

Wigan Remembers

A BETA

*Research book on
World War II*

**They shall grow not old
As we that are left grow old
Age shall not weary them
Nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun
And in the morning
WE WILL REMEMBER
THEM**



BETA Memories of the WWII Research Trips

We visited the WWII Parachute Exhibition at Tatton Hall. I saw photos showing the soldiers parachuting from planes. They trained at Ringway(Manchester) airport and Tatton Park. I read about the 'Bruneval Raid' where paratroopers and commandos parachuted into France and took German radar equipment to Britain. *Carol Ratcliffe.*

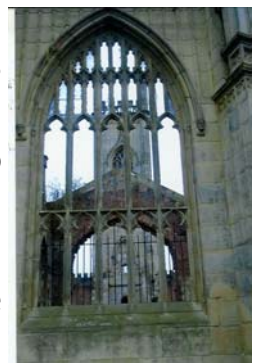


BETA had a Peace party in August. We had a band that played 1940's music and a singer. The old soldiers who helped us with our research came to the party. We had a good buffet and some of us dressed in 1940 styles and Paul and Richard wore uniforms. I danced with Les who was a sailor in the war. *Ellen*

We went to Eden Camp in Yorkshire and I saw a WWII tank. The tank was Russian. This made me think of what happened in Stalingrad when the Germans invaded Russia. A lot of people died in Stalingrad from September 1942. In February 1943 the Russians managed to stop the German advance. This was a turning point in WWII. *Stephen Hesketh*



We visited Liverpool and went to see St. Nicholas' church in Liverpool. This church was bombed in WWII, but has been re-built. There are monuments to the people who died in the blitz and to those sailors who died in the Atlantic and Arctic convoys. St. Lukes church in Liverpool was also bombed, but this has been left to remind us about the Liverpool Blitz. *Chris Bates*



This is me looking at a World War II vegetable garden at the Museum of Liverpool Life. People had to grow their own vegetables and not flowers. This was because food was very scarce. Most food was rationed such as meat, fish, eggs, butter, cheese and sugar. Clothes were also rationed. Everyone, even babies, had ration books with coupons which they took to the shops and the coupons were taken along with the money by the shop-keeper for the goods.

Colin Gaskell



BETA WORLD WAR II PROJECT



**BETA students laying a wreath at the Wigan Cenotaph
on Remembrance Day 11th November 2005**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Les Rogers,
Bob Rawlinson
Theresa Mather
Elizabeth Rostron
William and Joan Johnson
Joan Hurst
Sheila Craigen
Molly Blay
Barbara Davis
and all those who told us their stories
Wigan World web site
Home Front Recall
All contributors**



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The Rise of Nazi Germany

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

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

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

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

Pastor Martin Niemoeller who was arrested on Hitler's orders in 1937



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, France, Italy and Germany. Hitler promised not to invade Poland, France or Britain. In return Hitler was allowed to invade Czechoslovakia.

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

Memories of 1938

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 in 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)



Signing the Munich Agreement



Peace in our Time

1939

Russia signed a pact with Hitler that if Germany invaded Poland, Russia would get part of Poland. In return Hitler would not attack Russia.

1st September 1939—
Hitler invaded Poland

3rd September 1939 —
Britain and France declared war on Germany.

GAS MASKS -

Were given to everyone in Britain and they had to be carried everywhere.



BLACKOUT—

No street lights, no lights to be shown in houses, shops etc.. Blackout curtains, blackout material had to be put on every window.

CONSCRIPTION into the Armed Forces of every man in Britain aged 18 to 41 years. Wages were 15s. per week for a private.

BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE - troops sent to France and Belgium.

RATIONING— of food began in Britain.

EVACUEES—

Nearly 3,000,000 people moved from towns and cities in danger from enemy bombers to places of safety in the countryside. Most were schoolchildren. People were paid 10s 6d per week to look after one child, 8s. 6d .per child, per week if more than one child was taken. Clothes, bedding and medical care were provided by the Local Authority

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES—

In Germany the mass killing of people in asylums who had mental and physical disabilities was started. This is where they first tried out the Zyklon B gas.

1939

British Expeditionary Force leaves for France



British Expeditionary Force leaves for France and Belgium



British soldiers meet French soldiers

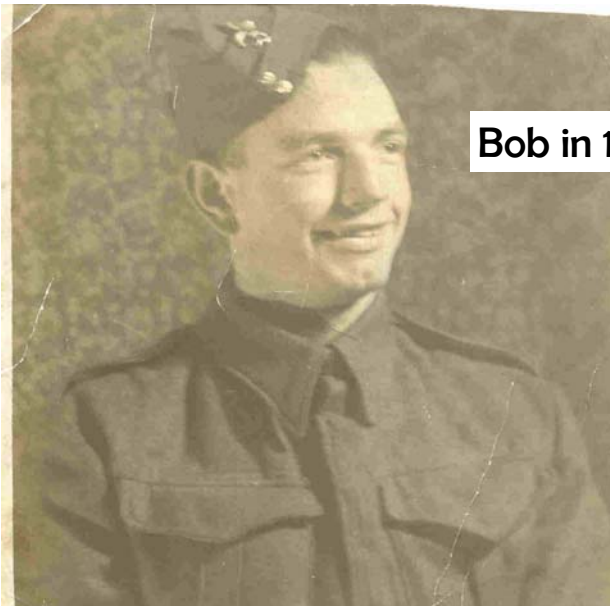
Memories of 1939

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 Gorner'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

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

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 good-byes.

