

Those next Summer holidays were earth shaking. The Blitz on London had started. We spent many a night in the cellar. The weather was perfect but before we could cut the lawn we searched for shrapnel from the anti-aircraft battery on the Heath. We saw the smoke from the fires at the docks and the light from the flames at night. My father had to replace our windows glass for the first time. A land mine (see note had exploded in the pond opposite.

Back at school that September it was different. The L.D.V. (Local Defence Force, soon to be the Home guard) had been formed. We seniors made up a bicycle platoon and took turns to patrol the fields for parachutists.

Somehow it wasn't such a game any more. Many of the staff joined up. Older men took over and women too. Our Lee Enfield rifles went back to the army and we were issued with the Canadian Ross instead.

A strange new weapon arrived – the Northover Projector and Molotov Cocktails.

Food rationing started. We had little butter but plenty of margarine. We boys organised our own athletics that Easter term but we were still expected to work. I wanted to go into the Navy but didn't do well enough in my exams. The prospect of the army and sitting in England for years did not appeal one bit – we were real glory boys in those days!

The Indian Army – Gurkhas – beckoned. We had a couple of dozen old boys serving with them.

I sailed in the early summer to Bombay and Mhow, Shillong and Palanpur, Tamu and Imphal. We were still quite young.

#### NOTE:-

1. Land Mines came down on parachutes as opposed to bombs which were free fall.

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## ASCOTT MEMORIES

**I** WAS NINE when the war started with no idea what it was all about. I was on holiday in Lincolnshire at a big house with friends of my parents', who had a daughter about my own age. They were housekeeper / cook and gardener / handyman when the news came through. He dug a shelter in the lawn and wore a German helmet as the people from the house were away and it was all very exciting. Then my parent's said I must come home. I have always lived in Ascott.

We had lots of evacuees who brought a teacher with them. There were so many of them that we didn't go to school full time.

One thing that fascinated me was there was one black girl. I thought she was marvellous as I had never seen anyone black before. Quite a few soldiers were billeted here at the Pubis and bigger houses. Bill Owen from Last of the Summer Wine was billeted here, not that I knew who he was.

A tank knocked down part of our garden wall so the soldiers gave us a tin of evaporated milk, that was an occasion!

We had two land mines dropped at the bottom of the village and two or three bombs at the other end which made some ponds. It was said that the Germans just dropped them to get rid of them so they didn't have to take them back. We had soldiers guarding them for ages as the mines hadn't gone off.

When the Germans were bombing Coventry, it lit the sky up right up to Ascott.

When I was eleven I went to Shipton School. As I lived at the wrong end of the village I didn't get a school bike, so you shared one or ran along the railway lines. You had to take your gas mask everywhere so you took your lunch and anything else in the box.

Oswald Mosley was prisoner at the Shaven Crown. His guards used to bring him along Shipton Road most days for exercise, so we children used to shout horrible things to him, I can't remember what it was.

There was a canteen opposite the gas works (that was ) where all the new houses are now. Those of us who had far to go home had our school dinners with the Americans as there were a lot billeted in Shipton. They gave us chewing gum which we had never had before. They gave us a Christmas party at Shipton Court. One GI asked me if I would like some chocolate.

I said "Yes, please" – I was very disappointed when he gave me a cup of cocoa.

There were lots of air bases around here so along the sides of the main roads there were piles of bombs and we children used to run along them and have a great time. When it was D Day they were being moved and the planes and gliders were going all day long. My father worked in an aircraft factory and if any of the planes crashed he used to go away to help repair them.

One thing I remember, I had two bananas given to me, so I gave one to my sister who is seven years younger than me. She had never seen one before and I let her try to eat it with the skin on. I did tell her what to do in the end. I was always horrible to her though we're alright now. I left school at fourteen and went to Oxford to work. We had lots of trains then, always full of troops and munition workers from Cowley.

When you went out at lunch time, if you saw a queue in Woolworths, you just joined it and then found out what it was for. It was either for knicker elastic, a comb or something in short supply and you were only allowed a certain amount.

I don't remember an awful lot about V.E. Day. The bells were ringing and we had a bonfire on the village green. I think we had a party in the barn. I had my first boy friend, so we were trying to keep out of our parents' way.