
Remember those who made it so on the shores of Normandy

<https://www.normandymemorialtrust.org/shores-of-normandy-single/>



Jim Radford in 2019 and 1944

D DAY—6th JUNE 1944

LES ROGERS



Les told BETA his story when he visited us.

“I was in the Royal Navy during the war and was at D Day on June the 6th 1944 serving on HMS Kelvin. We were at the “Sword Beach” landing site. We were giving back-up fire as the troops landed on the beaches. We used all our shells and had to return to England. HMCS Haida, a Canadian ship, was at the “Juno Beach” landing site.

On our return we re-stocked with ammunition and on 12th June two V.I.P’s came on board with their entourage. They were Mr. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, and Mr. Jan Smuts, the Premier of South Africa. Mr. Smuts was really nice and spoke to everyone in turn.

We took these V.I.P’s to see the D Day beaches and Mr. Churchill asked us to fire a salvo, then we returned them back to England”. *Les Rogers, Wigan*



HMS Kelvin

Memories of D Day

In June 1944 the regiment went to Normandy to the beaches, but I was returned to a hospital in Leeds with a bad attack of malaria.

I re-joined the regiment in July. *William P. Johnson, Wigan*

Albert Knott – 1st Special Service Brigade



My dad, Albert Knott, was in 4 Troop of No. 3 Commando and for the D Day invasion they joined The First Special Service Brigade. Dad had taken part in many Commando operations, he was 21 years old and was considered a veteran.

They left England and crossed the English Channel to Normandy, France, in small landing craft. Before landing on Sword beach, the commandos removed their helmets and put on their commando berets.

They landed on Sword Beach under heavy fire, but after a 2½ hour march, managed to get to Benouville Bridge (now called

Pegasus) to join the 6th Airborne 2½ minutes late. The Commandos were led by Lord Lovatt and his piper Bill Millin played the bagpipes.

My dad said the lady who owned Gondre Café at the bridge gave drinks to everyone and took in the wounded. Madame Gondre was a nurse. Dad was wounded, but after an operation on Madame Gondre's kitchen table and recovering in her sitting room, he then re-joined his commando unit and went on to retake the Merville battery.

Just after D Day, the Commandos led the Special Service Brigade in a single file night march along a railway line infiltrating unseen and unheard by the enemy front-line defenders. At dawn the Commandos overran the defences to secure Angouville. There were four German counter attacks, but the Commandos held firm. The casualties suffered by the Commando Brigades in Normandy from 6th June—30th September were high, over 50% were killed or wounded.

Eileen Walsh, Wigan



No. 3 Commando 4 troop practising for D Day (Dad is No. 37)

D day photos



British Paratroopers leave for D Day



Commandos landing on Sword Beach



British troops at Pegasus Bridge and one of the British gliders that landed next to the bridge.



British troops land at Gold Beach



Canadian troops land at Juno Beach

D Day - the memories of Bert Ryding



found among his Army memorabilia after his death on April 22, 1998.

Private 3776184 Joseph Herbert Ryding (known as Bert) landed on Sword Beach with C Company 5th Kings Liverpool Regiment. The following is Bert's story in his own words.

"The order came to get into the landing craft. The seas were mountains of water, black and cold. All around as far as the eye could see were other ships of all sizes and shapes. Suddenly on our left we saw a ship split in two, why, we never found out but the bows rose into the air then the stern just like a huge V, but no time to worry about them poor beggars. The faces of my mates and mine also told its own story, what did the immediate

future hold. Then into the craft and lowered into that awful water and away circling round until all the other landing craft were in some kind of straggly line. The job was under way.

How many were in the boat I don't know. My pal Harry, like me like us all, wondered if we'd make it. A bet was made who would be sick first. He lost and later paid me the five Francs which I still have. What a racket. Big guns firing, shells whizzing overhead. Then the rocket ships opened up – what a sight. Flaming metal, scores of them flying skywards like a hailstorm. The beach and houses a long way off came into view, the craft beached and out we dived into three foot of water.

Then we realised what war was about and I know how small was my contribution. The top half of a body bobbed about then a few legs, then more bodies – must have been hit by machine guns and mines. It was a terrible shock. On the beach this wasn't Blackpool or Tenby but for real. The RE officer fine big red-haired fellow was taking his men up to the shoreline when a tremendous bang, showers of sand and mud flew up and he was another number on a war memorial. It sickened us but we didn't forget to flatten ourselves down.

Then a barrage of air bursts came over, not very funny when you don't know what it's all about, a nasty pain in the right ankle at the back and I'd got a shell splinter. My fighting day was over.

One of our medical orderlies took me to a dressing station, a short journey I'll never forget. Lined up on the foreshore were lines of stretchers, scores of them with mostly dead men on them; occasionally one stretcher had a poor soul crying for help or his mother but no-one had time to care for these. Then to a huge gun site and in the cellar wounded men being dressed and sorted out.

D Day—the memories of Bert Ryding Continued.....

The rest of the day was spent sitting around watching this huge war machine roll along, planes by the hundred bombing not a mile away, gliders crashing in the fields beyond, smoke from houses burning, dead men, Jerry and ours, crying men, tanks bogged down in the sand, hundreds of all kinds of craft. It was a huge masterpiece of showmanship but inside of me I was sick, terrified and hoping to wake up from this nightmare. Not only me but thousands of blokes like me.

That evening the walking wounded crawled, hobbled or somehow made our way to a beached craft which took us out to a hospital ship. On the way a ship discharging cargo hailed us: “This is the captain speaking. Thank-you for what you have done today. We are proud of you and wish you well.” I’ll never forget that moment. Someone really cared, someone who still had to find out what it was all about.

3rd August, Monday, Bank Holiday: Again my feet on French soil via the Mulberry Harbour because my scratch had healed and I was fodder again. This time what a change. The South Lancs decimated so we were broken up (the 5th Kings) and joined that mob. Few weeks rest, across the Seine, the Maas (I think) then a course on how to be a soldier. I passed with top marks, a joke surely after all the training I had had. A stripe? Not on your life and the company CO wasn’t impressed by my refusal and said “But you’d be a section commander just the same” so I couldn’t win.”

With the 1st Infantry Battalion of the South Lancashires Bert made his way across France and eventually became part of the 'Market Garden' operation in Holland.



The five franc note that Bert's pal Harry gave him after losing the bet.



South Lancashire reaiment landina on Sword Beach D Dav

JACK PARKINSON,RAF Bomber Command

115 squadron



My uncle Jack Parkinson from Wigan was a Sergeant navigator in RAF Bomber Command, 115 squadron, based in Witchford.

This is the official report of his 8th June 1944 flight:

'The crew of Lancaster bomber HK548 took off 0023 hours on Thursday 8th June 1944 to bomb a target at Massy Palaiseau. Whilst over France and on the run in to the target the crew came under attack by two night fighters. The fighters shot up the port inner engine which caused a fire, this was quickly extinguished. The starboard inner engine

had also been hit during the attack and the fire spread across the starboard wing and could not be extinguished. The order was given to abandon aircraft. Flight Sergeant Nurse bailed out at about 6000 feet, and after landing safely was unable to contact any other member of his crew, except his pilot, Pilot Officer Law, who informed him that Sergeant Parkinson, Flight-Sergeant Washbourne aged 20 years, and Sergeant Russel had all bailed out.

Later on the ground Sgt. Jack Parkinson had met up with F/S Gordon Washbourne about ten minutes after landing, and both airmen had spent the night together in a house at Chatenay, which was about six miles from Paris. F/S Washbourne was suffering from a sprained ankle and was unable to move immediately. However, he left with a young 18 year old Frenchman who was to be his guide and was under the instructions of the French Resistance.

Sgt. Jack Parkinson was later advised that F/S Gordon Washbourne and his young French guide had been picked up and arrested by a German soldier in Paris and that F/S Washbourne had been wearing civilian clothes when captured. It appears F/S Washbourne had been shot at some time after being arrested. The British War office made an official enquiry to the German Government to ascertain the circumstances regarding Flight Sergeant Washbourne's death whilst in custody, but the Germans did not reply. German documents recorded that Flt Sgt Washbourne had been shot as he tried to escape. No trace of his grave has been found.



A memorial from his family to F/Sgt. Gordon Washbourne, Royal Australian Airforce, who was the son of Frederick and Florence Washbourne, of Perth, Western Australia. Runnymede Memorial - panel 262

JACK PARKINSON, RAF Continued

Uncle Jack was picked up by the French Resistance who took his uniform and gave him new clothes and identity papers as a Belgian. He was moved from one set of French Resistance workers to another, often being picked up in a truck when no words were exchanged. It was safer for the Resistance to keep their identities secret in case Uncle Jack was captured by the Germans.

On one occasion he hid in a barn when the Germans came to question and beat the French farmer because they suspected he was helping allied airmen. Uncle Jack could do nothing because if he had revealed himself the French farmer and his family would have been shot. The French Resistance handed Uncle Jack over to the Dutch Resistance.

Eventually Uncle Jack reached England and came home to Wigan. His sister said that they did not recognise him as he was thin, sun-tanned and wearing "foreign" clothes.

This is the telegram my mum received from Jack on the 6th September 1944 to say he had arrived back in England safely.

Charges to pay s. d. RECEIVED	POST OFFICE  TELEGRAM	No. _____ OFFICE STAMP	
Prefix	Time handed in.	Office of Origin and Service Instructions.	Words.
_____ m	3240	Appleton Lodge	12
From _____	To _____		
At home 100 Warrington Road Park Lane Wigan			
Home last night love Jack			
51-6536 MP	For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and if possible, the envelope		B or C

THOMAS KILLEEN



Tom Killeen attended St. Patrick's school, Scholes. He was a noted rugby player at St. Patrick's.

When World War Two started, Tom signed up to be a soldier.

Just after the D Day landings in June 1944, he displayed great bravery and was mentioned in dispatches twice.

The first occasion he was mentioned in dispatches:

Tom's unit didn't have an anti-tank gun available, so at close quarters, Tom destroyed a Tiger tank and two self-propelled guns with just grenades.

The second occasion he was mentioned:

Just after the first event Tom came across German snipers who were hiding in a church. Tom wiped these out single handed.

Tom remained in the Army after the end of the war and became a Sergeant Major.



German Tiger Tank destroyed in Normandy

HMS MOURNE – KEN GUY and JIMMY HEAPS



HMS Mourne was on patrol off Lizard's Point, the western entrance of the English Channel. HMS Mourne was with other warships of the 5th

Escort Group. They operated as part of the Allied landings in Normandy (D Day). On 15th June 1944 at 13.45, HMS Mourne was torpedoed by U Boat 767 and sunk. The Commander, 7 officers and 102 ratings died and a rating later died of his wounds. There were a few survivors one of whom said "after the ship was hit, the rest of the British group of frigates left us. After being in the water for 6 hours, an American ship picked up the survivors". U boat 767 was sunk in the English Channel south west of Guernsey 3 days later on 18th June by depth charges from British destroyers.



Kenneth Guy from Wigan, son of William and Ada Guy, was a Telegraphist on HMS Mourne, he was killed when the ship was torpedoed. Ken was born in 1924 and was 19 years old when he died. His name is on the Plymouth Naval Memorial.

Keith Bowen sent us the following information on Ken:

"I 'met' Ken Guy on one unforgettable occasion. I must have been about 2 years and a few months old, playing in the street at Clarrington Grove, just outside number 29. I looked up and saw Ken fully attired in his naval uniform walking jauntily down the Grove. That alone must have made my mouth drop, even at that age, I didn't take my eyes off him. He was smiling and I can still 'see' him as he walked past me and unbelievably turned and went into number 29! I quickly followed, now I was always a shy child (honest), It was not my practice to speak to total strangers but "something" compelled me and I piped up, I felt very strongly that I had to give him this message. He

was leaning on the brass rail above the fireplace, with his back slightly turned away from me (no doubt his concentration was directed at Auntie Annie). I blurted out the message that was drilled into us children with the canal being so close, "Don't go near the water, you'll drown!" at the same time I was feeling very nervous about calling out in this manner, I need not have worried since it caused much amusement at the time. It's only with hindsight that these 'prophetic' words can be interpreted in different ways but it is something that has stayed with me all my life."

Lorraine from Wigan:

"My grandfather, Jimmy Heaps was on the Mourne when she went down. He was in the water about 6 hours before they were rescued. He had breathed in a lot of oil, and his chest was badly affected. He was a very lucky man to have survived. He was also one of the oldest crew members. He had served in WW1, and signed up again for WW2, he was 44 when the Mourne went down."

