

keep!

LIMPLEY STOKE IN WORLD WAR II

**AN EXHIBITION TO MARK
THE 50th ANNIVERSARY
OF V-E DAY, 8th MAY, 1945**

"We will remember them"

This book is dedicated to the
memory of Corporal John Pike,
the only resident of Limpley
Stoke to be killed in action
in World War II

VICTORY IN EUROPE

A REMEMBRANCE AND CELEBRATION OF VE-DAY, 8th MAY, 1945

Whilst we celebrate the Allied victory in 1945 we should also remember that it was not won without sacrifices. This exhibition presents a brief history of the war in Europe and some details of the difficulties faced by the civilian population.

As might be imagined, Limpley Stoke was not subject to much enemy action. However, the war on The Home Front would have been the same here as elsewhere.

In this exhibition we have recollections from people who were here at the time or serving in the forces and now live here. We are very grateful for their contributions.

Not all aspects of the war can be considered but that does not mean that they can be forgotten. The fact that we are able to present this exhibition at all is a testament to the many sacrifices that were made.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Limpley Stoke Fete Committee gratefully acknowledges the support that it has received from the community. For this exhibition we have been greatly assisted by the recollections, memorabilia, information and help from the following:

John Allen	Violet Duck
Jo Bloss	Ethel Griffin
Rose Booty	Derrick Hunt
Madeleine Brown	Sid Huntley
Yvonne Carson	Anne Jarrett
Peter Challen	Sir Bernard Lovell
Wylda Chesterman	Marjorie Paddy
Audrey Davies	Tony Turnbull
Bob Davies	Dr George Wimbolt
Susan Driver	

REFERENCES

The following books were the principal sources of reference for the information in this book. Every attempt has been made to ensure accuracy so any errors are regretted and are attributable to the author of this book.

"The Second World War (Abridged Edition)" by Winston S. Churchill, Cassell

"Iron Division" by Robin McNish, Ian Allen

"The Silver Phantom" by Her Company, Frederick Muller

"The Baedeker Blitz" by Niall Rothnie, Ian Allen

"Through The Looking Glass - A History of Dress", BBC Publications

"The Bath Blitz" by Martin Wainwright, available from Bath & Wiltshire Evening Chronicle

"Life Is A Four-Letter Word, Book 2" by Nicholas Monsarrat, Pan Books

LIMPLEY STOKE

BEFORE THE WAR

Sid Huntley: I was born in 1910 and lived in Limpley Stoke until I retired in 1977.

The village had a number of local shops, services and sources of employment: school (now the village hall), garage, post office, hotel, 2 pubs, grocery shop (with off-licence), sweet shop, newsagent, cobbler, railway station, sawmill and rubber mill. Also there was a Reading & Billiard Room (opposite the school), Band of Hope at the Baptist Chapel, Bible Classes at Ensleigh (now Berkeley House), and a manual telephone exchange at the post office. There was a very successful football team which one year won the Bath & District League.

When I left school, aged 14, I started work at the Limpley Stoke Hotel looking after the electric system. It was powered by a Crossley Gas Engine driving a 100 volt dynamo charged a battery of 50 cells of 2 volt each. The engine only required attention every 2 hours to oil it and was a source of curiosity to visitors to the hotel. When I showed them the engine they would often ask if there was anything else of interest to see in the village.

