

Memories of the war

By Josette Fox, nee Venet, French citizen.

I was born in October 1939. My father had already been called up and was captured at Dunkerque. I met him for the first time in 1946 when he was repatriated from Russia. He was a prisoner of war in Germany, Stalag 1B, liberated by the Russians and, I think sent back from Odessa by ship,

I cannot say that I have bad memories from that time as I was looked after with my sister by my mother and my paternal grandparents. I also was too young to understand what was happening, At the top of our road was a railway line and I remember seeing German soldiers holding guns by the doors of the carriages. One day a German soldier came to our door to warn my mother as I was still outside after curfew.

I also remember being woken up during the night, wrapped in a blanket, and been taken in a push chair to a shelter, which was a sort of cave where mushrooms were grown. There were lots of people sitting on the ground. Some neighbours had had a shelter built in their garden, but they never asked us to go in there.

My mother was a teacher, she worked all through and she managed to organise some small celebration for our birthdays, she also told me that she had to leave our house and walk further south as we lived not far from Paris and close to an important railway dépôt which was constantly bombed by the Allies

The last memory was of the Americans arriving in their tanks, I remember them laughing a lot and giving us things in particular pieces of pink soap. It turned out to be Lifebuoy. The smell of that soap came back to me when I was in hospital for the birth of our first baby.