RAF Flight Lieutenant Ronald Arthur Walker DFC



Ronald Walker from Thicknesse Avenue in Wigan volunteered for aircraft training on October 9, 1940, his 18th birthday. He was with the Pathfinder Squadron, which was a target marking squadron of Bomber Command. Ronald flew a number of missions and was over Cherbourg on D-Day with 83 Squadron.

“On June 21st 1944, Ronald’s Lancaster was shot down on his 45th mission while they were going to bomb a factory which made ball bearings. After the crash the crew was recorded as six bodies and one missing, the latter being Ronald. He bailed out with no parachute and landed in some bushes, he wasn’t injured badly. He was found by the Dutch Resistance and moved around the country to avoid the attention of the Nazis. Ronald evaded capture for several weeks, being shifted between safe houses due to the courageousness of the Dutch Resistance. Ronald ended up in Tilburg Holland in the home of Coba Pulskens who was known by everyone involved in the secretive work as Aunt Coba. She defied the occupying Germans by hiding Jews and Allied airmen in her home, a decision which would prove to be fatal. Ronald was sheltered with two other fighter pilots. Two more were supposed to join them but on the 9th July the Gestapo found out about them and came into the house. Ronald, a Canadian pilot and an Australian surrendered, but they were taken into the back yard and shot and murdered. In a last act of defiance, when asked to find a blanket to cover their bodies with, Aunt Coba produced a Dutch flag which she had kept hidden away ready for the country’s liberation. She was taken away by the Nazis for her part in the Resistance and put in Ravensbruck concentration camp. She was initially put to work but was killed in the gas chambers. Aunt Coba had taken the place of a missing prisoner who had been sentenced to death.

Ronald’s body and those of the two other airmen were taken to a hospital in Eindhoven. A doctor there was appalled by the gruesome sight of the three airmen as they had been shot more than 100 times in cold blood by the Nazis. The doctor secretly took pictures of the bodies and handed the images over to the authorities investigating Nazi brutality after the war. Eventually some of the Gestapo men operating in that area were tried for war crimes and sentenced to be hung. Ronald has no grave as his body was taken to the Vught concentration camp and cremated, part of the Nazi efforts to cover up many of their inhuman acts. The Dutch flag used by Aunt Coba to cover Ronald’s body, hangs in the Airman’s Chapel in Lincolnshire.

Ronald was awarded the DFC which was collected from Buckingham Palace by his parents Horace and Ethel Walker of Wigan. Ronald’s name is on the Runnymede Memorial in Surrey.

John Eaborn from Preston, a surviving relative of Ronald has a collection of memorabilia about Ronald. He went to the continent with his two sons to see the memorial to the three airmen in Tilburg and lay flowers. John remembers visiting the family and seeing Ronald on Christmas 1943.

Frederick and Kathleen Oliver



RAF Sergeant Frederick Oliver of Wigan and 622 Squadron Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and the pilot of a Lancaster (mk Lm 138), Harry Cooke of New Zealand were shot down over France on the night of June 23rd - 24th 1944.

The plane crashed down in Mayor Vandaeles farm field. Frederick and Harry were killed in the crash and buried by the villagers in the local churchyard at Socx, Nord Pas de Calais, France.

Kathleen Lowe Oliver died, 28th July 2012 age 91 yrs this is her story of how she heard of her husband's death.

"I was cleaning windows upstairs at Maple Grove, Beech Hill. Every-one else was out - when I noticed a young telegram boy on his bicycle, ride around Hazel Avenue. As I came downstairs our door knocker sounded. He looked at me anxiously as I opened the door. I opened the yellow envelope he handed to me. It was a rather large sheet. I read "Do not communicate with the Press" I thought my husband (Sgt. Fred Oliver) had done something out-standing, and smiled at the boy and said "It's alright love".

The telegram was printed on both sides. On the other side, which I read as he got on his bicycle - tentatively returning my smile I read "We regret to inform you"

Kathleen wrote the following poem:

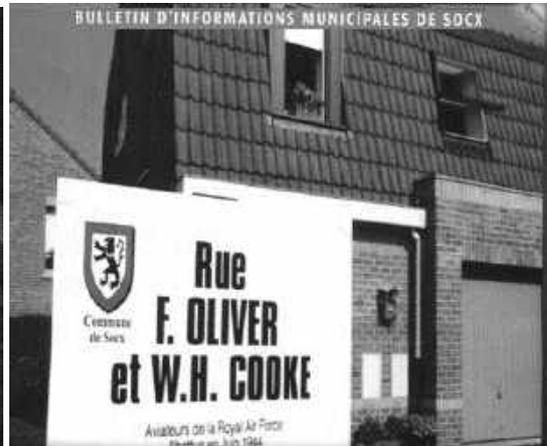
TELEGRAM BOY Lancashire, England. 1944

Messenger from hell- unknowing..
Little boy with curly hair.
Streamers from your cycle flowing
As you pedal....., where?
Yellow envelope in your pocket,
Bearing tidings dread; for whom?
Who will see this day of sunshine,
Blacker than the darkest tomb?
Who your face will long remember,
Stamped indelibly on their mind
As the last face they saw smiling
In the sun they left behind?
Telegram boy, please pedal slowly!
Let them dream two minutes more --
For their dreams will die for ever
When you knock upon their door.
And he knocked upon my door
And smiled at me.
Now my soul is dead to beauty
Dulled my mind, and warped with pain,
Can mad sciences footling atom,
Give my dead love life again?

Frederick and Kathleen Oliver Continued.....

In 2006, the people of Socx completed a wonderful group of new residences - for a mix of homeless older people, and families with young children. They named the development Oliver-Cooke Cottages in honour of Frederick and Harry.

Kathleen and her and Frederick's son Kevin Frederick Oliver and family were guests of honour at the housing dedication ceremonies on September 13th-15th.



Kathleen wrote the following poems:

HERO'S DEATH 1948

They said "He died a hero's
death,
Kathleen; you should be proud",

I did not see bright glory's blaze;
My head was ever bowed.

I valued not his country's praise;
I cursed all bestial war,

And they who said "hero's death"
My very soul did jar.

WARTIME MEMORIES 1950

Rain and fog and sleet and snow.
Sun and sand and moonlight glow
Heart of laughter heart of pain -
Treasured picture in a frame.

Verses scribbled in a book
Bits of heather, walks we took.
Melodies and half-lost rhymes -
All the myriad scattered lines.
Scents on breezes - daffodils,
Bluebells, clover, purple hills.

Air raid sirens - screeching bombs
Throbbing engines of the Huns.
"Douse that light" - "Your gas mask
please"

"What's that light there in the trees?"
We won't forget, we who are left
We won't forget - must not forget.
We pray to God, if God there be,
To save man from himself.

THOMAS JONES- ESCAPE FROM AN EXECUTION SQUAD



Corporal Thomas Jones aged 30 years and living with his mother in Pagefield Street Wigan. He worked in the Wigan Junction Colliery. He joined the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders in June 1940 and then joined the Commandos. His father Sergeant Thomas Lloyd Jones was killed in action in France in 1917 whilst serving with the Liverpool Kings Regiment. He saw active service in Abyssinia, Lybia, Syria, Eritrea, Sicily and Italy. He returned to UK in September 1944. This is his interview in Wigan Observer 23rd September 1944:

“On 5th July 1944 12 of us were dropped right into a German ambush and we were surrounded. Three escaped and I learned later that two managed to get back to our lines. Four others were taken away and I was one of five who were taken and put in a civilian prison in Paris. We were all

handcuffed and we were kept in that prison for five weeks. We got some rough treatment and the guards manhandled us during our interrogation which spread over the first three days. The Germans refused to treat us as prisoners of war. They said we weren't soldiers but terrorists, although we were all in British Army uniforms. On the 8th August the German guards brought us towels, soap and razors and told us to shave and wash and take off our uniforms and put on the civilian clothes they had brought in. Early next morning 9th August, they loaded us, seven of us, into a truck and drove us away. This would be about one o'clock and about six o'clock they ordered us to get out and then marched us into a forest at a place I later found was near Noailles, near Fayel. All seven of us now dressed in French civilian clothes and handcuffed, were lined up and then we saw that we were going to be shot, for five Gestapo officers formed a firing party lined up facing us. One officer read out our sentence in German and another interpreted it into English. He said we had been found guilty of attempting to collaborate with the terrorists of France for the purpose of sabotage against the interests of the Third Reich. Therefore we would be treated as terrorists and we had been sentenced to be shot to death.

When he said those words all seven of us seemed to have the same thought at the same time that we had better make a break for it as it would be better being shot as we were trying to get away than standing there and being shot.” We were in a small clearing in a wood and I was on the extreme right of the group. I made a sudden dash for the trees nearest to me and the others did the same, but I had travelled only about 12 or 15 yards when owing to being handcuffed, I lost my balance and fell forward onto the ground just as the Germans fired a volley.” Continued.....

THOMAS JONES Continued.....

“They dashed after us and ran right over us firing as they ran, me and four of my pals all lying there no doubt thinking we were all dead.” At last when everything was quiet I got up, I had not been hit and then I saw that four of my pals had been shot and were dead. I got behind a big tree for cover, my first job was to get my handcuffs off, this I managed as I had found a way to do this when I was in prison. Then I cleared off into the forest and after about six hours I was found by an old French farm labourer who got me in touch with the underground resistance people. For a week I lived in that forest stopping under the tree and only going to the labourer’s house for a bath. The old man used to bring me food and cigarettes.”

One day the Frenchman asked me to go down to his house and listen to the wireless and the English news, I went but there was no wireless. I had been waiting about two hours when a policeman came with an old lady who could speak English. It turned out she was from Guernsey and she asked me all kinds of questions about being dropped by parachute and my party and other things, then she shouted into the next room “You can come in here” to my surprise I walked Jean, (I called him John) one of my pals. He was a Frenchman who was serving with us and had been dropped with us and had managed to get clear away from the execution squad, he was just as surprised as me.

John and I were taken by the French people to another place. Whilst I was there German soldiers used to come in to eat their meals in the room next to me. The German retreat had started and one morning German soldiers came in and demanded somewhere to sleep, they were banging my bedroom door when the French lady came upstairs shouting that I was her husband and was ill in bed. She then with her ten year old son, went to see her husband at the sugar factory and explained what had happened.

I found the French people simply hated the Germans and they had every reason to do so. The day before I arrived they had shot the whole of a family at a farm and driven away all their cattle. When the Germans were retreating they would grab anything that could move or was on wheels and the night before the Americans came in the house opposite five Germans broke into the house and stole the horse, when the man objected they bashed his face in with a rifle butt and when his son tried to help his father they shot him in the stomach and he died three hours later.

I remained with the French family and made enquiries as to what happened to the bodies of my 4 pals who had been shot. The resistance people helped me and I was taken to a woman who had been mixing with Germans and she showed me where my pals had been buried in one grave but there was no marker. I took a map reference and have since given it to the authorities here in England.”

On the morning of the day when the Americans arrived I introduced myself to them, invited three of the Yanks into the house and gave them something to eat and drink and told them my story. “

Continued.....

THOMAS JONES Continued.....

“The Americans took me to the authorities and I again told them my story and I gave them the map reference as to where my pals were buried. I was then returned to England. After speaking to the Army of my experiences I was then given a new uniform and leave to return home to my mother in Wigan.”

BETA Extra Research

Thomas was known as Ginger and he was awarded the Croix de Guerre. We have discovered that Thomas was in the SAS and this operation on 5th July was named 'Operation Gain'. Thomas was a miner in civilian life. He was in L Detachment SAS 1942 (Private), 1 SAS 1942-43 (Pte), Special Raiding Squadron (1 Troop) 1943 (Pte), 1 SAS (D Squadron) 1944-45 (Cpl), POW 4.7.1944 -escaped 8.8.1944 (Op.Gain) died in Wigan 6.12.1990.

Five members of the SAS Operation Gain executed on 9th August 1944 are buried in the MARISSSEL FRENCH NATIONAL CEMETERY, near Beauvais:
Private Thomas James Barker aged 20; Captain Patrick Bannister Garstin aged 25; Private Joseph Walker aged 21; Private William Pearson Young aged 22; Sergeant Thomas Varey aged 32 years.

The following is from Picardie Operation Gain website:

'It was a team of 12 men but they dropped in to an ambush. Apparently someone in Paris was caught trying to sell a parachute and told the Germans of the forth coming parachute drop. On landing, 9 of the 12 were captured, 3 missing & 3 badly wounded (that does not make 12?). They were interrogated at a place Ave Foch in Paris by Herr Dr.Schmidt and the SS. They were kept there until the 9th August 1944. They were dressed in civilian clothes and put in the back of a truck; they were told that they would be taken to Switzerland on a POW exchange program. After some time they got to Noailles (not far from Fayel) where they were driven around for a while. Finally taken out into the woods and lined up in front of a firing squad. Whilst Dr. Schmidt was fussing about preparing the sentence, Vaculik let out a scream, charged the Germans which resulted in a melee. The SAS men scattered. 5 were shot and two escaped.'



