

My memories of World War 11

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I attended Olders Charity School in Angmering when I was 5 years old and almost six months later, in September 1939, World War II started. We had no school uniform in those days and I walked to school taking my packed lunch. Later I also had to carry my gas mask with me to school. This was a mask which covered my face should the Germans ever try to drop bombs containing gas. There was a shortage of food and we had ration books so that everyone had their fair share. When our mothers bought tea, for example, tea coupons were cut out from the tea page of the ration book. It was the same with clothes but my Mum was clever and made dresses and coats for my sister Eileen and I from old clothes which other people had given her. She even made my sister and I a dress each out of a parachute which had previously saved an airman's life. My Dad grew a lot of vegetables in the garden which helped to feed us. Even at school we did not have drawing paper on which to paint pictures – we were given pieces of old wall paper instead. My Mum made dolls and their dresses from odd pieces of material for my sister and I to play with. We could not go on the beach – there were large poles and concrete blocks to prevent the Germans landing in our country. We were not allowed to show any light from our windows at night for fear the German planes would see where our houses were and drop their bombs on us. My Dad was in the Home Guard – rather like a small army to help fight the Germans should they manage to land here. Many times he was on night duty.

I remember hearing the drone of our British planes flying overhead at night on their way to drop bombs on Germany, and I used to wonder how many of them would return home safely. My Dad was very worried regarding the possibility of the German Army landing on our beaches and he told my Mum, sister and I to hide in our cupboard under the stairs if the Germans ever came near. Dad took the lock off the cupboard door so that they could not lock us inside. Thankfully the Germans never reached our shore thanks to the bravery of our Army, Navy and Air force.

At meal times Eileen and I were told to keep quiet whilst our parents listened to the news on the radio which, of course, was all about the war and how the

Germans had taken over Holland, Belgium and France. It was all very worrying. When German planes were near us the sirens sounded to warn us and when it was safe again the sirens would sound then we could go outside and play. I remember being in our garden one sunny afternoon when I could see German planes dropping bombs on the radar pylons at Poling, about three miles away. My Mum rushed out into the garden and brought me indoors. I also remember a plane crashing in the woods near us (I think it was a German plane) and a bomb dropped by Dappers Lane a short distance away. I also saw a doodle-bug – a rocket sent flying from Germany which eventually crashed locally when its engine cut out.

Whilst bombs were dropping on London, many children from the capital were moved to country villages where it was less dangerous. A girl called Jean Mann came to live in Angmering and came to my school. She was happy living with her new family but her parents, who were still living in London, must have missed her so much. Children such as Jean were known as “evacuees”.

During the war our Uncle Bill was going to marry his lady friend from London. Eileen and I were very excited as we had never been to London before. Twice the wedding was arranged and twice had to be cancelled because of bombs dropping near the bride’s home, blowing out the windows. Eventually Uncle Bill and Auntie Rene were married in Sutton, Sussex, and Eileen and I were very disappointed.

In June 1945 World War II thankfully ended and in September I started school in Chichester. The school grounds were littered with lumps of concrete and other obstacles to stop the German planes from landing on the school playing field and I remember helping to clear the fields so that we could play hockey! In September 1950 I started a course at Portsmouth Municipal College and it was so sad to see all the houses and shops which had been destroyed by German bombs during the war. Let us hope you all have a peaceful future.

(Memories from Margaret Thair of Hammerpot, near Angmering, West Sussex)
