

MEMORIES OF THE 2ND WORLD WAR

I was aged five when WW2 began, and was living with my parents, and an older brother and sister, in Bournemouth. That may not sound significant, but Bournemouth is situated on the south coast with Portsmouth on one side and Southampton on the other - both towns of military significance. Bournemouth's problem was that when German bombers had been on a raid over England, they would drop any bombs they still had left on towns on the south coast, before crossing the channel back to Germany.

My father was away most of the war. He was too old to fight, but worked on munitions. All men and women of whatever age had to do war-work, but women with small children were excused. My mother ran a ten-bedroom boarding house not far from Bournemouth railway station. She took B&B guests in the summer, but also had residents, mostly elderly women, who lived there. Throughout the war we suffered frequent all-night air-raids, and also sometimes there were raids during the daytime. On one occasion I was playing in the garden when British and German planes began fighting overhead, and my mother rushed out to bring me indoors. On another occasion, I had a friend in the house who had come to play with me, when a fight began overhead. My mother shut my friend and me in a cupboard until it was over.

The night raids were the worst. Sometimes the siren would go about 10pm, and the all-clear might not sound until early in the morning. The residents and my family would congregate in our large living room, and we seemed to spend the night drinking tea. On one occasion a boy who was walking past the house in the evening during a raid knocked on the front door asking for shelter. He came in and sat with us, and I remember feeling most indignant that when he was offered a plate of biscuits he took the plate and began eating them all!

Our house was never hit by bombs, although many houses around us were destroyed. Outside our main living room windows we had a 'blast wall' built so that the windows would not be shattered by blast from the bombs. On one occasion the back door was blown in, but that was all.

Bournemouth was a Garrison town, where many troops were billeted. Sometimes they used to march along the road where we lived, and their sergeant would stop them in the road while they performed drill.

My father was quite fearless, and when raids were on he would lie on the lawn watching the British and German planes fighting overhead. On one occasion he rushed back into the house, shouting 'Look out! There's one coming down.' Everyone thought he meant a bomb. My mother and I lay down and someone threw a rug over us - what protection that would have been I can't imagine! But my father was disappointed, because what he'd actually said was, "Come out and look, there's a plane coming down". He wanted us to see the German plane which had been shot down by one of ours.

When the war ended, we all went down to the centre of Bournemouth. It was packed with cheering people, embracing, crying - you couldn't move for excited people. The coloured lights on the front were lit for the first time in five years.