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

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.

Miss I. Parkinson, Orrell

Memories of 1939

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 heartbreaking 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

Leo was Jewish and his parents sent him to England as a young boy. This was before the war started here, but in Germany the Jews were being persecuted so they sent him here for his safety.

Leo lived in Orrell and went to school 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 he came to visit us at least twice a year. He was full of admiration for what we had done and called us his "two lovely girls".

Eileen and Eileen

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 (now living in Wigan)



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

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

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 in 1939.

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



The Royal Oak



The final resting place of The Royal Oak

1940

APRIL - Denmark was invaded by Germany and surrendered
Norway invaded by the Germans and surrenders in June.

MAY - Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of Britain
Germany bombed and invaded Holland
Germany invaded Belgium and Belgium surrenders.
Germany invaded France

Dunkirk British army rescued from Dunkirk beach in France

JUNE - France surrenders to the Germans
Italy declares war on Britain and France
Britain stands alone
Channel Islands invaded by Germany



Over 200 merchant ships and several
British war ships sunk by German U boats in the Atlantic Ocean.

10th July—Start of the **Battle of Britain** fought by the RAF

29th JULY – German Luftwaffe drop a bomb on Salford

9th AUGUST - start of the German Luftwaffe bombing Liverpool
and Manchester

28th AUGUST – 180 German bombers attack Merseyside at night

28th AUGUST – City of Manchester bombed

SEPTEMBER 1940

5th Bomb drops on Wigan and destroys Greenhough Street Methodist Church

7th Germany began heavy bombing of Britain-**The Blitz**.

12th Italy invaded Egypt.

15th The **RAF win the battle of Britain**. Hitler decides to postpone plans
for the invasion of Britain.

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.

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.

DECEMBER 22nd, 23rd, 24th Very heavy bombing in Manchester.
Manchester Cathedral, The Shambles and Manchester city centre badly
damaged by bombs.

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.

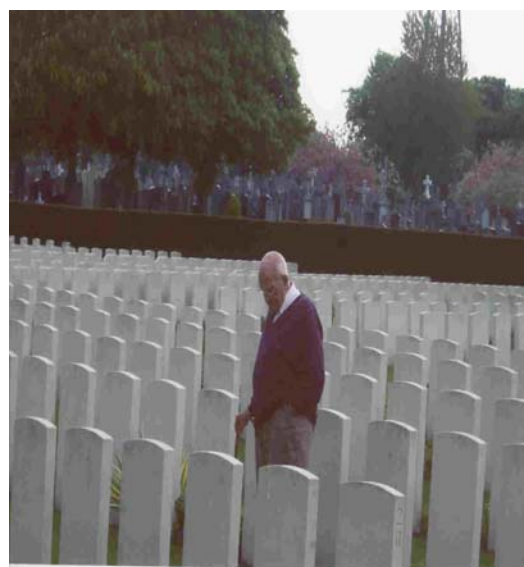
We were told to head for Dunkirk so we could get ships back home. In Northern France we stopped at a farmhouse where the British had set up hot food and we could rest in the barns. While we were sleeping “all hell broke loose” and German tanks had entered the farmyard. The officers shouted “every man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



Dunkirk May 1940



**Bob on a return visit to
Dunkirk 2004**

Dunkirk

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*



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

“The Battle of France is over. The Battle of Britain is about to begin, upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization, upon it depends our own British life and the long continuity of our institution and our Empire.”

Winston Churchill, June 18th 1940

2,353 young men from Great Britain and 574 from overseas, pilots and other aircrew are officially recognised as having taken part in the Battle of Britain. 544 lost their lives in the Battle of Britain and a further 791 were killed in action before the end of the war.

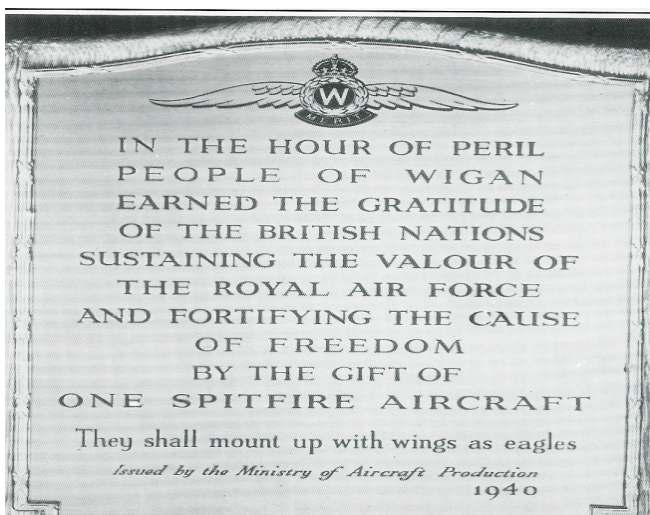
The German Luftwaffe felt it was absolutely necessary to defeat the RAF and attempted to win air superiority so that they could invade Britain. The Luftwaffe lost 1,733 aircraft from July to October and the RAF lost 915 planes. The RAF defence was well organised, radar picking up approaching forces and relaying the information to the aircraft bases from where the RAF sent up planes to destroy the Luftwaffe.