Thomas Jones

LES ROGERS – HMS KELVIN

“After D Day on September 16th 1944, HMS Kelvin was told that two fishing boats with German soldiers were trying to escape from France. We caught up with them in the Bay of Biscay and our captain ordered us to open fire on them. Two messmates and myself were told to go aboard the ships and get the prisoners.

When we arrived all the Germans were dead and we soon realised that the boat was sinking. Unfortunately HMS Kelvin had sailed away. We removed our duffle coats, I was upset at this as it had my wages in the pocket, and ended up in the water. I never could swim and I thought this was the end of us. Luckily a Canadian ship, HMCS Haida came to our rescue and sent out a small boat for us.

We were saved and Ralph Frayne, a Canadian seaman, pulled me out of the water. On board we were given dry clothes and a dressing gown, in the pocket of which was a note with the name of the person who had made the gown. I later wrote to the lady and thanked her.

In 2004 I was able to visit Canada and met the man who saved my life and pulled me out of the water, Ralph Frayne. It was a wonderful occasion and the people I met treated me like Royalty. I also met the grand-daughter of the lady who made the dressing gown. The Canadian ship HMCS Haida is now a museum and it was a very sentimental journey when I visited her.”

Les Rogers, Wigan

Les in Canada with HMCS Haida



Les with Ralph Frayne
Canada 2004



Memories of The Liberation of Paris

The German garrison surrendered Paris, the French capital, on 25th August 1944.

“During the war my father, who was in the Royal Air Force, was stationed at an air base in the North of France.

Whilst there he met a French soldier named Paul Demailly and they became firm friends. My father stayed in France until 1946.

Our families kept in touch after the war and when Viviane (who was Paul's daughter) and I were old enough, we began to correspond with one another. This helped with her English and my French.

I have been to France on a few occasions and Viviane has been to England several times. Viviane was able to meet my parents, husband and family, but unfortunately I never had the pleasure of meeting hers, as they had died.

The photograph of Paul's family was taken on 2nd September 1944 when France was liberated and Paul had written on the back of it

‘Vive L'Angleterre’ - Long live England

‘Vive la France’ - Long live France



This is a photograph of me and my dad taken in 1945

Barbara Davis, Wigan



Battle of Arnhem, Operation Market Garden

17–26 September 1944

Operation Market Garden was devised by Field Marshal Montgomery and 41,628 English, American and Polish troops took part. The goal was to secure key bridges over three rivers Maas/Meuse, Waal and Rhine in the Netherlands (Holland). They had to outflank the heavy German defences of the Siegfried Line (Westwall) which protected heartland Germany. The success of the operation would see quick advance towards Berlin and the war would be over in a few months by Christmas. In the end the operation failed mainly due to:

- Bad weather conditions
- Heavy German opposition, especially near Arnhem.
- The airborne drop zones were situated too far from the Nijmegen and Arnhem bridges.
- Communication problems,
- The laborious advance of the ground troops
- Mistakes by the high commanders in the final days of the operation

The Battle of Nijmegen was successful, but the Allies did not manage to take the last bridge in Arnhem, the proverbial 'Bridge Too Far'.

Approximately 1,984 allied troops were killed and 6,854 captured. Approximately 1,300 German troops killed and 2,000 wounded.

Memories of Arnhem and beyond

On the 4th September 1944, we were the first troops to arrive in Brussels where we had a marvellous reception.

We were sent on "flying columns" into Holland reaching Nijmegen—"A bridge too far" - via Valburg and Elst. We all had a rough time, half of the transport was put out of action, but we struggled on.

The bridge was out at one place, but engineers repaired this. We were then sent to cut off the German troops, but only reached the outskirts of Arnhem. On the 16th December I was promoted to sergeant. *William P. Johnson, Wigan*

Holland, Nijmegen, a Bridge Too Far eh! We crossed it in and out, ate more German pork and smoked Dutch cigars that would kill a donkey. Vandalised houses for pillows or blankets (the owners could be dead or something so it didn't matter to us) after all the usual topic was 'Will we make it?' A good excuse for doing what we wanted. Nothing criminal though. *Bert Ryding 1st Infantry Battalion of the South Lancashires*

Sapper John Bretherton, 1st Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers, Arnhem



John Bretherton was the son of James and Ellen Bretherton and husband of Patricia. Just before taking part in the Battle for Arnhem John was told that they were expecting a baby.

On 20th September 1944 John landed in Arnhem, Holland for Operation Market Garden. He was stationed at the Van Limburg Stirum schoolhouse at the end of the bridge with Major Lewis and 60 other men. This was an important part of Lieutenant-Colonel John Frost's defence of the bridge. Without the stand made by Major Lewis and others, the Germans would have been able to concentrate their full force on Frost, forcing him from his position sooner. This would have allowed the Germans to move more men against 1st Division forces fighting around Oosterbeek, and might have ended with more British soldiers being killed, wounded or taken as Prisoners.

The retreating British hoped to reach a nearby smaller building, which had been evacuated by the sappers on the first night. As the men made their way they came under fire and John Bretherton was shot in the back and killed as he was getting over the wall. He was 27 years old.

Shortly after this, John's wife Patricia gave birth to their son Larry.

John is buried in Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery, the inscription on his grave is: "THE HEARTS THAT ALWAYS LOVED YOU ARE THE HEARTS THAT NEVER FORGET"

The Van Limburg Stirum School which, overlooked the bridge, was a position of pivotal importance. It was fiercely defended by the 1st Parachute Squadron and 3rd Parachute Battalion until Wednesday 20th September when, with the building burning fiercely, the British were forced to abandon it and surrender.



The Van Limburg Stirum School before battle and after the battle

L/Cpl. THOMAS CUNNINGHAM

Lancashire Fusiliers and Parachute Regiment



Thomas Cunningham was born in Wigan 1919. He lived in Belle Green Lane, Wigan with his mother and father who was a veteran of World War One. Thomas joined the 1st Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers when World War Two started in September 1939.

Thomas served with the Fusiliers in India and Burma just prior to the Battalion taking part in the Chindit operations.

In October 1942, he transferred to the Army Air Corp and became a member of the Parachute Regiment. Thomas took part in the Operation Market Garden at Arnhem. He was shot and wounded, losing one lung. Thomas was captured and made a Prisoner of War in Stalag X11A. On 30th September he wrote this postcard to his mother. Most of the soldiers had been captured on the 25th so Thomas must have been one of the last to be taken. Thomas would have been liberated in April 1945.

Kriegsgefangenenlager Datum: 30-9-44

I have been taken prisoner of war in Germany, I am in good health. We shall be transported from here to another camp. Please do not write until I give you new address.

Kindest Regards.

Thomas Cunningham L/Cpl

Kriegsgefangenenpost

15 An Postkarte

Mrs T. Cunningham

Gebührenfrei

Absender:
Vor- und Zuname: *Thomas Cunningham*
Gefangenenummer: *Stalag X11A 90500*
Lager-Bezeichnung:

Empfangsort: *185 Belle Green Lane,*
Straße: *Wigan, Lancashire*
Land: *England*
Landesteil (Provinz usw.):

Deutschland (Allemagne)

PASSED
FT. 100

The Battle of Overloon & Venray, Holland - October 1944

Between September 30th and October 14th 1944 a battle reminiscent of World War One raged around the village of Overloon, Holland. The British plodded further across the heavily mined Loobeek which they finally took on October, 16th.

Venray fell on October, 19th, 1944. Then the offensive was suspended. The troops were needed elsewhere for the fighting around the Scheldt estuary in order to open a route to Antwerp, Holland. This harbour was needed urgently if the allied supply situation was to be solved. On December, 3rd, 1944, the German bridgehead was finally eliminated with the capture of Blerick, a suburb of Venlo on the west bank of the Meuse. Venlo itself would remain in German hands until March, 1945.

Memories from Bert Ryding, 1st Battalion, South Lancashire



This village, that hamlet, then the 12th October we had to go for Venlo and Venray in Holland because of the railway importance. Half my section wiped out by air bursts. Today, Thursday, no deaths just leg, arm and or neck wounds. God why wasn't I one to get away from the nightmare of digging in, no sleep, eating any mush that turned up, smoking inside your tin hat to hide the glow. Why didn't they move the corpses that once looked like me, poor mum, poor dad or wife or whoever. What if they only knew how we hated this?

You haven't seen them digging trenches 100, 200, 300 yards long, bringing their bundles in grey army blankets wrapped around them, boots sticking out or not always, then lowering them into that clay, blokes just like me who had never lived and yet lived to die just like some filthy vermin. God help these people who invented war. They shall grow old, not they.

Friday rolled on into Saturday. The 14th October 1944, a cool autumn day, press on for Venlo. God, why do they send us tanks. The Jerry can see us without them stupid bastards giving them something to aim at. They were the old Desert Rats, they ought to have stopped there. Then all hell let loose, tanks hit, burning away. We dive for cover – anything – a pile of cow muck to hide behind. Then peace. We made it to the main road with a ditch on either side. After a briefing with the CO I had to lead my section (four of us), what a laugh, to a certain point, cross the road and get behind the house at the crossroads. Not one friend in front of me only the last remains of Dutch land and the German army.

***Memories from Bert Ryding, 1st Battalion, South Lancashire
Continued..***

All is quiet, my heartbeats could be heard in Berlin, then a slow progress up this ditch on the left of the road. A brief rest then it's over the top, across the road and into the ditch, and bang the world blows up into a red, black, green volcano with me sitting on it. Was it minutes, hours or days before the world settled down? I don't know but I remember the Jerry prisoners who were ordered to lift me out of the ditch. I remember the poor sod who trod on a mine and no doubt lost a leg, that made the score even. I am sorry it had to happen to him but he just had to be a prisoner at the wrong time. The rest is history to me and mine.

The pain is still real, the fears are just as fearful and my inside aches for what I've seen. My dreams are mine alone but shared by thousands who cannot break that vow of silence. To tell would be sacrilege, a betrayal of all our mates who died in vain. The nightmare is over and yet it is with me every day, not because I want it to be but because it's the way it was meant to be. How futile, how ludicrous, how obscene and still we haven't learned.

1945: My proudest moment. Wearing hospital blues, on crutches, waiting for a tram back to Childwall from the Pier Head, Liverpool, after being on a few days leave. An old lady about 70 odd years, came to me and said: "My husband is very shy but we would both like to shake your hand and say 'Thank you' for what you have done for us." Two old people who no doubt had suffered in many ways but still had time to think about me. Bless you both.

It was on the outskirts of Venray that Bert, a section leader, was seriously injured on October 16 by one of the many shoe mines hidden in the mud of the Molenbeek. Eventually he was taken to a school field hospital in Stevensbeek, a village close to Overloon.

Later came repatriation to the specialist Queen Mary's Hospital for war limbless in Roehampton, then to Hillingdon Hospital in Uxbridge and, finally, Childwall Hospital, Liverpool, to complete his rehabilitation after losing his lower right leg and parts of several fingers.

He was discharged on September 4, 1945, for 'ceasing to fulfil Army physical requirements Para 390 (xvi) KR 1940' – one of 12,000 service personnel to lose limbs in World War Two.

Bert went on to live a full and productive life; firstly at Leyland and Birmingham Rubber Works and (until retirement in 1984) as caretaker at Ashfield House, Standish – location of Standish UDC. He married in 1947 and had three children. For many years he was chairman of the Wigan branch of the British Limbless Ex-service Men's Association (BLESMA) – now known as Blesma, The Limbless Veterans.

The accounts of Bert's D Day and later activity, found among his Army memorabilia after his death on April 22, 1998.

Sent to BETA by *Malcolm Ryding*

The Six Higham Brothers from Wigan



The six Higham brothers from Wigan, were shot at, had crash-landings and were blown up - yet they all returned to tell their tales. The brothers' paths never crossed in five years of war - but they did

see each other to take this family photo at some point during 1943

The above photo shows five of the six brothers but doesn't include the eldest Joseph Higham, who was kept back on reserve occupation at the time.

The brothers all followed in the footsteps of their father James Henry Higham. He left his family to fight in the First World War in the Royal Garrison Artillery and was involved in the Battle of Ypres. He pleaded with his sons not to sign up but three joined the RAF, two were in the Royal Signals and one was in the Marines. Between them they saw action on land and on the high seas - from Northern Ireland, Germany and Italy to Alexandria and Japan.



