

WORLD WAR II

They were rather different conditions at the outbreak of this war. We had the radio. Hitler had invaded Poland so war was inevitable. A message was given that the Prime Minister would make an important announcement at 11 am on Sunday, September 3, 1939, to say that a state of war existed between Britain and Germany. One of the first acts of war was the sinking of the liner Athenia. Then it was a rush to get the army to France to help the French army. Reservists were called up and every man had to register at the Labour Exchange. Everyone had identity cards and strict blackout was ordered, rationing of food and clothes.

When the army had to evacuate France in 1940 there was a period of wait and see what Hitler intended doing. Invasion was a possibility and so the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) was formed. One was said LDV was for Look, Duck and Vanish. No doubt that's what we should have done if paratroops had landed, as they were expected to do.

Evacuees came to our village of Clifton. We had a boy of seven from Tooting, London. He didn't mind being on his own. He loved the country and the farm. He called me Mr Farmer. He stayed till after the air raids had ceased. When things had quietened down he, like many others, went home but came back when the doodlebugs started and stayed till the end of the war. He said we had a big influence on his life. We have kept in contact with him ever since. He and his wife visit us most years.

I joined the LDV, later the Home Guard. Our first job was to keep observation on the countryside. We went out before dawn around 1.30 am to a vantage point and kept watch until 6.30 am. Then home to be ready for work at 7 am. We did this for the period invasion was threatened. We worked long hours so didn't need rocking to sleep. The only weapons we had at that time was one Lee Enfield rifle, two shotguns, one pair of binoculars and our knowledge of the countryside. Most of us were farm workers.

Gradually we had a lot more equipment, uniforms, rifles, stengens. Our Commander was Major Morris, our sergeant Boyce Paginton, and Corporal Vincent. I had one pip. We had exercises every Sunday. Some were half days but many lasted all day. Usually we had one or two lectures during the week at night and one night each week four of us were on guard at our headquarters in the Town Hall, Deddington. Two exercises I well remember. One was when our Clifton platoon was detailed to capture our headquarters from the Deddington platoon at night. It was a sharp frosty, clear, quiet night. We decided to keep off the road in case of ambush. We made a detour in the fields approaching the village from the north, crossing the side road, Earls Lane, into the churchyard, then over a high wall, dropping into the garden of Castle House. Very quietly, we thought, until I jumped into the garden and landed in a garden frame, shattering the silence enough to wake the dead, so all our stealth was wasted and we didn't gain our objective.

The other exercise was on Sunday. Three of us NCOs went to Hinksey near Oxford to referee an exercise between Hinksey HG and an American unit to stop the Americans from entering Oxford. Nothing happened for some hours. Everyone was expecting a sudden attack. Then news came the Americans were entering Oxford. They had passed under our feet along the sewers, so that was another battle we lost. We all had a drink together. It amused the Americans. We had plenty of rifle practice and some practice with live hand grenades, gas drills, unarmed combat from a regular army instructor. We all worked together and we could have put up a good show. We did $4\frac{1}{2}$ years service. We did our best.

Lord Woolton was Food Minister. He did a good job. Farm workers and others received extra rations. We had one advantage, having fruit and vegetables. It was BST, one hour forward in the winter and two hours in the summer, enabling work to be done very late in the evenings. Rationing ended in 1954. Our generation having been through two wars. It was a great relief to see the end and the troops after six years. Our evacuee, his name was Kenneth Hunt, would like to have stayed with us. He became a London fireman.

Then came 1947, the coldest winter of the century. On two nights in February there was 36 degrees of frost. The frost continued till the end of March. We were not able to plough until April. Having only one plough we did the ploughing in shifts. I ploughed from 5 am to 1 pm, Harold Whitlock from 1pm till 9pm. My job during the frost was to try and keep the ice from the laying hens' drinking water. The troughs were frozen solid each morning. I had white fingers some days which took a lot of thawing out. It was a treat to have the warm weather.