In early September the Luftwaffe changed to night bombing of British cities, but this was a big mistake by Hitler. When Hitler lost the Battle of Britain, he concentrated on the invasion of Russia. The Luftwaffe regrouped for the invasion, but they were not able to replace the skilled pilots and aircrew who had been killed or captured during the Battle of Britain.

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

“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”

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





**RAF crews
ready to
scramble**



**Lancaster
Bomber**

Spitfire



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 bungled 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.

/Continued.....

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 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.

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, its 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



Shelters being dug in Wigan



Air Raid drill at Whelley School



A Wigan First Aid squad stands by



**Dancing at Wigan's Empress Ballroom
6d per head 1s on Saturdays**



Captured German bomber on display in Wigan December 1940

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

Bombs Dropped on Wigan

One night a German bomber dropped a stack of bombs on a grave yard 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, Wigan

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



**A TOTAL OF 576 PEOPLE WERE
KILLED AND OVER 1800
INJURED IN THE MANCHESTER
BLITZ**

Manchester Royal Infirmary bombed October 1940

MEMORIES OF 1940 and Rationing

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.

The Court Hall in King Street (which is now a bar called The Hub) 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 from Wigan, born 1932

**Manchester Royal Exchange
bombed**



**Baby rescued, after
several hours, from
under this rubble
Manchester,
December 1940**

**His house was
bombed, but the boy
and his family were
saved because they
sheltered in the
Anderson Shelter
December 1940**



1941

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

March - 1,328 ships carrying food and war supplies, sunk in the Atlantic by U boats.
Lend Lease Act – the USA will send arms, planes etc to Britain and we will pay for them later.

April - Germany invades Greece and Yugoslavia.
Greece and Yugoslavia surrender.

May - ***'The May Blitz'***-very heavy bombing in Liverpool.

- 1 1,741 people killed by German bombing
- 2 St. Luke's church destroyed
- 3 Liverpool town centre heavily bombed
- 4 Liverpool Museum bombed
- 5 Lewis's bombed
- 6 Mill Road Hospital bombed

June - Germany invades Russia.

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

December - Japanese bomb Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, (United States of America).

USA and Britain declare war on Japan.
Germany declares war on USA.

Japanese invade Hong Kong.

1941

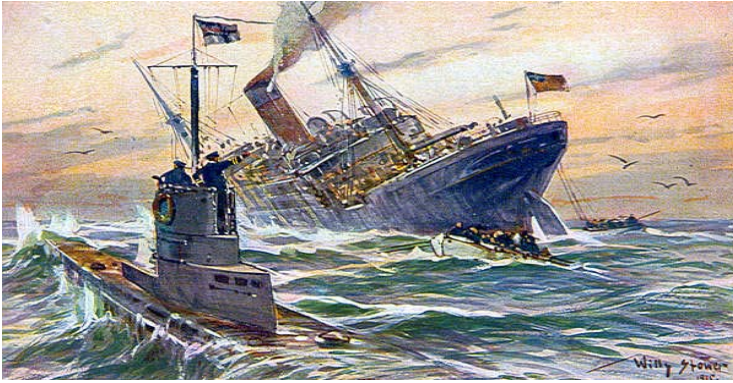
March 30th—Hitler says war against the Soviet Union will be one of extermination.

22nd June, Germany invades the Soviet Union



1328 British ships are sunk in the Atlantic, 432 by German U boats.

September 28th a British supply convoy is sent to Russia and Churchill promises to send a convoy every 10 days.



Auschwitz Concentration camp extends to include Birkenau camp. First prisoners were Polish political prisoners and Gypsies.

September— First people killed by Zyklon B gas were Russian prisoners of war and 298 sick prisoners.



Gates of Auschwitz



7th December, Japan bombs the United States Naval base at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii.

The United States, Britain and the Allies declare war on Japan. Germany and Italy declare war on the United States of America.

25th December The Japanese capture Hong Kong.



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, 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.

Memories of The Liverpool Blitz

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, Liverpool 3.

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.

The Blitz on Liverpool



Liverpool Town Centre May 1941



Lewis's bombed



Liverpool Museum destroyed



St. Luke's church



German pilot fires at civilians during the blitz

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

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

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

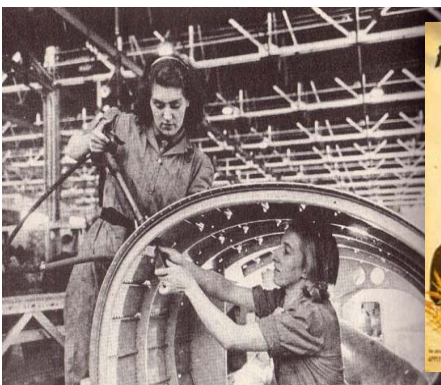
Mam had to work, she couldn't manage on the Government grant, even so she wasn't allowed to work overtime, only the men could. Like many other kids whose mother worked during the war, I wore the door key on a string around my neck. We got ourselves off to school, went to the shop for pies and a bottle 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

My Auntie Kitty lived in Liverpool and when she was 20 years old she was sent to Bedford in the Land Army.

The work was very hard and she still now suffers with her 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.

Eileen W.



Beech Hill Munitions Workers

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.

