

Recollections of World War 2

Denis Johnson in conversation with his wife Margaret:

Denis was 6 when war broke out and living with his mother and sister in Wallasey.

His sister was 10 years older and born in Boston so was able to join the American army at the age of 17 which she did partly because she escaped this then rather dreary Country and became well fed, provided with nylons and smarter uniform, dashing GIs and was sent to Paris to work for the Generals in the George V Hotel.

Wallasey took some of the Luftwaffe damage from Liverpool as a decoy harbour was built there to deflect the bombing from the city so they were incessantly bombed and were hit 3 times which meant that he moved house and schools each time, but he was fascinated by the Spitfire fights overhead and would not be dragged indoors. He helped to build a steel air raid shelter the size of a double bed in one house and an Anderson shelter in another. He was finally sent to board in a prep school that had been moved from Bromley to Wales which he hated.

As an appendix to the 5 years, he used to glide and it may interest people to know that the reparations in 1946 meant that German ships and aeroplanes were kept by the British. The air force was told to destroy their gliders but those pilots who knew better either flew them back to the UK or loaded them onto ships. They were used in peacetime by the Surrey Gliding Cub that started in a farmer's field belonging to Ann Welch (who was one of the team of women who flew newly built aircraft to the required airfield during the war) and her husband. Part of the membership then started Lasham Gliding Club where some of them are in the museum on the airfield.

I was aged 3 when War broke out and living in Wakefield with my parents and my sister aged 5 and brother newly born. We were fortunate because our father owned several grocery shops and bake house and was not accepted for enlistment because he would have been responsible for accounting for the food coupons being properly used and supplying the food. He did ARP night work from the roof top of the Town Hall.

My mother knit more socks for sailors than we could count and she did voluntary work in the nearby hospital.

When I started school, we were supplied with gas masks that we slung over our shoulders but when no airplanes seemed to fly over Wakefield, we left them at home. We had bunks in our cellar but seldom needed to use them. Leeds took all the bombing because of the steel works and manufacturing of tanks etc. At Waddington's games factory in Leeds some Monopoly games sent to prisoners of war in Germany were marked with a code and hidden were maps made of silk and Deutsch Marks and other items suitable for escapees.

I remember the effects of the war lasting for another 5 years, we had no luxuries and petrol, food and clothing coupons continued which meant still scrimping and saving. There was shortage of everything, second hand clothes were the norm and compared with today's portions a very meagre diet. Anyone with a garden grew food throughout the war and preserved it for the winter which actually was very healthy for us.

Postscript by Margaret:

I also remember that all the beaches in Yorkshire where invaders could successfully land were protected by at least 2 coils of barbed wire, and these were not removed for a couple of years after War ended. I assume that was the case all-round the UK but it restricted beach holidays when eventually we could have such things.