Eldest brother Joseph Higham was in the Royal Signals and volunteered. He worked on the defence of London and then followed the Allies into Germany.

Joseph helped rescue 78 soldiers from the Souda beach in Crete - an incident mentioned in Winston Churchill's memoirs.



RAF Flight Sergeant Harry Higham volunteered at the beginning of the war. He served in Northern Island on Coastal Command as Aircrew on anti-submarine and convoy protection patrols.

The Six Higham Brothers from Wigan - Continued



Douglas Higham (photo taken with his wife) was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in 1945 for his "determination and continued devotion to duty" after completing more than 160 sorties. RAF Flight Lieutenant Douglas Higham, born 13th January 1920 volunteered in early 1939 and was posted to 230 Squadron in the Middle East to fly as an air gunner in Sunderland Flying Boats.

Douglas was involved in rescuing King Peter of Yugoslavia and the royal family and the cabinet from Dubrovnik harbour. His eldest son John Higham, 73, said: "Dougie said that they landed outside the harbour and taxied in and met the large dinghy. He was in the doorway of the Sunderland to help the people board the plane. He said that the last passenger from the dinghy had a very large briefcase in his hand so Dougie grabbed the bag off him to help board the plane, but realised that the briefcase was chained to the man's wrist. The man fell into the water whilst Dougie held onto the case. He managed to pull the man on board, and then found out that the man was the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia and that the case contained the crown jewels."



Douglas Higham, an RAF Gunner, in a Sutherland Flying boat. After the war Douglas settled in Wigan and started a successful fruit and florist business. In 1963 Douglas had his D.F.C. stolen from his house in Pemberton. Douglas died in 1986. In December 2017 the medal was finally bought back from a dealer by his son John Higham.



William Higham with his brother Gerald Higham. RAF pilot officer William Higham enlisted at the beginning of the war and trained as a pilot, qualifying in early 1940. He completed ten bombing raids with 51 squadrons but on one occasion he crashed while returning to base, spending three months in hospital. William left Wigan Culture Trust £2million

to put on at least two military band concerts in Mesnes Park each year. Royal Marines Serviceman Gerald Higham volunteered and was posted to India.



James Higham, born in 1925. He was conscripted in 1942 and joined the Royal Signals. He served in Italy and Japan.

SPORT IN WORLD WAR 2

At the outbreak of World War 2 in 1939 football was suspended in Britain except for those games organised by the Armed Forces. However, the Home Office did agree to allow games to be played before crowds limited to 8,000 in evacuation areas and 15,000 in other parts of the Country.

Many players were drafted into war work or joined the Armed Forces and football grounds were damaged in air raids or taken over to be used for other purposes. Arsenal's ground at Highbury became an ARP centre (Air Raid Precautions) and the club had to share Tottenham Hotspur's ground – their great North London rivals. Over half of the 1.5 million troops called up during World War 2 spent much of their time in Britain. It was essential that sport played an important part in keeping them occupied. Money was raised for service charities at football matches – in May 1943, £8,000 was raised at Chelsea for the Navy Welfare League. Football teams also played an important role in supporting recruitment – Bolton Wanderers' captain, Harry Goslin, made a speech at a game to encourage spectators to join up. He and his entire first team joined the 53rd Field Regiment, Royal Artillery. Goslin was killed in Italy in December 1944. Players from Liverpool F.C. formed a club section in the King's Regiment.

Large factories had female, alongside male, football teams, Football was also very popular in Prisoner-of-war camps. Many professional football players who joined up were injured or became prisoner of war and 80 professional players were killed.



Betty Stanhope in goal for Fairey Aviation Company in 1944.

Football and other sports were encouraged in all the services to improve fitness, relieve boredom and boost morale. Flight Lieutenant Ted Drake, an Arsenal player, played as part of a British Forces team against a French team in Paris in 1944 and then in Brussels against a Belgian team. This game was just after the liberation and the stadium terraces had to be cleared of mines before the spectators were allowed in to watch the game.



British POW's at Stalag XX1D, Pozna. German Prisoner of War camp in Poland.

Stars Who Served in World War 2

Many of our post WW2 visits to our local cinema were to see our favourite stars on the silver screen, or to view them on stage or TV. This included many who saw service during the Second World War. Several stars left their profession to volunteer for the services. Others became famous later, perhaps as a result of their service.



In January 1942, thirties highly acclaimed film star Carole Lombard was the first American female casualty of WW2. She died in a plane crash after a tour promoting war bonds. She was the wife of Clark Gable who was a well-established film star often referred to as “The King of Hollywood”. He is best known as Rhett Butler in “Gone with the Wind”. After the death of his wife he enlisted in the US Army Air Force at the grand old age of 43. While stationed in England he flew 5 combat missions as an observer/gunner. On his Fifth mission his B17 was hit by flak. One crew member was killed, two were wounded and a piece of shrapnel went through Gable’s boot and narrowly missed his head. This was enough for MGM who petitioned to have their biggest box office star removed from active service.



Also a well-established film star, James Stewart’s career took a longer and perhaps a more surprising path. He joined the US Air Force in 1941 when he was already an experienced pilot and eventually was awarded his Air Force wings. Starting as a private, Stewart rapidly rose through the ranks and after the attack on Pearl Harbour he finally managed to persuade the powers that be that he should be allowed to fly combat missions. This he did successfully completing 20 bombing missions over Germany and other occupied countries, many as commander, winning several military awards. He remained in the Air Force Reserve after the war and he is thought to have flown at least one mission in Vietnam. His film career continued until the death of his wife in 1994. He retired from the military after 27 years in 1968, but his friend, Ronald Reagan, used his presidential position to give him his final promotion to Brigadier General Retired. In anybody’s book, his exceptional film career plus his military service make him quite a star.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



Audie Murphy is an example of how the war could make a star. As one of America's most decorated heroes he was persuaded to play himself in an autobiographical film, "To Hell and Back". Turned down by the Marines and the Airborne for being too small, and having lied about his age, he had to settle for the infantry. He fought in Italy and France, receiving promotions as his skills and marksmanship proved his worthiness. Reading accounts of his actions certainly made him stand out as a soldier. Seeing him in his later movie career does not promote him as a hard bitten military veteran with a killer instinct. His westerns tend to portray him as a polite, thoughtful good guy sheriff who wins nicely. Well done Audie.



There are of course too many stars to mention, but who could fail to be fascinated by a name joining the US Navy in 1941. He was involved in anti-submarine warfare until he was medically discharged with war injuries in 1944. That name was Issur Danielovitch or Izzy Demsky to friends. He later became better known in films as Kirk Douglas.



How about this member of the USAAF, one sergeant Charles Dennis Butchinsky? We may know him better as Charles Bronson.



During the early years of World War II, Henry Fonda had helped raise funds for the defence of Britain from Nazi Germany, before enlisting in the U.S. Navy. Fonda served for three years, initially as a Quartermaster 3rd Class on the destroyer USS Satterlee, and later as a Lieutenant Junior Grade in Air Combat Intelligence in the Central Pacific. It was during the latter period that he received the Bronze Star for "meritorious service as Assistant Operations Officer and Air Combat Intelligence Officer... during operations against enemy Japanese forces from May 12, 1944 to August 12, 1945.



Lee Marvin enlisted in the US Marines and saw action in the Pacific. He was wounded in the buttocks at the battle for Sai Pan. This injury severed the sciatic nerve. He was awarded the Purple Heart, he died in 1986 and was buried with full military honours in Arlington National Cemetery.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....

Some stars leave us curious. Take John Wayne for instance. Perhaps he was the greatest screen hero of them all. Why did he decide to stay at home? Read the web and some say “coward”, some say “draft dodger”. Friends such as genuine hero, Jimmy Stewart, have nothing but kind words about the man he was. Who knows? What is the case for swashbuckling Robin Hood figure, Errol Flynn? Errol, an Australian by birth, he became a naturalised American in 1942. Poor Errol, despite his active roles, was plagued with ill health. He tried to join up but was turned down by the military on medical grounds. The list of ailments makes sad reading: It includes a heart murmur, recurring malaria, latent pulmonary tuberculosis and venereal disease. Surely that was enough for one man.



Douglas Fairbanks Junior was commissioned as a reserve officer in the United States Navy when the United States entered World War II and was assigned to Lord Mountbatten's Commando staff in Britain. With his commando training he set up the USA Beach jumpers (Mountbatten thought up the name) whose operations were very successful including in Sicily. Awards: Silver Star, the Distinguished Service Cross, the French Legion of Merit, the Croix Guerre with Palm, the Legion D'Honneur, the Italian War Cross for Military Valor, and was made an Honorary Knight Commander of the British Empire.



David Niven joined the army as a young man. In the early thirties he trained at Sandhurst, becoming a commissioned officer. During his two years in his third choice regiment, the Highland Light Infantry, he became disillusioned with this peacetime existence. At the end of a rather tedious lecture on machine guns, the Major General giving the lecture asked if there were any questions. Niven's reply earned him a court martial for insubordination: “Could you tell me the time sir? I have to catch a train”. He actually had a dinner date with a rather nice young lady. After this naughty boy episode, he resigned his commission and went off to America to become a film star. However, on the outbreak of war, he came straight back and recommissioned as a lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade. Finding this rather boring he transferred to the Commandos where he commanded “A” Squadron GHQ Liaison Regiment, better known as “Phantom”. By now a Lieutenant-Colonel, he landed in France several days after “D Day” where “Phantom” located and reported enemy positions. He was also a member of the Army Film and Photographic Unit. He was also released to make two films designed to boost American support for the British war effort. These were “The First of the Few” in 1942 and “The Way Ahead” 1944. As well as starring in many highly acclaimed films, he also took to writing books, his best known probably being “The Moon's a Balloon”. He was well regarded as quite a “character”.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



Richard Todd OBE became famous for playing Wing Commander Guy Gibson in "The Dam Busters". Other war films include "The Yangtze Incident", "The Longest Day" plus many others. Perhaps what is less well known is the part he actually played in WW2. At the beginning of the war Todd joined the army and was given a commission in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. From there he transferred to the Parachute Regiment which was part of the British 6th Airborne Division. On D-Day 6th June, the launch of Operation Overlord, now a captain, Todd was the first airborne soldier to parachute into France to take part in the capture of two bridges near Caen. One became known as Pegasus Bridge, and the other as Horsa Bridge, named after the glider. The paratroopers came in support of the glider-borne troops led by Major John Howard. Todd met Howard on the bridge. Ironically, in the film, "the Longest Day", he elected to play Major Howard and his own part was handed to another actor. After a long and successful career he suffered the sadness of having two sons, from his two marriages and five children, commit suicide. Todd died in 2009.



Sir Alec Guinness was famous for a career in so many highly acclaimed films, particularly, "The Bridge on the River Kwai" for which he was awarded an Oscar. He joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in 1941 as a humble ordinary seaman. He was promoted to temporary sub-lieutenant the following year and temporary lieutenant a year later. During the Allied invasion of Sicily and Elba in 1943, Guinness commanded a landing craft. He was later given the task of supplying arms to Yugoslavian partisans. After the war, his versatility as an actor in Ealing comedies, huge box office films plus stage and television productions earned him his knighthood.



Michael Redgrave joined the Royal Navy as an ordinary seaman in July 1941, (HMS Illustrious) but was discharged on medical grounds in November 1942.



In September 1939, John Mills enlisted in the British Army in the Royal Engineers. He was later commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, but in 1942 he received a medical discharge.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



Dirk Bogarde, (Derek Jules Gaspard Ulric van den Bogaerde) was born to a Flemish father and a Scottish mother. He joined the army, the Royal Corps of Signals after his first screen appearance as an uncredited extra in “Come on George” with George Formby. In 1943 he was commissioned into the Queen’s Royal Regiment as a second-lieutenant at the age of 22. Known as “Pip”, he served as an intelligence officer in both Europe and the Pacific. He worked with a specialist army unit, travelling with air force units, interpreting aerial photo-reconnaissance information. He moved to Normandy after D-Day. Promotions followed, first to captain, later to major. From the headquarters of the Second Army he selected targets in France Holland and Germany for RAF Bomber Command. He later admitted to Russell Harty in a TV interview that, as he followed the advance, he visited places he had targeted. To relax he liked to paint. As he was painting in a village which had been bombed to impede the movement of German armour, he saw what he thought was a row of footballs. On closer inspection, it proved to be a row of children’s heads who had been taken to a narrow alley to protect them from the bombing. Their bodies had been crushed by a falling wall. In 1945 he claimed to be one of the first officers to enter Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. He undoubtedly saw a lot of terrible sights which fostered a dislike of Germans for the remainder of his life. His career after the war was very complex. His film career varied from comedy as in “Doctor in the House” to a series of serious main stream films and a series of “Art House” films. He was also a prolific writer, producing seven autobiographical books and six novels. Bogarde died in 1999 aged 78.