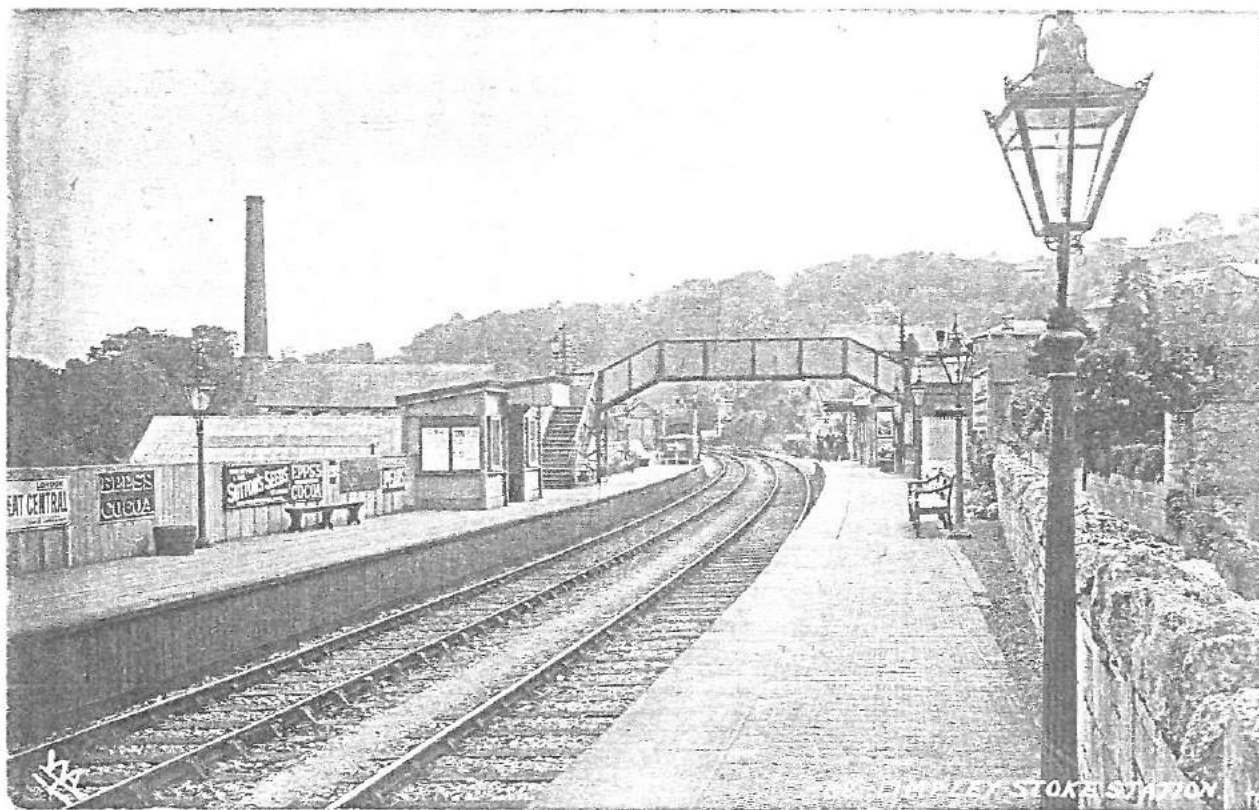
One of the attractions I mentioned was the abandoned stone mine so I would take visitors there in the evenings between "oil-ups". There was not much to see but in one of the tunnels there were faults, cracks and small caves with stalactites and stalagmites. In one place the roof had subsided and jammed about 3 feet above the floor. The lads from the village had put large stones on each side to make it safe and you had to bend double to get through. The visitors seemed to find this very exciting!

Two years after I started work the "Electric Grid" arrived and I was out of work. However I had become very interested in radio and the electricity company gave me a 230 volt AC motor and a 32 volt dynamo as compensation for losing my job. I started a small business recharging batteries and making radio sets and in the war started a small machine shop. This remained my main business until I retired.

At one time I was living by the railway and when I was working in my garden heard a terrific noise. A goods train was passing and three trucks at the end of the train had become de-railed. The guard's van was still on the rails but swaying about very alarmingly. It hit a leg of a tall signal post at the side of the rails which detached the guard's van from the train. The signal collapsed but the van righted itself and rolled gently to a stop. This probably saved the guard's life but the trucks were dragged along and badly damaged the station. From my grandstand position it was like watching a film!

Miss Violet Duck: I was born in 1907 and moved to Upland Farm with my parents and brother Arthur on October 10, 1925. We started a milk delivery round with a pony and trap. I was aged 18 and Arthur was 17 and at that time there was only a track in Midford Lane. The road was laid in 1926 when there were only 9 houses there. Today there are 62.

The milk round has remained in our family until today, through four generations. Arthur took over from our parents, then his son Terence and today my great-nephew, Alan, helps his father deliver the milk.