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. 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 after her French husband was killed. She was captured in June 1944 tortured and sent to Germany where she was shot in the Spring of 1945.



Amy Johnson



Violette Szabo

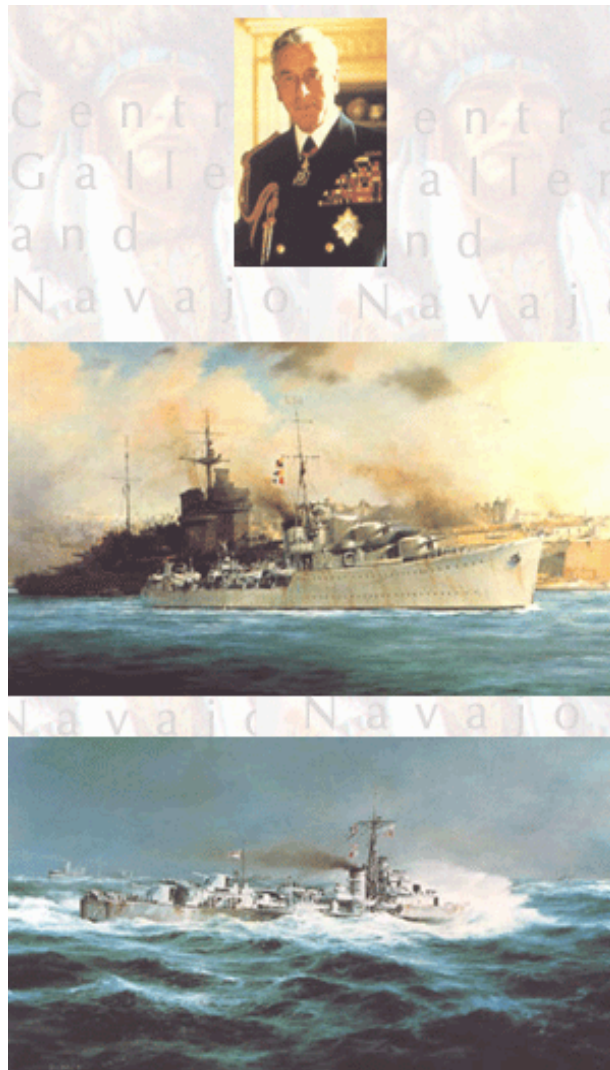
HMS Kelly

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



1942

JANUARY—**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.

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

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—**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.

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

JUNE—**AMERICAN TROOPS ARRIVE IN BRITAIN.**

Burtonwood set up as a United States Airbase.

AUGUST—**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.

NOVEMBER—**EL ALAMEIN VICTORY** – British win battle against Germans at El Alamein in North Africa.

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



Japanese capture 50,000 allied troops in Singapore. They are sent to Changi



British victory at El Alamein in North Africa. This led to the German retreat from the whole of North Africa



'MOTHERLAND' THE BATTLE FOR STALINGRAD, SEPTEMBER 1942 by David Pentland. Signed Limited Edition of 1150 prints plus 50 artist proofs, DHM843. Image size 25" x 15". Price code L. Artist proofs price code USL.

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 HM 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.

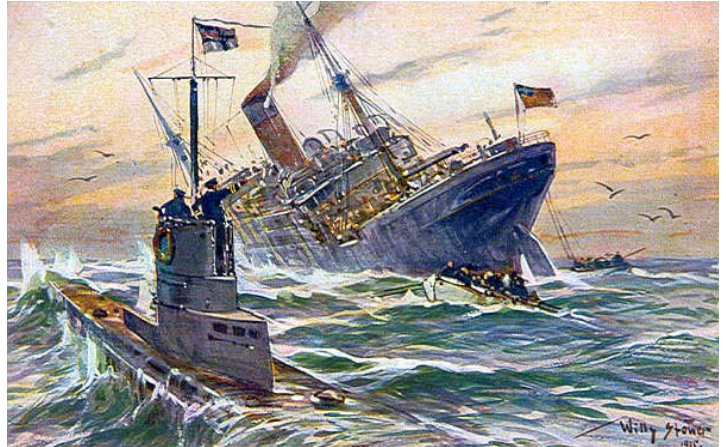
In these far Northern latitudes, summer brought less adverse weather conditions, but the almost perpetual daylight rendered the Allied convoys vulnerable to attack by their German opponents at almost anytime.

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)

WAR IN THE ARCTIC and ATLANTIC



Rescued merchant seamen aboard the Canadian corvette HMSC Arvida.



Convoy off Nova Scotia, Canada gets ready to cross the Atlantic and run the gauntlet of the German U boats



Setting depth charges at a German U boat



Western Approaches in Liverpool, Headquarters for the "Battle of the Atlantic and Arctic.

1942 COMMANDO RAIDS

The Commandos received 38 battle honours in World War II and they also took part in many smaller operations.

BRUNEVAL RAID— One of the reasons the British won the 'radar war' with Nazi Germany was that we knew precisely how the enemy system worked. This was thanks to a daring commando and paratroop raid on a German Wurzburg radar site at Bruneval in northern France.

The British raiders had attacked and destroyed the station and key components had been stolen and the whole German radar system analysed by British scientists. (What the 'boffins' did not know was that the British paratroops had orders to kill them, rather than let them fall into German hands if the operation went wrong.) Plucked to safety by Royal Navy landing craft, with Germans in hot pursuit, the raiders achieved complete success.