Louis Jourdan was making a French film when the second world war started and prevented completion of the film. His career was interrupted by the Nazi occupation of France.

His father was arrested by the Gestapo, and Louis and his two brothers were active members of the resistance, whose work for the underground meant that he had to stay away from the studios. It also resulted in his becoming a favourite of the resurgent French postwar film industry. At a time when many had worked on films that had served to help Marshal Pétain’s propaganda campaign – stars such as Chevalier were being accused of collaboration – it was easy to promote a star who had actively worked against the Nazis.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



Eric Sykes joined the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, qualifying as a wireless operator with the rank of leading aircraftman. Eric's entertainment career began during the Second World War while serving in a Special Liaison Unit, when he met and worked with then Flight Lieutenant Bill Fraser. Eric also collaborated with fellow RAF servicemen Denis Norden and Ron Rich in the production of troop entertainment shows.

Whilst preparing for one of these shows in 1945, Sykes, accompanied by Norden and Rich, went to a nearby prison camp in search of stage lighting; the camp turned out to be the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, which had recently been liberated by the Allies. Sykes, Norden and Rich organised a food collection amongst their comrades to feed the starving camp inmates.



Bill Fraser served in a Royal Air Force Special Liaison Unit, reaching the rank of flight lieutenant, where he met and became friends with Eric Sykes. Just after the war a chance meeting in a London Street led to Bill Fraser giving Eric Sykes his first work as a writer for radio comedy. Bill is best known as playing Sgt. Claude Snudge in *The Army Game*.



Denis Norden Served in the RAF. Talking about what he saw when he went to Bergen Belsen, he said he was totally unprepared for the sights that hit them between the eyes. "Appalled, aghast, repelled - it is difficult to find words to express how we felt as we looked upon the degradation of some of the inmates not yet repatriated," he wrote.

"As far as I could see, all these pitiable wrecks had one thing in common. None was standing. They squatted in their thin, striped uniforms, unmoving bony structures who could have been anywhere between 30 and 60 years old, staring ahead with dead, hopeless eyes and incapable of feeling any relief at their deliverance."



During wartime Leslie Howard made documentaries with Noël Coward for the BBC, in which he eulogised on the principles of defending the British Commonwealth. He directed and starred in "Pimpernel" Smith" (1941) an anti-Nazi film which was a big success in Britain and USA. German Propaganda Minister Dr. Josef Goebbels had seen Howard's "Pimpernel Smith" and decided to get the man who starred in this attack on the Reich. Leslie was returning from Portugal where he had promoted "Pimpernel Smith". On 1st June 1943 Leslie's plane was attacked by the Luftwaffe and shot down, everyone was killed.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



Sir Christopher Lee CBE (Christopher Frank Carandini Lee) was the son of Lieutenant-Colonel Geoffrey Trollope Lee and Countess Estelle Marie (née Carandini di Sarzano). Lee began his military career by volunteering to fight for Finland during the Winter War of 1939. He and fellow British volunteers were not allowed to do any fighting and so he soon returned to England to find employment. After a spell in the Home Guard he decided to join the RAF. He began flight training in South Africa, but a problem with his eyesight led to him not completing his training. As a result he moved to intelligence for which he had an aptitude. He was attached to an RAF squadron in North Africa and, now promoted to pilot officer, worked with his squadron throughout the campaign almost being killed when his airfield was bombed. During this time he did some supportive work for the Long Range Desert Group and possibly the Special Operations Executive, about which he would not talk. After this campaign was over his squadron supported the invasion of Sicily, then Italy. Now promoted to flying officer he was put out of action for a while by his sixth bout of malaria before he returned and was seconded to the Army. He spent most of this time with the Gurkhas as part of the 8th Indian Infantry Division who were fighting in the battle for Monte Cassino. During leave in Naples, Lee climbed Mount Vesuvius three days before its 1943 eruption. He returned to his squadron and had another encounter with death when an aircraft crashed and he fell over a live bomb. When his squadron was based near Rome he managed to visit his cousin, Nicolò Caradini who had been fighting with the Italian resistance. In November 1944, promoted to flight-lieutenant, Lee was posted to Air Force HQ in planning and liaison for the final assault fortress Europe. After the war Lee was seconded to the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects whose job was to hunt down Nazi war criminals. He was fluent in French and German and other languages which were seen as an asset. In a career as an actor stretching nearly 70 years Lee won numerous awards, starring in many and varied roles until his death in 2015 aged 93 years.



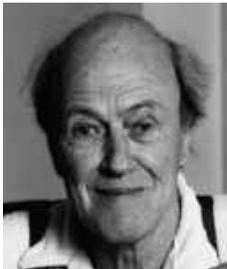
Denholm Elliot was an actor with over 120 film and television credits. He joined the RAF and trained as a radio operator/air gunner. Serving under Leonard Cheshire with No. 76 Squadron, his Handley Page bomber was shot down on the night of 23/24 September while attacking U-boat pens at Flensburg, Germany. The aircraft was hit by flak and ditched in the North Sea. Only Elliot and two other surviving crewmen were picked up. He spent the rest of the war at a prison camp in Silesia where he became involved in amateur dramatics. He married twice, though secretly bisexual. His second marriage produced two children of which the girl committed suicide. Elliot died at the age of 70 of AIDS related tuberculosis.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



Jon Pertwee served six years in the Royal Navy. He was a crew member on HMS Hood and probably considered himself lucky to be transferred for officer training shortly before it was sunk by the Bismarck. Later he was attached to the Naval Intelligence Division, a secret organisation, working alongside Ian Fleming, author of James Bond. Pertwee was known to report directly to Winston Churchill and his deputy, Clement Attlee. Jon's work involved teaching commandos how to use equipment of the kind supplied by "Q" in James Bond films, such as compasses in buttons or a pipe you could smoke that fired a bullet. Before the war, having been expelled from at least one school and later from RADA, Pertwee had been a Wall of Death rider. He then worked in repertory theatre and, at 18 was given a contract with the BBC. After the war he became a very successful comedy actor on radio with shows such as "The Navy Lark". On moving to TV he will be well remembered as the third Doctor Who and Worzel Gummidge. He appeared in countless shows, films and stage productions before his death in 1996.



It is perhaps strange to link children's author, writer of "James and the Giant Peach" and "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" to name but two of many, with Roald Dahl being a WW2 fighter ace. Dahl, son of Norwegian immigrants, joined the RAF in 1939 and learned to fly in Kenya in a Tiger Moth. After qualifying he was posted to No. 80 squadron, RAF, based in Egypt. His aircraft was an out dated Gloster Gladiator biplane. Having failed to locate his airstrip, he ran out of fuel and crashed while attempting to land in the desert. His injuries were severe and kept him in hospital for six months. The inquiry proved that he had been given the wrong location. When he returned to his squadron they had been equipped with Hurricanes and transferred to Greece where he took part in the Battle of Athens. Here he had his first kill. As the Germans took control of Greece, the squadron was moved back to Egypt. He fought on for a few weeks before he began to suffer after effects from his earlier crash. However, before he was grounded he had accumulated five kills which qualified him as an ace. Because of his talents for communicating and clear thinking he was dispatched to the British Embassy in Washington as an air attaché. Whilst there, he met British novelist, C S Forester, who was famous for the Hornblower series of books. He also came into contact with our earlier mentioned Ian Fleming when engaged on intelligence work. Not least of all, he also met film star Patricia Neal whom he married and had five children by. They divorced in 1983. His meeting with Forester was instrumental in shaping Dahl's future. Forester asked him to write some notes on his flying experiences for Forester to use as propaganda on the American public. Dahl's writing was so good it was passed on by Forester without alteration. Dahl began writing for adults and children. The rest, as they say, is history.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



Sir Patrick Moore (Patrick Alfred Caldwell-Moore) is best known as the presenter Of BBC's "The Sky at Night". He first joined the Home Guard under the command of his father who was platoon commander. In 1941 he joined the RAF. After training he became a pilot officer qualified as a navigator and pilot. He joined the crew of a Wellington bomber as navigator and flew maritime patrols and bombing missions over Europe. In his lifetime he accumulated many qualifications and honours. He was also a talented pianist and xylophone player. His war service was not without tragedy. To most viewers he was seen as an eccentric and slightly dotty figure, a confirmed bachelor. What is less well known is that during the war, he was engaged to a London nurse called Lorna. Tragically Lorna was killed when a bomb struck her ambulance. Patrick never married, declaring that his lost love was the only one for him.



All cricket lovers will remember the delightful commentaries delivered by the insightful and fun loving Brian "Johnners" Johnson CBE MC". During the war however, Johnners played a much more serious role. In September 1939 he joined the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards. After officer training at Sandhurst he became Technical Adjutant. Waiting to be posted to France, events overtook the battalion with the retreat to Dunkirk. Three weeks after D-Day, the battalion finally made its way to France, landing at Arramanches, and found itself in the thick of the action. Working with the Armoured Division, Johnston, as Technical Adjutant had the job of rescuing bogged down or damaged tanks, often under fire. He continued this role through France and across the Rhine. For his actions, he was awarded the Military Cross.



Tommy Cooper joined the army and served for 7 years until 1947. For much of this time, his regiment was posted to the Middle East. When opportunity allowed, he worked on his performances as a failed magician. It was during his time in Cairo that Tommy Cooper got his trademark hat – a middle eastern Fez. He was about to perform, but realised he had lost his hat. Therefore he swiped a hat of a passing waiter and performed with that.



Spike Milligan saw action as part of the First Army in the North African campaign and then in the succeeding Italian campaign.

Spike was appointed lance bombardier and was about to be promoted to bombardier, when he was wounded in action in the Italian theatre at the Battle of Monte Cassino.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



How is this for a name? Peter William Shorrocks Butterworth. Perhaps he was destined to become a comedian and a comedy actor. However, in 1940 he was a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Fleet Air Arm. While on a mission over the Dutch coast in a Fairey Albercore, he was shot down by a Messerschmitt 109. One crewman was killed, but after crash landing, Butterworth was taken prisoner and sent to a prisoner of war camp from which he escaped through a tunnel. He was recaptured, after gaining 27 miles, by a member of the Hitler Youth. He later joked that he would never work with children again. After two more failed escape attempts he was sent to Stalag Luft 111 at Sagan in Poland, scene of the famous Great Escape. Here he performed in the camp theatre and met up with Talbot Rothwell who later went on to write a few of the Carry On films in which Butterworth was to star. When in the camp, one escape, portrayed in the film "The Wooden Horse", was covered by prisoners vaulting over a wooden horse to distract the guards. Although one of these prisoners was Butterworth, he did not get a part in the film because he did not look athletic or heroic enough.



Also performing in the camp was Rupert Davies. Born in Liverpool, he had also joined the Fleet Air Arm. Sub-lieutenant Davies was captured after his Swordfish ditched in the sea off the Dutch coast. After three failed escape attempts he also took to the stage in the camp theatre to entertain fellow prisoners. When released after the war he became a favourite on television in many plays and series. He is most remembered for playing Maigret in the sixties series. As a result, he became the first person to win the Pipe Smoker of the Year award.



Roy Dotrice OBE became another performer in the camp. He had joined the RAF as a wireless operator/air gunner and was imprisoned after being shot down in 1942. His acting career in theatre, films and television spanned many decades. He worked until his death in 2017, his final role being that of Grand Maester Pycelle in Game of Thrones. Readers may better remember his daughter Michele, the long suffering wife of Frank Spencer in Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em.

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



The women should not be forgotten. Audrey Hepburn's father was British and a Nazi sympathiser. He became estranged from the family before the war. Audrey was born in Belgium and although British, her ancestry was complex and multinational. After the outbreak of war her mother, Baroness Ella van Heemstra, moved her daughter to the Netherlands in the hope that, as in WW1, the country would remain neutral. This proved not to be the case and they were soon under German occupation. Audrey changed her name to Edda van Heemstra rather than sound too English. At boarding school, Hepburn had been taking ballet lessons. During the occupation, she put these skills to good use giving silent ballet performances to raise money for the resistance. In 1942, her uncle, a prominent member of Dutch society, was executed as a reprisal for an act of sabotage carried out by the resistance. Her half-brother Ian was deported to a Berlin labour camp and her other half-brother, Alex went into hiding. Apart from raising money she was believed to have delivered underground newspapers, and messages and food to downed Allied flyers hiding in nearby woods. She volunteered to help at a hospital which was in an area of strong resistance activities. Her family also sheltered a British paratrooper during the Battle of Arnhem. She later recalled the trauma of seeing Dutch Jews being taken away to concentration camps. After D-Day, the Germans prevented supplies of food being transported to Dutch citizens. Audrey's malnutrition led to her developing acute anaemia and respiratory problems. She was undoubtedly a bright girl, speaking five languages. Her experiences led to her becoming a committed humanitarian as well as a screen and fashion icon.