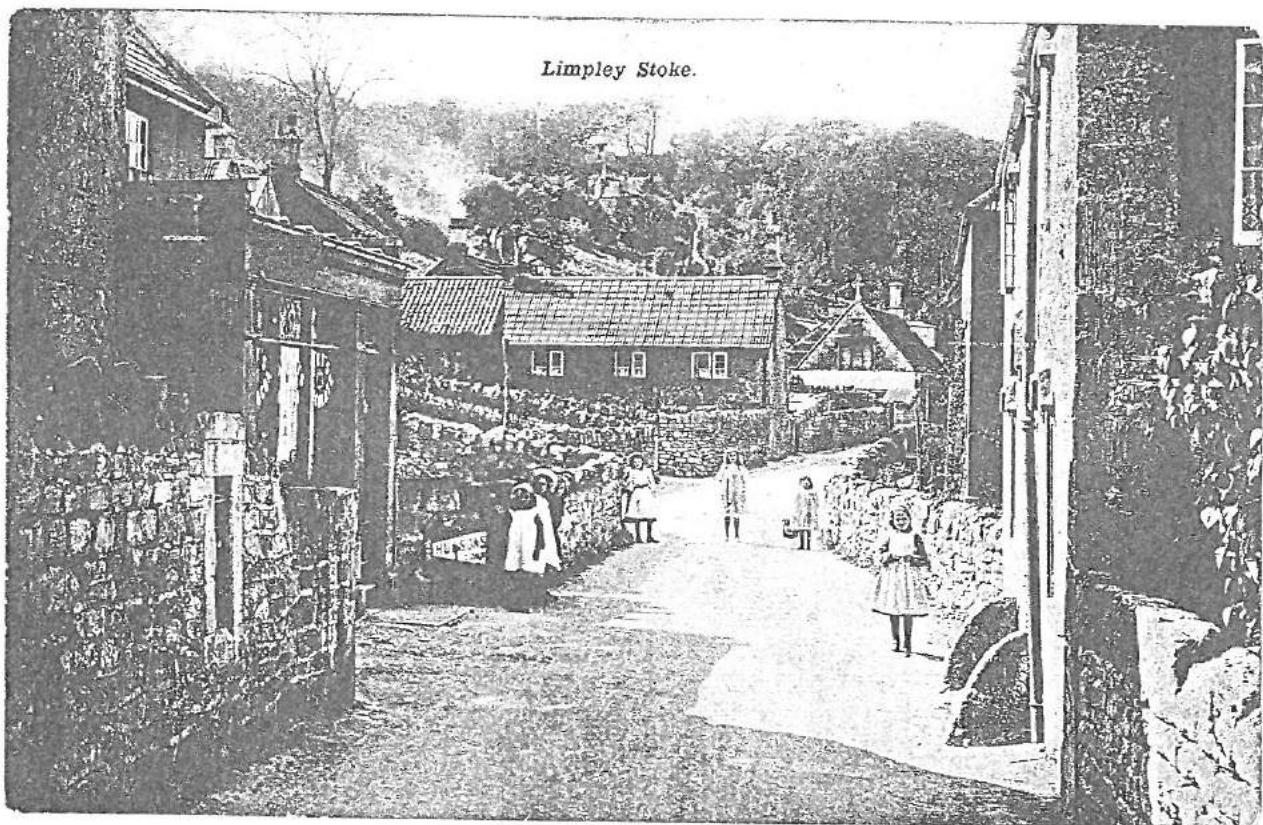
Limpley Stoke Station - view looking south.
Note the chimney on the mill.



Middle Stoke - view looking south
past Wilkin's Store.



Middle Stoke - view looking north
past the Baptist Chapel and School



Middle Stoke - view looking north
past Wilkin's Store

1919 - 1939

PROLOGUE - AN UNCERTAIN PEACE

1919	Treaty of Versailles which resulted in harsh reparations, re-drawing of European boundaries and loss of colonies
1923	Hyperinflation in Germany Munich Putsch - Nazis try to seize power in Bavaria
1924 - 1933	Nazi Party gradually acquires an increasing number of seats in Reichstag and wins the public relations battle against a disorganised opposition
1930	January 30 - Hitler appointed Chancellor
1933	February 27 - Reichstag fire March 24 - New Reichstag gave Hitler emergency powers
1935	November - First Hurricane flies
1936	March - First Spitfire flies March 7 - Germany occupies the Rhineland

ORIGINS OF THE WAR

There are four underlying reasons that led to the war in Europe

1 Reparations

The Treaty of Versailles included terms requiring Germany to pay enormous financial reparations to the allied countries: Britain, France, Italy and USA. In order for the payments to be made it was necessary for Germany to receive international loans to rebuild her industry and commerce. Without these loans the reparations could not be financed.