ST. NAZAIRE RAID— HMS Campbeltown with 18 smaller ships sailed into the port of St. Nazaire, France, where she was rammed directly into the Normandie dock gates. The Commandos engaged the German forces and destroyed the dock facilities.

Eight hours later, delayed-action fuses set off the explosives in the Campbeltown, which wrecked the dock gates. The dock remained out of action for the duration of the war.

Of the 241 Commandos who took part, 64 were killed or missing and 109 captured. 2 Commandos and 3 members of the Royal Navy were awarded the Victoria Cross and 80 others decorations for gallantry.

DIEPPE—Britain, America and Russia were desperate for a victory in Europe. They ordered British and Canadian troops to attack the French coast at Dieppe from small boats. On August 19, 1942, Dieppe was the site of a bloody landing by 4,965 Canadian troops and 1,075 men of No.3, No.4 and No.40 Commando. The raid lasted only nine hours, but claimed 907 Canadian dead and 1,946 taken prisoner. The Commandos fought bravely, but were outnumbered.

The operation was widely criticised as poorly conceived, although it did lead to the decision not to attempt to capture a port by way of head-on assault during the invasion of Normandy in 1944.



Albert Knott aged 19 yrs

My Dad, Bert Knott, joined the Army when he was 18 and volunteered to join the Commandos. He became a member of No. 3 Commando 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. Each Commando unit 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 like the fact that whilst training in Scotland they used to run up and down Ben Nevis carrying their field packs. At Spean Bridge, 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, Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, including Dieppe, St. Nazaire and D. Day.

He was one of the lucky ones to escape from Dieppe, he said that the Germans were waiting for them.

He was wounded a number of times, but only once, in 1944 sometime after D Day, had to be returned to England for hospitalisation, because of serious shrapnel wounds. He soon recovered after a couple of weeks and returned to active service abroad.

My uncle told me about a special operation dad took part in. 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 took part in the raid.

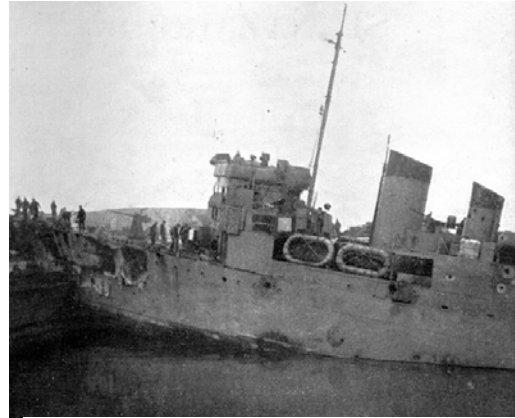
They arrived by small boat from a British submarine and were met by a young boy from the French Resistance. The boy took them to the house. The safe was opened and the documents taken.

They all got back to the submarine then to England safely and the "safe cracker" earned his release from prison.

1942 COMMANDO RAIDS



"From now on all men operating against German troops in so-called Commando raids ... are to be annihilated to the last man.... Even if these individuals on discovery ... give themselves up as prisoners, no pardon is on any account to be given." Hitler's command 1942



HMS Campbeltown after she was rammed into the dock at St. Nazaire



German radar equipment



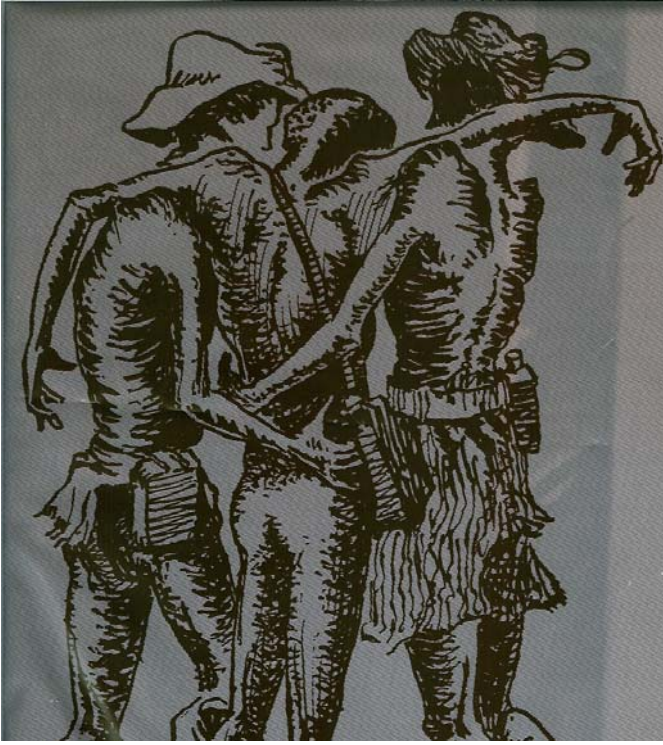
Commando Monument Spean Bridge Scotland where the Commandos trained