When war broke out in 1939, Princess Noor Inayat Khan trained as a nurse with the French Red Cross. Noor was passionate about her father's pacifist teachings – so it was a surprise when Noor joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force after escaping to England during the German occupation of France. There she was trained as a wireless radio operator and recruited into the Special Operations Executive. Her fluent French had her sent to France as a radio operator for the resistance, code name "Madeleine." After the arrest of many in the Paris resistance, Khan continued to move around undercover, sending messages back to London HQ. In October 1943 she was betrayed and arrested by the Gestapo. She managed to escape for a few hours, but upon her recapture she was sent to solitary confinement at Pforzheim prison in Germany. She was held in chains and tortured, but never revealed any information about the resistance. From the German prison, Khan was sent to Dachau Concentration Camp where she was brutally beaten and sexually assaulted. When she still revealed no secrets, the young Muslim woman was shot execution-style in the back of the head. Her last word as the firing squad took aim was "Liberté."

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Stars Who Served in World War 2 Continued.....



Josephine Baker, born Freda Josephine McDonald, is probably less well known to most people. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri USA. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in her native country, she was subjected to racial abuse. In 1937 she married a Frenchman and became a French citizen having moved there years earlier. She had become the first African-American to star in a popular movie, but had taken Paris by storm appearing in the Folies Bergère. Her exotic dancing, sometimes only wearing a skirt of artificial bananas around her waist, caused a sensation. When war came she simply became a spy. As a performer, adored by many celebrities of the day, she was welcomed to many European Embassies. She gathered information which she wrote in invisible ink on her sheet music and concealed in her underwear. She passed military intelligence, secret messages, and was happy to shelter refugees. For her work with the resistance the military rewarded her with the Croix de Guerre and later, Charles de Gaulle named her Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur. She was very much a humanitarian, active in the civil rights movement including appearing on a platform with Martin Luther King. After the war, Josephine adopted twelve children from different ethnic backgrounds. These she called her "Rainbow Children". By now she was also a singer and was welcomed to venues around the world including the London Palladium. However, she was still subjected to racial discrimination when back in the USA. It is now possible to visit her home, "Chateau des Milandes" which is on the Dordogne river near Sarlat. Here she raised her children and aspects of her life can be seen all around the chateau. She was a true heroine and her home is well worth a visit.



Edith Piaf was a successful French singer during WW2. She was invited to perform in Germany and agreed because she wanted to do something more meaningful for her country and people. In Germany Edith insisted that she would only sing to everyone, both German soldiers and French Jewish Concentration camp prisoners. After each performance at the camps Edith requested photos with everyone. Back in Paris she passed the photos to friends. For everyone in the photos, false documents were created. Edith again went to Germany, attended the same camps and secretly delivered documents to the prisoners. She repeated this a couple of times. After each concert, she went into the audience for a signing, to pass documents to the prisoners. Her help saved thousands of French Jews. Those who died at the camps were not forgotten by Edith. She regularly organized charity concerts to support the families of victims. After the war Edith was accused of collaborating with the Germans. Dozens of those she rescued came to the court and defended her. Today, the French are proud of their most famous singer and brave patriot Edith Piaf.

1945

JANUARY 26th Russian soldiers liberate Auschwitz Concentration camp
Poland liberated from the Germans.

FEBRUARY 4th Conference at Yalta with Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin.

13th Heavy bombing of Dresden, Germany by the RAF.

28th Clifford Halliwell injured in roof fall at Chanters Colliery.
Died in Leigh Infirmary 1st March 1945.

APRIL 12th United States President Roosevelt dies.
Truman became new U.S. President.

13th British troops liberate Belsen Concentration Camp.

30th Hitler commits suicide in his Berlin bunker.
Mussolini is executed by the Italians in Rome.
Japanese kamikaze pilots attack US ships in the Far East.

MAY 2nd Russian Army enters Berlin.

GERMANY SURRENDERS

8th VICTORY IN EUROPE DAY

JUNE 26th The United Nations founded.

JULY The Labour Party wins the British General Election, Attlee is now Prime Minister instead of Churchill (Conservative Party).

AUGUST 6th The United States drops atom bomb on Nagasaki in Japan.

9th The United States drops atom bomb on Hiroshima in Japan.

AUGUST 14th JAPAN SURRENDERS

AUGUST 15th VICTORY IN JAPAN DAY

OCTOBER 24th United Nations Organisation came into being.

NOVEMBER 20th War Crimes Trials begin in Nuremberg, Germany.

Some of Ann's Auschwitz photos



Entrance showing train lines



Truck from a train



Entrance to gas chamber



Auschwitz sleeping shelves



Auschwitz prisoners

Ted from Liverpool said: "I had a client who had been at Auschwitz. He was 6'4", but when he was liberated, in 1945 he weighed 6 stone. He had a tattooed number on his arm".

Ivan Martynushkin, a 21-year-old lieutenant in the Russian Army said:
"We saw emaciated, tortured, impoverished people, those were the people I first encountered. ... We could tell from their eyes that they were happy to be saved from this hell. Happy that now they weren't threatened by death in a crematorium. Happy to be freed. And we had the feeling of doing a good deed — liberating these people from this hell."

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland

Initially used as a detention centre for political prisoners in 1940. In September 1941, the SS at Auschwitz conducted the first tests of Zyklon B as a mass murder agent using Soviet POWs. Jews and enemies of the Nazi state were exterminated in the gas chambers, or used as slave labour. Some prisoners were also subjected to barbaric medical experiments led by Josef Mengele. In January 1945, with the Russian army approaching, Nazis ordered and sent 60,000 prisoners on a forced march to other locations, many died on the march.

On 27th January 1945 Russian soldiers liberated Auschwitz. The Russian army found approximately 7,600 sick or emaciated detainees who had been left behind. The liberators also discovered mounds of corpses, hundreds of thousands of pieces of clothing and pairs of shoes and seven tons of human hair that had been shaved from detainees before their liquidation.

During World War II prisoners consisted of:

- Jews (1,095,000 deported to Auschwitz, 960,000 died)
- Non-Jewish Poles (140,000- 150,000 deported, 74,000 died)
- Roma (Gypsies) (23,000 deported, 21,000 died)
- Soviet prisoners of war (15,000 deported and 10,000 died)
- Other nationalities (25,000 deported, 10,000- 15,000 died)

Leo Dreyfus' mum Matthilde was amongst those who died in Auschwitz.

Ann Cleary visited Auschwitz and this is her report for us.

We walked through the famous gates stating 'Work will make you free' and then toward the Railway lines which lead to the inner camp. We went in late December and the snow and ice were thick on the ground, giving us a sense of how things might have been as the people arrived, packed tight in the wooden wagons. This site was mostly destroyed by the Nazis just before the relief of the camps. Harrowing sights here:

- At the end of the railway track, we stood in line where the Commandant would, with the flick of his thumb to left or to right, deciding in that instance who would live and who would be sent immediately to the Gas Chambers.
- In the buildings, we saw row upon row of photos taken of the people as they arrived, complete with the date of arrival and date of death. Most only survived 2/3 months, even those in their early 20's.
- One room contained a glass cases the length of the room, piled floor to ceiling with human hair (the Nazis used hair to make socks for their soldiers) and shoes. I saw tiny little children's shoes and a fashionable pair of red heeled sandals, which must have been the pride of the young lady who owned them. This was only one week's collection!
- Our walk through the gas chamber following the victims' path, then out through a door at the far end, which lead us past Number 3 crematoria was incredibly moving and thought provoking.
- Glass cases of the Cyanide gas canisters were piled high in another room. What we hadn't known was that it was the heat of the bodies crammed in the 'Shower' room that activated the Cyanide.

British troops liberate Bergen-Belsen



British troops liberate Bergen-Belsen - BBC Report

“British troops have entered the German concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen on 15th April 1945. Inside the camp the horrified soldiers found piles of dead and rotting corpses and thousands of sick and starving prisoners kept in severely overcrowded and dirty compounds.

Belsen, near Hanover in Germany, was the first concentration camp to be liberated by the British. Details of the conditions inside are likely to horrify a public which until now has only heard limited descriptions from the camps in Poland freed by the Red Army. The first British soldiers who entered Bergen-Belsen have described seeing a huge pile of dead, naked women's bodies within full view of several hundred children held at the camp. The gutters, too, were filled with dead bodies.

One of the reasons the Germans agreed to surrender Belsen was because so many of the inmates were diseased. There was no running water in the camp and there were epidemics of typhus, typhoid and tuberculosis. There were thousands of sick women, who should have been in hospital, lying on hard, bare bug-ridden boards. Of the 1,704 acute typhus, typhoid and tuberculosis cases, only 474 women had bunks to sleep on. There were fewer male prisoners, but they were also kept in severely overcrowded and dirty conditions.

One of the British senior medical officers, Brigadier Llewellyn Glyn- Hughes, told the Reuters news agency he saw evidence of cannibalism in the camp. There were bodies with no flesh on them and the liver, kidneys and heart removed. He said their first priority was to remove the dead bodies from the camp. He was told some 30,000 people had died in the past few months. He said typhus had caused far fewer deaths than starvation. Men and women had tried to keep themselves clean with dregs from coffee cups. Medical supplies were severely limited - there were no vaccines, or drugs and no treatments for lice. The only food available for the prisoners was turnip soup and British guards had to fire over the heads of prisoners to restore order among those desperate to get at the food stores. Those prisoners who were too weak to get up and collect their food went without and died.

The camp commandant, who was described as "unashamed" at the camp conditions, has been placed under arrest.

Inmates of Bergen-Belsen were Jews, Poles, Soviets, Dutch, Czechs, Germans, Austrians. It was estimated that at least 50,000 or more had died in the camp. Anne and Margot Frank were inmates who died.

Frank Moss from Huyton, Liverpool, was one of the first British soldiers to enter Belsen.

Photographs and a film taken at the camp by the British and published in the media brought home the full horror of life in Belsen. German civilians living near to the camp were taken to see what had gone on inside.”

My dad told me this film of Belsen was shown to all British servicemen and some were chosen to go to the camp as witnesses.

Liberation of Bergen Belsen Camp



On April 15, 1945, British soldiers liberated Bergen-Belsen camp, and my grandmother, then Charna Francus, became a free woman. She was 19 years old when WWII began, and the proximity of Kalisz, her Polish hometown, to the German border, thrust her almost immediately into the turmoil of the war.

At 24, she emerged from the ashes sick and with little family. Like so many others, my grandmother picked herself up and, with eyes firmly planted on the future, rebuilt her life. She married, had a daughter, and lived to see all three of her

grandchildren born before passing away in 1991.

This brief letter, written for her English language class in 1950, reflects so much of what I have been told about my grandmother. She was intelligent, and she was reserved. My family treasures this artifact, and it is proudly read every year at the Passover Seder.

Charna Francus - From my memories...

"It happened on an early spring day. I will never forget it. I was a prisoner in one of the many concentration camps in Germany. It was April 15th, 1945, the day of our liberation.

There were 500 people packed as herring in our barrack, there wasn't any water to drink in the whole camp. We haven't gotten our bread ration for 8 days, and what kept us from starvation was a little watery soup they gave us once a day (soup, in which you had to fish hard to find a piece of potato). All of us were weak, starved to death and wary, I among them were suffering from a high fever (Typhoid fever).

We knew something was going to happen, but we were too indifferent to care. We just lay on the floor in a kind of stupor and listened to the mar and thunder of machine guns far away.

A few hours earlier a girl passing our barrack stopped at the door and said "keep it up girls! Now it is only a matter of hours until we will be free. The English army is coming closer." But we who had been disappointed many times before didn't pay much attention to her words.

Some hours passed and it seemed it was getting quiet outside. Then, we heard voices and suddenly the door flew open. In came three soldiers in English uniforms. My first thought was 'I am asleep and dreaming. Good God let the dream become truth.' Then I saw that it wasn't a dream because one of the soldiers said something in English we couldn't understand. One of the girls translated. They said, "Women, The war is over (as far as you are concerned). For that you can thank God and the English Army. Now you will get water and as much bread as you like!"

It wouldn't be possible to describe our reaction to those words. Everybody began to scream, cry, and laugh at the same time. I looked at the three soldiers at the door and they were no three tired men in dirty uniforms that I saw, but three angels who came to us straight from Heaven, to tell us our years of suffering are over and we were saved..."