The immediate consequence was the hyperinflation of 1923. At its peak the exchange rate was 43 million million marks to the pound.

The Allies (principally the USA) continued to provide loans and demand reparation payments until 1933. By that time deep bitterness and resentment had set in as the German people could see no end to the situation - not helped by the Stock Market crashes of 1929 and 1931.

2 Political Vacuum

At the end of World War 1 Germany was in a state of complete internal collapse. The success of the Bolsheviks in establishing a Communist state in Russia had led to an upsurge of communist activity in Germany. Hitler was in hospital during the winter of 1918 - 19, temporarily blinded by mustard gas. He had developed a fervent loyalty to the concept of Germany and the German people. As he recuperated he developed his appalling ideas regarding the supposed roles played by the Jews and Communists in the defeat of Germany.

In 1921 he formed the National Socialist Party and embarked on a carefully planned programme to seize power. By legal elections, bullying and propaganda the Nazis gradually acquired enough seats in the Reichstag so that he was appointed Chancellor in Jan 1933.



EUROPE 1921

1919 - 1939

3 Rearmament

The Treaty of Versailles had called for Germany to be disarmed and not to move any forces within 50 km of the Rhine. By the time the Nazis had gained power in 1933 considerable progress had been made by the German armed forces to re-equip. The fact of this rearmament was known by the Allies but successive attempts to get action to stop it failed due to vacillation by the League of Nations and failure by the British and French Government to oppose it by re-arming themselves.

In 1933 Germany stated to build the battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* and was allowed to start building U-Boats.

By 1935 Germany had a stronger Air Force than Britain and had started construction of the *Tirpitz* and *Bismarck*

In March 1935 Germany started compulsory 2 year military service at age 18 which meant that by August 1936 the Army was 1.5 million (France 400000).

The failure of the British and French Governments to act decisively in 1930 - 33 to stop German rearmament and expansion meant that war was inevitable

4 Territorial Demands

Once the Nazis had control in Germany they then wanted to increase their territory beginning with Austria (a policy that became known as "Lebensraum"). Attempts to persuade Austria to unite with Germany failed even though the Nazis assassinated President Dolfuss.

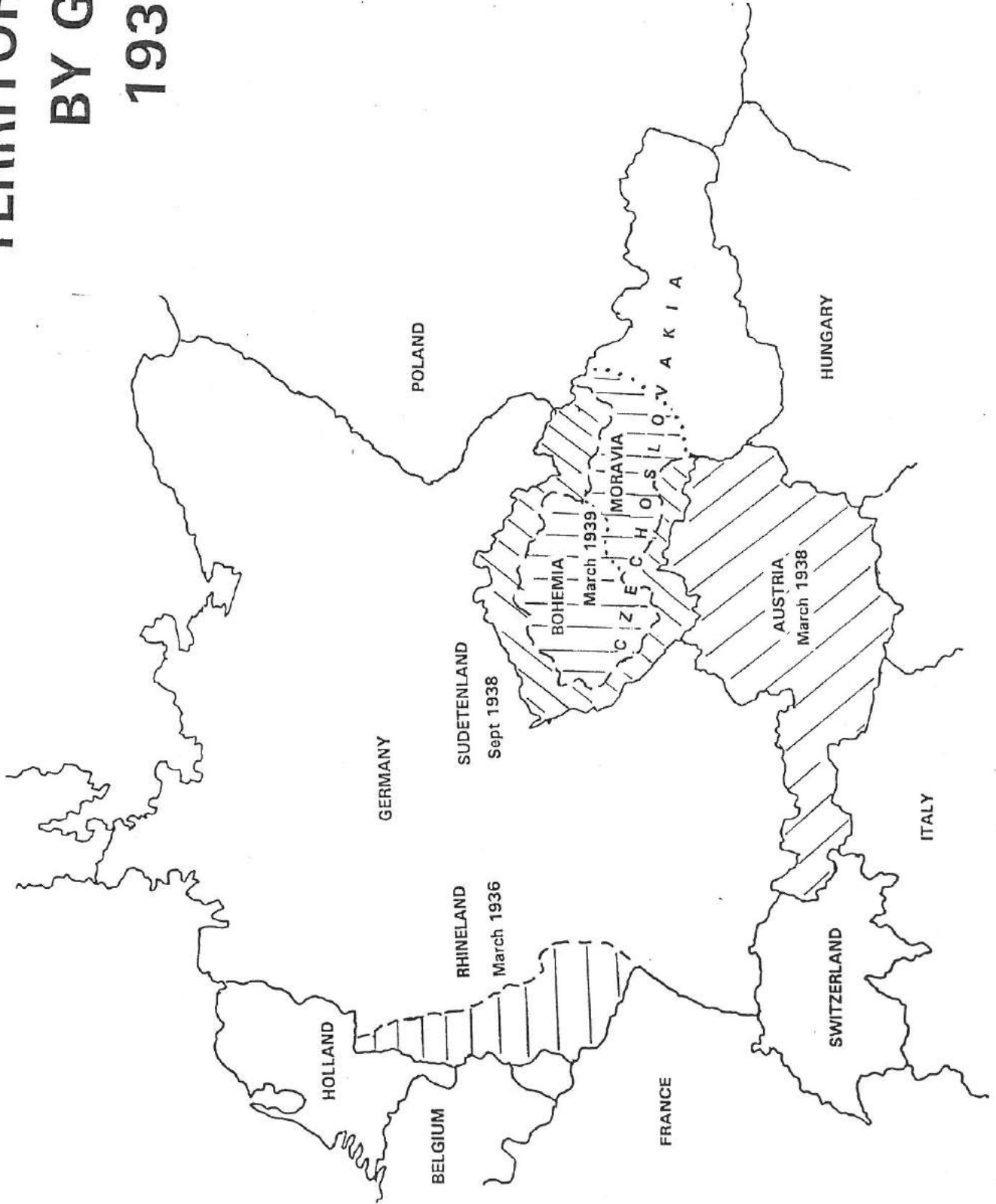
March 7, 1936 - Germany re-occupies the Rhineland and started to continuously reiterate its excuse that more space was needed for her increasing population. In 1937 Germany declared a desire to incorporate territory in eastern Europe - Poland, Danzig, Ukraine and White Russia. Secretly they were planning to annex Austria and Czechoslovakia.

