

Recollections of WW2

by Graham Crane

I was 15 months old at the outbreak of war and spent 66 of the 68 months European duration living near Clapham Common in London SW11. In Grandison Road, about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from Clapham Junction until 1942 and then Broomwood Road about 1 mile from the Junction – a prime target – being the “busiest” station in the World at that time.

Of my five recollections, the first three are undated. Although the first is recorded on the internet the dating seems to stop in 1941. So probably, occurred in Spring/Summer 1942 when I saw a German bomber release its bombs which landed about 150 yards away. As they fell, my Father (it must have been the weekend) pushed me into our garden Anderson shelter – much to my annoyance!

The next memory around 1943 was of a visit to a Portchester bungalow (near the crematorium) with my mother to see the parents of her fiancé who had been killed in a Lee-on-Solent airfield accident in 1928. I remember that they had a pony and trap and we went to Gosport (by bus probably as I think the trap was only a 2 seater) where I had my first view of the Navy from the Gosport Ferry.

Also, probably in 1943, as conventional air raids diminished in 1944, I recall watching and hearing the AA shells exploding around a German bomber illuminated by search lights from both Clapham and I think Tooting Commons.

The first recollection I can put a date to occurred on 23rd June 1944 – my 6th birthday. It was a sunny Sunday and no birthday party was planned as the “Doodlebug” onslaught had just started. Around midday, we heard an unfamiliar aircraft noise. I rushed to open the front door and saw this jet plane over the house across the road. My Father joined me and recognised the V1. As we watched, the engine stopped and again I was grabbed and this time pushed under the stairs as we had no shelter or cellar in 134 Broomwood Road. Very soon, there was a loud crump muffled by the girl’s high school between the explosion and our house 200 yds away. Today for the first time, I googled the time and place and learned that 6 people were killed, 8 houses destroyed and 20 seriously damaged. (I am surprised that only 6 people were killed, maybe on

a sunny June weekend, many were on either Clapham or Wandsworth Commons – both less than half a mile away).

It was many years later taking my teenage son to the Science Museum and seeing a V1 (only about 5 meters wingspan) that I realised just how close it was to the house opposite.

As a result of our “near miss”, my Mother and I joined some Welsh friends who were retreating to Ebbw Vale for a couple of months until the situation improved. We stayed with delightful neighbours, Bessie, and Charlie Price in Tredegar Road. She was a primary school teacher, so I joined her class and he was a Foreman in the vast 2 mile long steelworks, so I was shown Bessemer Converters pouring molten metal and rolling steel plate!!

My final war time experience was viewing the VE Day celebrations of May 8th 1945 in Whitehall from the 3rd or 4th floor of Scotland Yard where my Father was a police officer in the Criminal Record Office. There was a sea of cheering and happy faces even though victory over Japan and the dropping of two atom bombs were still 3 months away.