Landing Craft used in the raids



Commandos return home after Dieppe



A drawing by one of the Changi prisoners



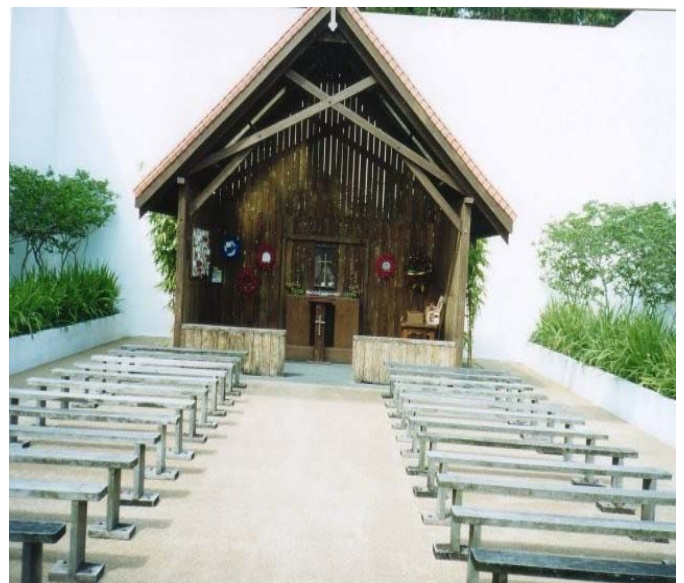
Burma Railroad. It cost a human life for every sleeper laid. 120,000 sleepers were laid.



Prisoners line up for their one meal a day



Prisoners from Changi, Singapore, after their release in September 1945



Changi Chapel, Singapore

MEMORIES OF THE WAR IN THE FAR EAST

When the war started my brother- in- law 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 C. from Liverpool

My grandad 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 grandad was imprisoned in Changi jail, Singapore and the women and children were sent on to camps in Malaysia.

My grandad 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.

David Frost, Wigan

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 were taken by the Japanese, one 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 people tried to give them drinks of water, but were beaten by the Japanese. There was an exhibition of drawings by prisoners who managed to get paper and pencils.

We saw a radio secretly made by the prisoners, it was in a matchbox.

We said prayers in the little chapel built by the Allied prisoners of war.

George and Eileen Walsh, Wigan

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, now aged 89 years.



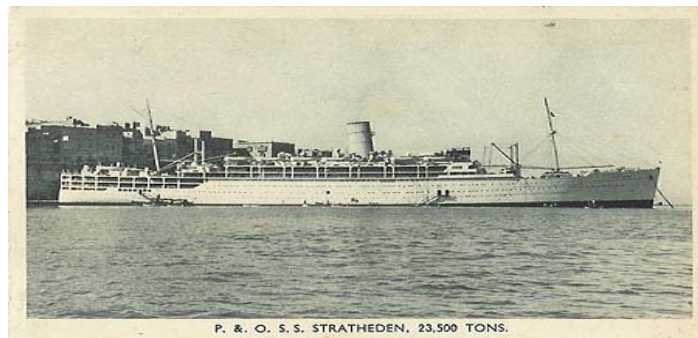
William and his wife Joan
at the BETA Peace Party
20th August 2005

My father, John Walsh, 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.

George, Wigan.



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, now aged 85 years.

1943

JANUARY—British 8th Army (Desert Rats) take Tripoli, North Africa from Germans.

FEBRUARY—Germans defeated by Russians and surrender at Stalingrad.

FEBRUARY —British and Indian troops 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.

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

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

JUNE- Himmler orders liquidation of all Polish Jewish ghettos

JUNE—United States begins submarine warfare against Japanese in the Pacific.

JULY— Allies land in Sicily, Italy. Allies bomb Rome, Italy. Mussolini is arrested in Rome.

SEPTEMBER—Italy surrenders. The Germans occupy Italy and release Mussolini.

SEPTEMBER—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— First meeting of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin who meet in Teheran, Iran. They confirm plans to invade Western Europe in Spring 1944.



Tripoli



The allies in Burma



Jews surrender in the Warsaw Ghetto



Guadalcanal



Allied landings in Italy



Germans release Mussolini

Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill





Malta GC

My Uncle George 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 .Eventually the convoy of Allied ships got through, bringing food to the starving population and fuel for the 'planes. 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.

Eileen B. Wigan

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 involved in the Anzio landings. On the 23rd January she was sunk with heavy loss of life.



HMS Victorious, Indomitable and Eagle as part of Operation Pedestal to relieve Malta



Valletta, capital of Malta, photo taken in 1943 after the siege.

1943 Memories

Dad, Bert Knott, was in No. 3 Commando Unit and they were amongst the first to land in Sicily in 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.

The bridge was guarded by the Italians, but when they saw the British commandos, they quickly ran and left the bridge. The commandos successfully removed the demolition charges that had been set.

Then the Germans attacked them with tanks, 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. Some commandos were captured but my dad and two friends went 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, 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'.

Eileen Walsh, Wigan.



1944

JANUARY— British and United States forces land at Anzio, Italy
Russians enter Poland

FEBRUARY— 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 were captured and the Germans executed 50.
British Chindit operations start in Burma against the Japanese.

APRIL — First prefabricated houses are erected (prefabs) for homeless families in London. 500,000 to be built after the war.

MAY- German surrender at Monte Cassino. The monastery is practically destroyed, but the way is now open for the Allies to Rome.

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

JUNE 10th 642 men, women and children killed in Oradour-sur-Glane, France

JULY— Plot to kill Hitler by some of his generals fails.

AUGUST— Paris liberated from the Germans on the 15th.