March 1938 - Germany invades Austria after Nazi sympathisers and agents had infiltrated and weakened the government.

Now, with Czechoslovakia sandwiched between Germany and Austria, Hitler pressed for the Sudetenland to be annexed. The meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain (which resulted in the "Peace in Our Time" declaration in September 1938) led to Britain, France and Italy agreeing to a German carve-up of Czechoslovakia.

Hitler duly invaded the Sudetenland and then in April 1939 invaded Bohemia and Moravia and declared a Protectorate over the whole of Czechoslovakia. The pressure was now on Poland because Hitler was convinced that Britain and France would not attack across the Rhine. At this point Britain gave assurances to Poland that we would come to her aid if she was attacked.

TERRITORIAL SEIZURES BY GERMANY 1936 - 1939



1919 - 1939

Most of Hitler's territorial gains were made against the advice of his military staff who were always expecting a military response from Britain and France. He gambled that there would be protests but no action and this contributed to his belief that his knowledge of tactics was superior to that of his generals. Fortunately for the allies he was wrong and this was to be a significant contribution to his eventual defeat.

It has often been said that the Munich agreement had bought time for Britain and France to prepare for war. In fact little preparation was undertaken and we were hopelessly outnumbered and ill-equipped in September 1939. Neville Chamberlain had a personal conviction that he knew how to deal with the dictators, Hitler in particular.

He was proved wrong by events, and felt particularly betrayed by the Germans when they invaded Bohemia and Moravia having said that all their territorial demands had been met by the decisions taken at the Munich conference. Too late he realised that he had been tricked and that Britain and France could be dragged into war.

The astonishing German-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939 was soon followed by Britain formally agreeing a treaty with Poland guaranteeing them support if invaded. The stage was set for war. The Soviet position on this pact was that at that time they would have been incapable of resisting a German attack if one had been launched. On the other hand it was a convenient way of annexing some territory even though it meant co-operating with a government that they detested. As we now know, they bought time that could have been spent preparing their defences but in the event the German attack of 1941 was a total surprise to them.

1939

September 1 - Germany invades Poland

September 3 - Britain declares war on Germany.

September 11 - British Expeditionary Force lands in France.

September 17 - Russian troops invade Poland and meet the German forces at the agreed dividing line on the next day.

