

Memories of WW2 by Dorothy Bonner

My name is DOROTHY BONNER (nee Peacock) born September 1932, then I lived in a small hamlet – Finkley, near Andover, Hants. Smannel and Little London also formed the neighbouring villages.

Little London is where my paternal grandparents had a small farm, Mount Pleasant Farm. After grandad died the family moved to Southsea, the farm was tenanted so grandma had to move out.

Andover is where my maternal parents lived – the Queen Charlotte Inn, London Road, Andover. Grandad was the landlord and after he died grandma became the licensee.

When my dad was called up, we had to move because we lived in a tied cottage and the landlord needed the house for a farm worker. That's how we came to live with grandma in the pub.

Mount Pleasant Farm was on the outskirts of Little London, on the top of a hill, they had a searchlight battalion in one of the fields and a huge barrage balloon. On the farm Aunts and the children set special traps, and every morning we went round the traps – because if we caught any rabbits, it did spread out our meal rations. The skins also had a use, specially treated they made nice warm gloves.

Beginning of the war

As soon as the war was declared all the men in the villages “signed on”, they then came home and waited to be called up. Dad was called up and joined the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) – in the meantime he became a sergeant in the Home Guard. They did duties around the local area keeping watch and guarding us.

Dad's army training was carried out somewhere in the Lake District and he lodged with a lady called Mrs Burton.

When this training was finished, they set sail for Singapore. Off the Cape the ship broke down and couldn't be properly repaired, so they limped up the East coast of Africa. He then joined the North African Campaign for the rest of the war. THANK GOODNESS, because Singapore fell to the Japanese. After the campaign in North Africa came to an end he went on to Italy – he never spoke about this part of the war.

Battle of Britain

Dad and I watched the dogfights standing on our air raid shelter in the garden. Around Andover at this time there were numerous Army camps and airfields, so I suppose it was a prime site to be targeted.

We also stood on the shelter and could see the red sky when Portsmouth and Southampton were bombed and burned.

We didn't have any bombing near us, just the occasional bomb drop if they had any left on their way home. I remember one plane being brought down, but it was so heavily guarded that no one could get near it.

Rationing and Food

We had special "RATION BOOKS" with some items having to be registered with particular shops in town.

Even sweets were rationed, actually until the 1950's.

Our books had PK marked on them, because Grandma kept chickens, this mark also enabled her to get special food for the hens. She also kept some young pigs in the stables. When it was time to kill them, this was done on the farm. Half the pig was ours to salt down. The other half went to the Ministry of Food.

When eggs were plentiful, they had a large pan in the larder and that was filled with isinglass – eggs from the chickens were placed in the middle and used in the winter. They could be cooked with but not boiled.

Also attached to the house was a large walled garden in which all the fruit and veg grew. No shortage of fruit and veg, but I don't remember any salad items being grown. But it wasn't an everyday requirement those days.

If we went to visit our relatives for a week, we had to go to the M of F office in the town and collect a coupon sheet for the basic foods we needed while we were away.

All of the windows had to be taped, this I believe was in case they broke they wouldn't shatter and cause injuries.

If we moved around outside after dark the torch we used had to have a shield to point the light beam down.

Cars also had shielded lights for the same reason.

School

This I think was the start of school dinners, at least in senior school. It also helped with the rations at home.

Shoes had to have coupons to be purchased and in senior school if you were size 5, I think and above, we had to have extra because they were classed as adult and therefore used more coupons.

We all had one third of a pint of milk a day at school. The crate with the milk was aired by the stove in the classroom. Can you imagine warmed milk at lunchtime, but we loved it.

The gas masks in their boxes had to be carried everywhere. Now if the siren sounded, we had to collect our gas masks and run over the playing fields to the air raid shelters. I don't remember doing this at all, I suppose most of the raids started at night.

D Day

There had been a buildup of British troops and American troops in the area and the day before D-Day the pub was full to overflowing. Lots of jollity and singing – the next day they were all gone - it was like magic. We never saw them again.

At school on D-Day we all went to school assembly, Miss Althouse, our headmistress announced what had taken place and we must pray for everyone's safety especially for the husbands of two of our teachers. The teachers were both in tears on the stage, because the husbands went across to France on that day.,

I remember standing in the Guildhall, Portsmouth, but not whether it was VE or VJ Day. You can imagine thousands filled the Guildhall Square.

Now its getting everything back to "normal" after peace was announced, and the men and women were coming home.