

At the end of 1945 the war had ended and my particular pilot returned from the Middle East so I left the land to get married. I was presented with a certificate and a thank you letter from Queen Elizabeth (now the Queen Mother).

Most of the time, bad weather apart, I really enjoyed the experience.

Peggy McAll

Ascott under Wychwood.

A HEAD HERDSWOMAN REMEMBERS

V.E. Day 1945 came when I was pursuing my chosen career to become a Head Herdswoman. I was living in a hamlet called Cudham in West Kent and my friend and I got up extra early to milk the cows and then set off to bike the necessary eight miles to Orpington Railway Station to go to London. There we mingled with the crowds and found it quite frightening at times to have to go where the crowds went, rather than where we wanted to go.

We joined the celebrations in Trafalgar Square and queued on the steps of St. Martin-in-the-Fields for one of the continuous services. It was here that I had a strange meeting, when amongst the people coming out from the previous service was a neighbour from my own street in my home town of Canterbury.

Much later my friend and I took a train back to Orpington and biked wearily back to milk some loudly complaining cows!

Olive Tucker

MEMORIES

SEPTEMBER 1939. We were 16 going on 17 - school boys. The summer holidays were well on. We paid more attention to the newspapers, but in truth the prospects for the next rugger season were more important to us than war in Europe or anywhere else for that matter. We listened to the Prime Minister's broadcast.

Home was in South East London - Blackheath to be exact. The air raid sirens sounded. We went down into the cellar. Nothing happened and after a bit the "all clear" sounded.

The "phoney war" had started. Later that month we went back to school - Windsor - 1st XV Rugby, the Officers Training Corps - uniform - I was a Sergeant. We thought more about the next match than the war. The British Expeditionary Force in France seemed a world away - and then it was May 1940..... The fighting escalated, the casualties mounted, evacuation from Dunkirk and the other channel ports began.

Somehow rowing on the Thames seemed less important.

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.

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.