Daniel Goldberg is a rabbinical student and doctoral candidate in Bible at Yeshiva University. He is also a Wexner Graduate Fellow.

Flying Officer Arthur Clifford Richards; DFC



The more observant reader may notice that, in this case, Richards has an "s" on the end unlike the more famous Cliff Richard. When I first met Cliff he had retired from the RAF and had some comical stories to tell. I knew he had spent time in South Australia on a posting to Woomera, a military research establishment, where, at that time, rockets were being tested. All I learned from him was that kangaroos sheltered from the hot sun by standing behind telegraph poles. It was only after his death that I learned more about his life through his daughter, Alison.

Cliff had become a navigator, qualifying in January 1943. Having flown several operational bombing missions, on the 23 August 1943 he was navigating his Stirling bomber over Berlin. There, after the crew released their bombs, they were attacked by a Junkers 88. It came in three times, raking the bomber with machine gun and canon fire. The gunners on the bomber managed to beat it off, but not before it had wounded the pilot, damaged the port engine, and severely damaged the tail plane. Unfortunately one crew member was killed. Before he lost consciousness the pilot, in his weakened state, feathered the outer port engine instead of the damaged inner port engine. He fell forward and while the searchlights were groping around them. Cliff took over the controls and flew the bomber out of the danger zone. He then handed control to the bomb-aimer and navigated back to base. Away from the enemy coast the pilot recovered enough to note that he had feathered the wrong engine and they were able to restart it and make it back to base and land safely. For his action in taking control of the damaged aircraft, Cliff was awarded the DFC.

After the war Cliff remained in the RAF attaining the rank of Wing Commander and had two spells as Station Commander of RAF Aberporth before retiring. Aberporth at that time was much involved in missile development, hence his time spent at Woomera. Eventually, retirement led him back to the North West. His career had taken him around the world including the USA where, I am told, he had an affair with the swimmer and film star Esther Williams. (The appeal of a man in uniform). *Alan Pacey*



Bombing of Dresden – 13th to 15th February 1945

It is worthy of note, that out of the 125,000 aircrew who served in Bomber Command, 55,573 were killed. This amounted to over 44% of the total, a higher rate than any other service. Over 8,400 were wounded and over 9,800 became prisoners of war. Arthur “Bomber” Harris, Commander-in-Chief, believed German morale would be sapped by “carpet” bombing cities. This tactic was used as the war progressed. However, rather as it did in Britain, it tended to make Germany more determined to resist.

The bombing of major cities such as Hamburg and Dresden killed many thousands of civilians including women and children. This proved to be damaging to Harris’s reputation. Churchill, who had appeared to support this tactic, later turned his back on the idea. Much of the work destroying infrastructure and other military objectives was forgotten by many.

This lack of recognition for the courage and sacrifice of the men of Bomber Command took decades to put right. A very fitting memorial was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II in Green Park London, 28 June 2012. *Alan Pacey*



Aftermath of the bombing of Dresden, Germany

JACK MARTIN



As part of the 6th Battalion Queen's Own West Kent Regiment Corporal Jack Martin was sent to Italy on 7th September 1944.

Jack was at the battle of Conselice in North Italy. This was part of Operation Buckland, the battle of the Argenta Gap between 12th to the 19th April 1945. This was the Eighth Army's contribution to the Allied Spring Offensive in Italy around the River Po.

On 13th April 1945, during this battle, Jack was shot in the left buttock and abdomen. He was taken to the field hospital. On 29th April 1945 he died of his gunshot wounds, he was 28 years old. Jack is buried at Forli war

cemetery near Rimini in North Italy.



This was Jack's original grave marker, but later it was replaced with a gravestone by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

His wife Elsie had this added on the gravestone:
"A DEAR HUSBAND AND DADDY. MAY
THE WINDS OF HEAVEN BLOW GENTLY
O'ER THIS SACRED SPOT"



Cliff Martin, his wife Barbara and their two daughters.

Photograph from his latest visit to his dad's grave in Forli cemetery, Italy.

The German surrender in Italy, was on Sunday 29th April 1945. The German surrender of Italy and agreement signed on 2nd May 1945.

JOHN (JACK) TAYLOR



The George III penny, with shrapnel mark, that Jack Taylor thinks saved his life.

The two holy pictures Jack kept with him



Madonna of the veil by Carlo Dolci now in the Eltham Palace Greenwich Museum



Virgin Mary and Child, part of Sistine Madonna by Raphael Santi, now in Dresden



Jack Taylor in Venice

JOHN (JACK) TAYLOR

written by his Great Granddaughter Connie Ashcroft



Jack was a motor mechanic who joined the RAF and as a Leading Aircraftsman was based at Hornchurch Fighter Station. However, when things quietened down after the Battle of Britain they asked for volunteers to join Combined Operations which included servicemen from the Army, the RAF and the Navy. Jack did this and was accepted for training for which he was sent to Scotland.

From this commando training he was transferred to a small unit which would be sent to Italy. The invasion of Italy began in Sicily, but Jack's landing craft was sunk with the loss of the unit's equipment. His unit spent three days waiting by the beach eating wild tomatoes before being sent to Malta to be re-

equipped and returned to Italy. There were five of these units each containing approximately 13 men. Their job was to sneak out at night ahead of the line and using Radar equipment detect enemy aircraft or mortars flying overhead.

Jack had to use Radar equipment and also look after the transport his Unit would use such as jeeps, lorries and his own workshop on wheels as he was also the mechanic. It is hard to imagine sneaking out with all this equipment and one night they came to a broken bridge and were waved at by a German sentry from the other bank of the river, whereupon they waved back and carefully reversed away. This was one of many of the amusing stories that he told but more serious actions were not discussed. During the campaign some of these small units were lost.

Jack was a very popular man and well respected soldier. When the war ended he was posted to Greece as there was much unrest there at that time. Demob had to wait because the peace keeping force needed mechanics.

One of Jack's friends was a very good artist and did a drawing of Jack from a photograph he had at the time. This drawing has been reproduced and hangs on the wall of several houses.

We are very proud of 'Poppa Jack' and his work during the war.

Poppa Jack liked to tell of the time he was guarding a German prisoner and his tommy gun fell apart. The German politely helped him to pick up the pieces.

JOHN (JACK) TAYLOR Continued..

Nanna Rene has two holy picture icons which Jack brought home from Italy. He was bedded down against a wall in a small building when two German bombs hit the village. The building collapsed and Jack was against the only wall left standing. Above, on the wall where he was lying, were the two holy pictures. Although he was not particularly religious, he was superstitious enough to take the pictures with him.

Italy can be very cold and wet in winter. When they were 'bogged down' on the River Sangro his unit was billeted in a stone building with a large fireplace. To keep warm and to cook they burned petrol in half of an old oil drum. Eventually the fire burned through the wooden beam which supported the stone chimney above causing the whole fireplace to fall down.

Nanna Rene also has an old George III penny which was given to Jack as a good luck token by a neighbour. This penny has some sharp cuts in the face. The story is that when he was driving a truck, a piece of shrapnel came through the window and struck the penny which was in his breast pocket and bounced away leaving him unscathed.

On another occasion when the unit was based in Venice they were in a queue on some 'duck boards' when one of the men fell into the water. In those days Venice did not have a good sewage system and the water had lots of "things" floating about. While this poor man was swimming to try to get out, the current created suction and a piece of poo was drawn to his chin. He was straining his neck and frightened to draw breath in case the unthinkable happened. All his pals thought this extremely funny and were too helpless with laughter to come to his assistance.

After the war Jack continued to have a charmed life and amazed and amused the family with many narrow escapes both at home and at work. When Poppa Jack's unit were taken out of the line later in the Italian campaign, they were often sent for R & R (rest and recuperation), to a small hilltop town in Tuscany called Scroffiano. I am pleased to say that Nanna Rene and Grandpa Alan managed to take Poppa Jack back to visit Scroffiano along with "Little" Nanna Margaret in the year 2000. This brought back a lot of memories for him and he was excited to share these memories with his family. Unfortunately he became ill the following year and died in 2002 aged 81.

Also on this time he was able to see the grave of a favourite uncle in a war cemetery in Casserta. He enjoyed trying out some of the long forgotten Italian that he had picked up during the war, chatting to locals about his time in Italy and recognizing the features in Scroffiano which was little changed.

The family knows that he saw a lot of horrible things in his time in the forces; but, like so many of his generation, he shared very few of these experiences. He liked to remember his comrades that he shared these experiences with and showed a lot of respect for them, particularly the young pilots he met at the beginning of his service at Hornchurch. Like so many young men I believe he thrived on the excitement of it all; but then, as now, it took time to adjust to civilian life.

WAR AGAINST THE JAPANESE AND THE ATOM BOMBS

After the attack on Pearl Harbour, Japan achieved a long series of military successes. In December 1941 Guam, Wake Island, and Hong Kong fell to the Japanese, followed in the first half of 1942 by the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. Japanese troops also invaded neutral Thailand. Only in mid-1942 were Australian and New Zealand forces in New Guinea and British forces in India able to halt the Japanese advance.

The American navy's battle of Midway victory in June 1942 was a turning point in the Pacific war. In August 1942, American forces attacked the Japanese in the Solomon Islands, forcing a withdrawal of Japanese forces from the island of Guadalcanal in February 1943, unfortunately with heavy loss of life. Allied forces slowly gained naval and air supremacy in the Pacific moving from island to island, conquering them and often sustaining heavy casualties.

In October 1944, American forces began retaking the Philippines from Japanese troops, who surrendered in August 1945. American Army and Air Forces launched a strategic bombing campaign against Japan. British forces recaptured Burma in March 1945. In early 1945, American forces suffered heavy losses during the invasions of Iwo Jima (February) and Okinawa (April), an island of strategic importance off the coast of the Japan. The 36-day Iwo Jima battle cost 26,000 American casualties, including 6,800 dead. The 82-day Battle for Okinawa cost over 62,000 casualties, of whom 12,000 were killed or missing. Despite these casualties and suicidal Japanese air attacks, known as Kamikaze attacks, American forces conquered Okinawa in mid-June 1945. The Japanese defended their positions in China until they surrendered on 15th August 1945.

Late on 6th August 1945, President Truman of the United States of America made this dramatic announcement:

“Sixteen hours ago an American aeroplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. That bomb had more power than 20,000 tons of T.N.T. and more than 2,000 times the blast power of the British ‘grand slam’ which is the largest bomb (22,000lb.) yet used in the history of warfare.”

The world now had heard of the first use of the atomic bomb.

Hiroshima was a Japanese naval and army base with a population of about 340,000 and was virtually disintegrated by the effect of the enormous explosion. More than a third of the people were instantly killed or burned to death.

On the 9th August the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, one of the other great Japanese cities, resulting in even more deaths. Following the explosion a vast cloud of smoke and flame could be seen over 250 miles away.

Continued.....

War against the Japanese and the Atom Bomb Continued.....

On the morning of 14th of August the Japanese cabinet met and decided to surrender to the Allies. At midnight, the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, announced the Japanese unconditional surrender and at long last the end of the Second World War. President Truman made a similar announcement from the White House in Washington. On Sunday the 2nd of September, Japan signed the document of final surrender on board the American battleship "Missouri" anchored in Tokyo Bay.

Throughout the Pacific, especially on the smaller islands, some Japanese soldiers refused to surrender either because they did not believe that their leaders would surrender or because they felt it was against their code. Even into the 1970's Japanese soldiers were coming out of hiding eventually accepting that the war was over.

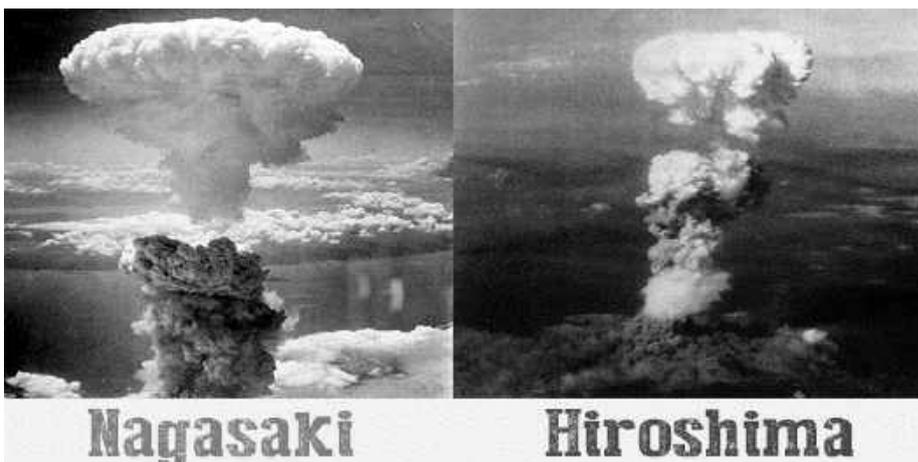
The war crimes involving the Imperial Japanese Army and the Imperial Japanese Navy under Emperor Hirohito resulted in the deaths of millions – through massacre, human experimentation, starvation and forced labour.

