

## **War Memories of a Partridge Green School Boy**

By Charles Shephard

The notice telling of the talk in Partridge Green Village Hall about the experiences of a Henfield boy during the Second World War made me look in my diary. The evening was free so I made a note of it and went. There were members and non-members present, proved by the difference in the entrance fee!

The meeting began and we settled to listen to the talk. I also had been a schoolboy during the war. I was born and spent my Primary School life in South Staffordshire, known, because of the heavy industrial smoke, as the Black Country. Throughout the evening I was able to compare and contrast, as I had been taught to do in King Edward VI Grammar School, then in Stourbridge in the county of Worcestershire, though in 1974 the Government changes put them into West Midlands. No talk can possibly include every aspect of the subject but I enjoyed the whole evening.

Young men and not so young men were 'called up' to join the forces. Women joined the 'Land Army' to work on farms. He remembered seeing British and German aircraft and sometimes saw what were called dog fights overhead. No buildings were allowed to show any outside light during the war so windows had to be fitted with Blackout.

Frequent daylight raids took place in South-east England. The coastal towns and ports were hit. London suffered night after night of air raids. Rationing of many foods and clothing coupons made life difficult. Summertime had been brought in during the First World War and in the Second World War Double Summer Time was brought in so that in high summer evenings were light almost till midnight. That enabled farmers and gardeners to go on working till very late, helping to produce food 'to help the war effort'. There were many crises and defeats which is why the Victory at El Alamein was celebrated so thankfully.

In the area where I lived then there were few daylight air raids but night time raids were common because the enemy aircraft were trying to bomb the heavy industry. My brothers and I slept in the air raid shelter (Anderson Shelter) in the back garden. One night our Mother woke us up so that we could go out to see the sky alight. It was a thrilling and terrifying sight. Soon we heard that there had been a devastating air raid on Coventry, several miles away. German broadcasts in English to England coined the word 'Coventrated' to describe the destruction of the centre of the city. Some people listened to German broadcasts to this country. There had been English report that 'There was a raid last night and bombs were dropped at random'. Soon there was a German report that 'Random had been completely destroyed'!

After the war we were able to go by bus, a long journey, to see the devastation of the city. The Cathedral, except for the tower, had lost its roof and all the glass from the windows. After the war it was an inspired design for the new cathedral which left the ruin in position and a completely new Cathedral was built. It was a tribute to the feeling of new hope that there were gifts made from Germany to the new Cathedral.

During the war a Prisoner of War Camp was built near the home of my Aunt and Uncle, close to where we lived. After a time Germans replaced the Italians. They remained there after the war and before being repatriated they were allowed to work in local firms. By that time I was learning German, having been learning French and Latin for three years.

The man who was working with my Father and Uncle was very intelligent and spoke excellent English, better than some of the Native Englishmen! The men were able to discuss many ideas together. Someone asked him if he had been a member of the Nazi Party. Yes was the answer. But did you agree with their policies? No. Why were you a member? His reply was revealing. Are you members of a Trades Union? Yes. Would you have a job if you were not? No. That was our reason for joining the Party.

From time to time my parents invited him for a meal. I learned more German from him as we talked and we all learned a great deal about life.

I have wandered away from a description of the talk but the talk was the stimulus!

**West Grinstead Newsletter Autumn 2006**