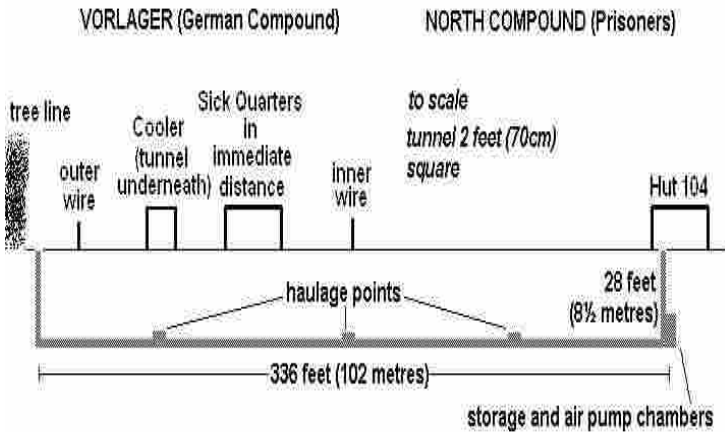
SEPTEMBER 17th –26th There was a devastating defeat for the Allies at Arnhem in Holland. The plan was to capture 8 bridges along the German Dutch border to shorten the war and march into Germany. 16,500 paratroopers and 3,500 troops in gliders were dropped into Arnhem. After defending the final bridge 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 16, to January 28, 1945, was the largest U.S. land battle of WWII. 600,000 Germans, 500,000 Americans, and 55,000 British fought. At the end of the battle 81,000 U.S. troops were injured, 19,000 killed, 1400 British troops injured, 200 killed. 100,000 Germans killed, injured or captured.

1944

Battle for Monte Cassino

Diagram of HARRY tunnel used for GREAT ESCAPE



Prefab



Americans enter Rome



Arnhem, Holland



Battle of the Bulge

D DAY—6th JUNE 1944



Lancaster Bomber gets ready for D Day



Pegasus Bridge shortly after the D-Day Landings. Notice the gliders in the background.



Commandos at D Day



British troops on Sword Beach

LES ROGERS

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 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 us all 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 Age 83 yrs

Les in BETA



Les in 2004
Canada



Les came to visit BETA a number of times and we became very fond of him. Sadly Les died a few weeks after the BETA “Peace Party”. We will all miss him.



Les at the BETA
Peace Party



Les with BETA students

Memories of D Day

My Uncle Jack was a pilot/navigator in the RAF and flew over France on D. Day in a Lancaster bomber as part of the Allied Invasion.

The plane was shot down near Paris and the crew had to bale out. Unfortunately the rear gunner was killed, but the other 6 crew members survived.

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.

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.

Eileen Bithell, Wigan



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 rejoined the regiment in July.

William P. Johnson, Wigan

Memories of D Day and 1944

My dad was in No. 3 Commando and for the D Day invasion they joined The First Special Service Brigade. They landed on Sword Beach under heavy fire, but managed to get to Benouville Bridge (now called Pegasus) to join the 6th Airborne. My dad said the lady who owned Gondre Café at the bridge gave drinks to everyone and took in the wounded.

One spectacular success for No. 3 Commando was on the 19th August when they 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



I visited the French town of Oradour-sur-Glane where on the 10th June 1944, the Germans rounded up all the people, 642 men, women and children, shot them all, then set fire to the town.



The remains have been left as a memorial.

Pat J.

Oradour-sur-Glane today

Arnhem

On the 4th September, 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

Memories of 1944

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.

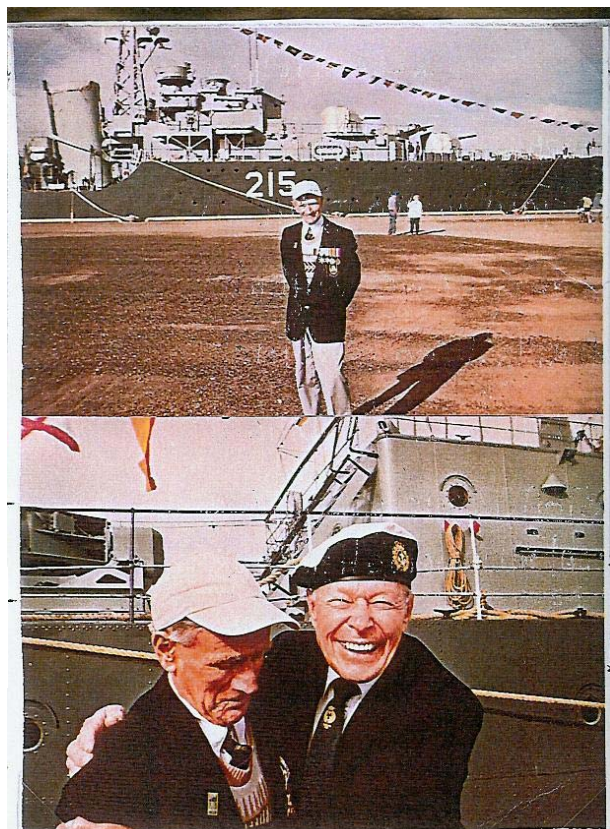
We were saved and Ralph Frayne, a Canadian seaman, pulled me out of the water. On board we were given dry clothes and a dressing gown, in the pocket of which was a note with the name of the person who had made the gown. I later wrote to the lady and thanked her.