Tens of thousands of British servicemen endured the brutalities of Japan's Prisoner of War camps during WW2 and over a quarter died in captivity. The rest returned home sick and damaged and lived with their wartime suffering for the rest of their lives, both physically and psychologically.

On the 15th August 1995 the 'Murayama Statement' was issued by the Japanese government apologising for the damage and suffering caused by Japan during World War Two.



American Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima February 1945



Nagasaki

Hiroshima

John Booth, Japanese Prisoner of War



John Booth, known to many as Jack, was born on 14 March 1918 in Chadderton, Lancashire, and was a driver for the Co-op before he joined the Royal Artillery at the age of 21. He trained in North Wales and Woolwich but his then girlfriend Irene, insisted they marry before he was posted overseas. John managed to get a 48 hour pass for the ceremony at St. Gabriel Church in Middleton, Manchester in 1941. They had just one night together before John was deployed to Singapore.

Ten months later in January 1942 John was taken prisoner of war, along with many other soldiers, as the Japanese invaded Singapore. He was forced to work in 12 hour shifts on the docks in tropical heat, surviving on meagre rations of rice, dead rats and snakes.

John was later shipped with 700 soldiers to work on the railways in Thailand and Burma. He was given a job transporting water up a rock face from the river, but developed tropical ulcers on both legs after suffering insect bites and bamboo scratches that turned septic.

John had both his legs amputated without anaesthetic after being given just five minutes to decide whether to choose amputation or be left to die. Four friends held him down whilst a medic PoW amputated his legs with a saw. John later said he was relieved after the operation as he had been in such excruciating pain from the ulcers. Most men died after undergoing amputation, but John and an Australian PoW, Billy Hargreaves, were the only two double leg amputees to survive.

"Most lads died after the amputations, but I survived along with an Australian, Billy Hargreaves. We stayed in the camp under a mosquito net for 12 months. When lads died, someone would play the Last Post, and you'd hear it 20 times a day some days. I was lucky to survive.

My wife hadn't seen me for years – and when I came back home I obviously had no legs. But I was in an OK condition considering."

When John returned home, Irene had found a cottage for them to begin married life together and they went on to raise two children. John got false legs and wore them for 70 years. John worked for the Co-op for 30 years, carrying out maintenance jobs, and remained independent, using his prosthetics for 70 years.

MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR TWO IN THE FAR EAST

When the war started my brother-in-law, Owen, was in the Catholic Seminary training to be a priest. He decided to join the army and was sent to the Far East.

Owen was captured by the Japanese and sent to a prison camp. Along with other soldiers, he worked building the infamous railroad.

Owen witnessed many atrocities committed by the Japanese to his fellow prisoners, many of whom died in the prison camp.

At the end of the war Owen returned to England, but after what he had seen and been through, felt he could not take his final vows to be a priest. Instead he became a school teacher..

Annie Cull from Liverpool

My father Jimmy, was in the army and sent out to serve in Singapore. In 1942, the Japanese invaded Singapore and the British Army and their families were sent to prison camps. My father was imprisoned in Changi jail, Singapore and the women and children were sent on to camps in Malaysia.

My dad knew the area around the jail and escaped a number of times to get food for his fellow prisoners. He was caught and so savagely beaten that the marks stayed with him until he died in 1982. He helped look after the men and when they got abscesses, he put maggots on the wound, which then healed.

He saw many atrocities and torture whilst he was in Changi, like men digging their own graves before being shot for some minor matter. He never forgot the cruelty he had seen and would never buy anything Japanese.

Christine, Wigan

Len Wilson was Bishop of Singapore in 1941 when the Japanese invaded. He was imprisoned in Changi Jail, Singapore. Whilst in prison he was tortured by the Japanese. In Changi 950 prisoners of war died, 567 of these were British.

At the end of the war Len converted some of his Japanese captors into the Church of England. In 1948 Len Wilson became Dean of Manchester Cathedral until 1953. *Manchester Cathedral*

MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR TWO IN THE FAR EAST

SERGEANT THOMAS PRIOR



One of the names on the Wigan cenotaph is my uncle Sergeant Thomas Prior of The Loyal Regiment. He was on a troop ship going to the Far East when it was sunk by the Japanese, his friend was killed.



He was sent to work on the notorious Burma railway.

He died aged 30 yrs on 31st May 1943 and is buried in Thanbyuzayat Cemetery in Burma (now Myanmar). *Christine, Wigan.*



The Burma Railroad. It cost a human life for every sleeper laid. 120,000 sleepers were laid.

MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR TWO IN THE FAR EAST



On a visit to Singapore, we went to Changi jail. In the museum there are many stories of the cruel treatment of the prisoners by the Japanese.

The only photographs taken were by the Japanese. One photo showed a young Australian prisoner about to be beheaded because he stole a chicken to feed his friends. Another picture shows British men, women and children being marched through Singapore to the camps. Local Chinese people tried to give them drinks of water, but were beaten by the Japanese.

We saw a radio secretly made by the prisoners, it was in a matchbox. We said prayers in the little chapel in Changi built by the Allied prisoners of war.



An exhibition of Changi prisoners' drawings, by those who managed to get paper and pencils.



British prisoners of the Japanese after their release in September 1945

Eileen and Bert Knott – a World War Two Romance



My mum Eileen Gribbin lived with her mum in a tenement flat in Liverpool city centre.

Mum worked in the Littlewoods' Parachute Factory in Liverpool folding parachutes which was very precise work. The factory managed to produce over 5 million parachutes for the war. During a few Commando operations my dad used some of these parachutes.

Mum met my dad, Bert Knott, during the war just after he became a commando. My mum had a wonderful singing voice and personality to match, she was always popular at get-togethers. Her friend at Littlewoods invited her to a family anniversary party. Mum was singing at the party and my dad saw her and immediately said he was going to marry her. Dad walked her home that night, even though he was worried as she lived near Scotland Road (it had a bad reputation for trouble). They fell in love, but my dad decided not to marry until the end of the war as he was worried he could leave mum a widow.

In June 1945, after the victory in Europe, my dad was given some leave. After all the battles and commando raids he had taken part in he had been promised to be stationed at home. The home posting turned out to be Germany. Dad had a few days leave so they could get married. Mum wanted to marry in a Catholic church, but the priest would not marry them as dad wasn't a catholic. Mum's older sister was against mum marrying in a registry office so mum packed an old little case and went off to my dad's dad. On the way to the bus her case opened and all her clothes fell out. They were married on 23rd June 1945 in the registry office, a few days later dad went to Germany. Mum and Dad were later married in St. Oswald's Catholic church after dad had lessons and become a Catholic. The above is a photo of mum and dad after dad was de-mobbed from the army in February 1946.



When mum and dad celebrated their Silver Wedding Anniversary, dad wrote in her card "25 years with you is like 25 seconds, 25 seconds without you is like 25 years".

Mum and dad had four children (the first, me, born in 1947) and were married for 29 years until mum sadly died. Dad was broken hearted and had to wait 30 years to join her. Mum didn't get to see her grandchildren, although she knew two of them were expected. They had 12 grandchildren and now have 23 great-grandchildren.

World War Two Ends

We celebrated Victory in Europe day with a street party for the children, then the adults brought out the ale and a piano accordion. They sang all the wartime songs, mothers did the 'knees up Mother Brown' and danced the 'Conga' line around the tables and partied well into the night.

The ban on bonfires was lifted, we built the biggest one and collected money for fireworks. On Bonfire Night we feasted on gingerbread, treacle toffee and roasted potatoes and cheered as the effigy of Guy Fawkes and Hitler went down in flames. Wartime children were given a fortnight's holiday at summer camps in Southport. A first-time venture for most of us, even though the war was over, parents couldn't afford a holiday.

Wigan Fair was back again, the first time I tasted black peas and cotton candy. Foodstuffs and exotic fruit I'd never seen before appeared in the shops and on the market. I was amazed to discover a pomegranate was full of seeds, I didn't know whether to swallow or spit out. Rationing was still in effect for staple food until well into the fifties.

The Council informed the tenants who had a shelter in their garden that they now had to pay ten shillings. People weren't happy and the Council never did get the ten shillings.

When the war was over and dad came home, I wouldn't let him in. I didn't know him and I wasn't about to let a complete stranger in the house while mam was at work. So he stood at the back door with his kit bag till mam came home two hours later.

The war years were a good part of my childhood. Most of the time I was around adults and privy to the conversations going on around me. Our elders couldn't shield us from the harsh realities of war, it wasn't just overseas it was overhead and around us. We had to grow up fast with a knowledge beyond our years about man's inhumanity to man, and children I might add, that was going on in Europe. Some memories, like the death of my brother, are too painful to recall. *Elizabeth Rostron, from Wigan, now living in Canada*



Victory in Europe Day Party, Ince
8th May 1945



Victory in Japan Day Party, Ince
15th August 1945

The War Ends



When I was born in 1943, the Second World War was still going on and my father Stan was in Italy fighting in the war. I lived with my mum and grandad. My father was in the army, the Lancashire Fusiliers, and served in Egypt and Italy. When he came home at the end of the war, I didn't know who he was and was frightened of him.

Colin Gaskell, Billinge,

George Watson

In 1945 George Watson, brother of Eric Watson, was sent to Sydney on the Dominion Monarch, then onto Singapore to set up radar systems.



Eric and George Watson in Mesnes Park Wigan 1945



George Watson standing on a captured Japanese bomber, Singapore, 1945

The war ended when I was ten and I never knew until that time about all the atrocities that had been going on in the world. When I was older I found out just how terrible it had been for all those people. It could have been us here in England.

I think of those poor people and the horror has lived with me ever since. I thank God for our safety and all the poor soldiers who fought for us. *Molly Blay, Wigan*

1945 GENERAL ELECTION

A General Election (the first for 10 years) was held in July 1945. The Labour Party led by Clement Atlee won by a landslide. The Beveridge report had been published in December 1942 and this recommended a National Health Service and Welfare state. A National Health Service that was comprehensive, free at the point of use and universally available to all. The recommendations were adopted by the Labour Party and received widespread support, but only lukewarm support from Churchill and the Conservative Party.

In 1945 the Labour Party introduced:

- Family Allowance 5 shillings per week for the second and subsequent children, this started in 1946.
- National Insurance Act 1945 which introduced unemployment pay for 6 months and Sick Pay for as long as you were sick.
- Industrial Injuries Act (1946) which gave extra benefits for people injured at work.
- Nationalisation of the Bank of England
- Ellen Wilkinson appointed Minister of Education, first British woman in history to hold the post. She was a campaigner against poverty and in 1946 she brought in the Act which gave a daily free 1/3 pint of milk to all school children under 18 years.
- The National Health Service Act which came into being in 1948
- The Nationalisation of the Coal Mines Act implemented in 1947
- The Nationalisation of the Railways and Road Haulage Act came into being 1948
- A target was set of 300,000 new houses a year and 1.25 million council houses were built between 1945 and 1951

The Welfare State

- After the war, which highlighted that so many people were deprived and poor, the Liberal politician **William Beveridge** identified five issues that needed to be tackled to make a better Britain.
- To achieve his aims, **Beveridge** proposed the introduction of a **welfare state**.



WANT - Social Security

- **Family Allowances Act (1945)** - 5s a week for each child after the first.
- **National Insurance Act (1945)** - unemployment pay for six months and sick pay for as long as you were sick.
- **National Insurance - Industrial Injuries Act (1946)** - extra benefits for people injured at work.
- **National Assistance Act (1948)** - benefits for anybody in need. 'The Times' described it as: 'the last defence against extreme poverty'.





Entrance to Auschwitz Concentration Camp



Spitfire



St. Luke's bombed out church, Liverpool



Liverpool Blitz memorial



Inside the Western Approaches Museum



Inside a Glider, St.Mere-Eglise Museum



Poppy growing on Sword Beach 2019

In the six years of World War II:

403,000 British Military were killed

92,700 British Civilians were killed

15 million soldiers were killed

20 million Russian civilians were killed

6 million Jews were killed



Eileen Bithell and Eileen Walsh are BETA Charity Trustees and, on a voluntary basis, research, record, write and publish local history for the community.

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