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 R.ogers, Wigan

Les in Canada with HMCS Haida

Les with Ralph Frayne
Canada 2004



Memories of The Liberation of Paris

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



Combrai 2 Septembre 44
jour de notre libération
Vive l'Angleterre
Vive la France
Paul

This is a photograph of me
and my dad taken in 1945



Barbara Davis, Wigan

1945

26th JANUARY—Russian soldiers liberate Auschwitz Concentration camp
Poland liberated from the Germans

4th FEBRUARY— Conference at Yalta with Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin

13th FEBRUARY— Heavy bombing of Dresden, Germany by the RAF

12th APRIL - United States President Roosevelt dies. Truman new U.S. President.

13th APRIL— British troops liberate Belsen Concentration Camp

30th APRIL—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

2nd MAY—Russian Army enters Berlin
Germany surrenders

8th MAY—**VICTORY IN EUROPE DAY**

26th JUNE—The United Nations founded

JULY—The Labour Party wins the British General Election, Attlee is now Prime Minister instead of Churchill (Conservative Party)

AUGUST—The United States drops atom bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan.

14th AUGUST—**Japan surrenders**

15th AUGUST—**VICTORY IN JAPAN DAY**

24th OCTOBER—United Nations Organisation came into being

20th NOVEMBER—**War Crimes Trials begin in Nuremberg**

1945



Yalta conference



Dresden bombed by RAF



Roosevelt dies

British troops liberate Belsen



Hitler commits suicide



Mussolini executed by the Italians



Japanese kamikaze pilots attack US ships in the Pacific



Russians enter Berlin



Germans sign the surrender



Atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki



Labour wins the British General Election



Japanese sign the surrender

Memories of 1945

Auschwitz

200,000 Jews, 140,000 Poles, 20,000 Gypsies and 10,000 Russian prisoners of war died in Auschwitz due to executions, inhuman living conditions and torture.

I had a client who had been at Auschwitz. He was 6'4", but when he was liberated, in 1945 he weighed 6 stone.

Ted



Survivors in Bergen-Belsen walking near a large pile of shoes taken from those who died

In 1945 we were sent into Germany where we reached the most forward position from Hamburg. Our orders were not to vandalise the German transmitting stations. At least 100 Germans were there, trying to get home as the war had ended and I was put in charge of one of these stations.

The Regiment was sent to Lever until we were demobbed.

William P. Johnson from Wigan, now aged 90 years

My dad's brother, Uncle Jack, was sent to Burma at the beginning of the war. The British Army in the Far East was called the "Forgotten Army" as they didn't come home until the end of the war September 1945.

Many British soldiers were captured by the Japanese, sent to prison camps, and were treated as slaves. Uncle Jack was never captured, but like almost everyone else he caught malaria.

When Uncle Jack came home his hair was white and he was only 24 years old.

Pat .

The War Ends

We celebrated VE 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



V.E. Day Party, Ince 8th May



V.J. Day Party, Ince 15th August

The War Ends

When I was born in 1943, the Second World War was still going on and my father 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. *Colin Gaskell, Billinge, aged 62 years*



Stan Gaskell

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 confirmed into the Church of England some of his Japanese captors. In 1948 Len Wilson became Dean of Manchester Cathedral until 1953. *Manchester Cathedral*

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 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*

PEACE BROUGHT THE NATION “THE WELFARE STATE” AND WITH IT “THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE”.

BETA Memories of the WWII Research Trips



This is me at Eden Camp outside an air-raid shelter. Liverpool was very heavily bombed in the war they called it "Blitz". Thousands of Liverpool people died. One bomb landed on a public air-raid shelter in Liverpool and killed 65 people aged from 6 months to 50 years. *Phillip Rogers*

We went to the Jewish Synagogue in Manchester. We found out about what happened to the Jews in WWII. Hitler and the Nazis hated Jews and put them all in Concentration camps, including children. They killed them all by gassing. This is me studying in BETA about Auschwitz a concentration camp that killed many Jews as well as other people. *Alison Ratcliffe*



At Eden Camp we saw a landing craft that was used at D Day. D. Day was the 6th June 1944 when the Allied soldiers landed in France to fight the Germans. (I am second on the left in this photo of the landing craft.) *Trevor Knight.*

We went to the Maritime Museum and found out about WWII at sea. We saw a gun that was used on a Merchant ship to fire at U boats. The U boats were sinking the ships that were bringing food to Britain. *Ann Blay (I am third from right in the photo)*



We found out about WWII. In 1938 Neville Chamberlain our Prime Minister, signed a Peace Treaty with Hitler. Hitler broke his promise and we went to war in 1939. *Christine Hilton.*

BETA visited The Imperial War Museum and this is me standing by a tank. This reminded me of all the battles in World War II. *Chris Boylan*



BETA went to Eden Camp and this is me standing by a Spitfire. I thought about the RAF who fought in the Battle of Britain and won against the Germans. *Dawn Turnbull*

WORLD WAR II

In the six years of World War II:

15 million soldiers were killed
20 million Russian civilians were killed
6 million Jews were killed
4 million Poles were killed

403,000 British Military were killed
92,700 British Civilians were killed

100 million people were in the military



Lest we forget

This has been a BETA project
Supported by Home Front Recall
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