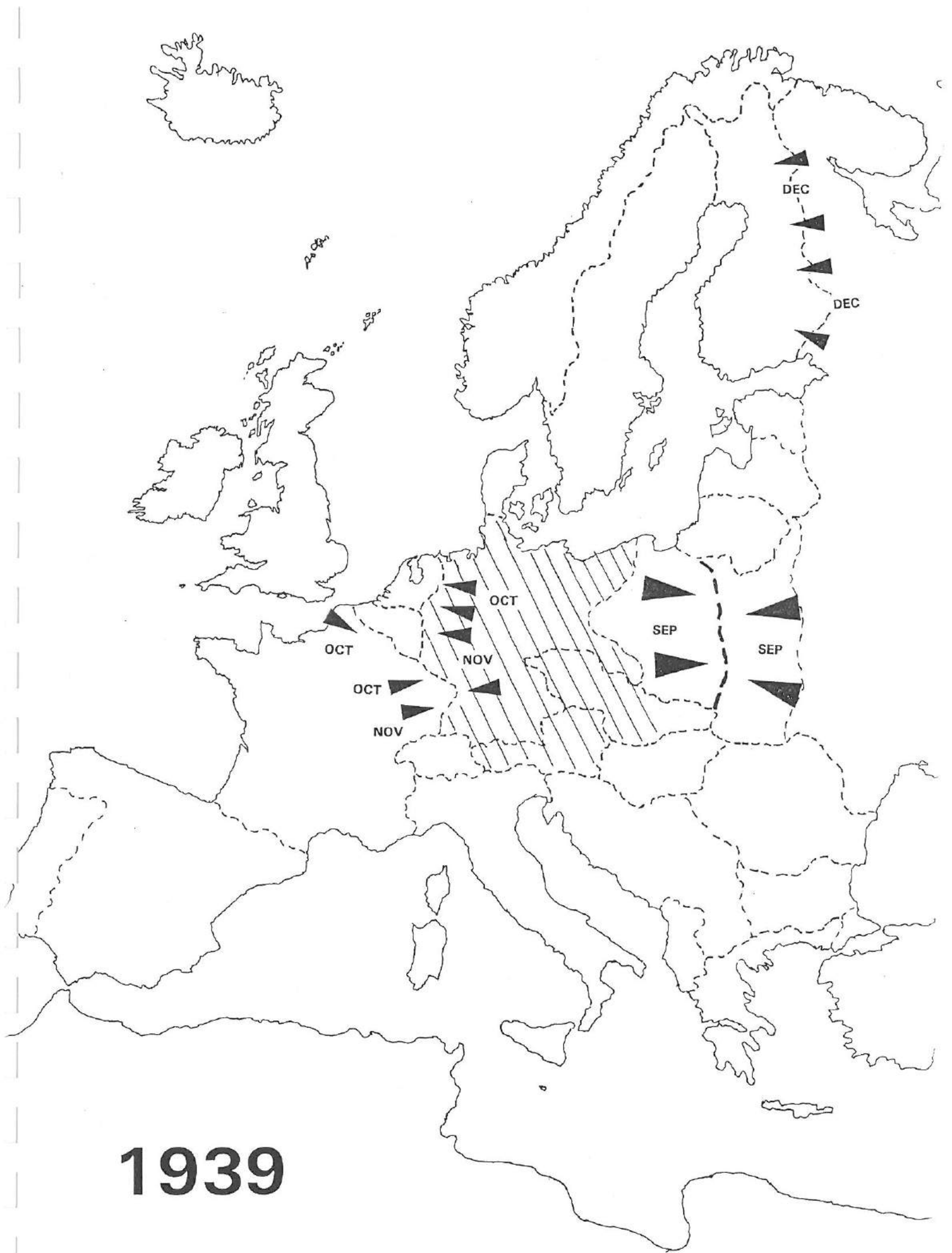
October 14 - German U-Boat activity was already causing concern and on this day one slipped into the harbour at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands. It sunk the battleship Royal Oak.

November - the Germans started to use magnetic mines dropped from aircraft. Although we had the good fortune to find an unexploded mine and devise counter-measures the battleship Nelson was mined on December 4.

November 30 - Russia attacks Finland to pursue territorial ambitions now that there was no threat from Germany. Fierce resistance from the Finnish troops held the Russians at bay for the time being.

December 13 - Battle of The River Plate, Argentina. The German battleship Graf von Spee had been sinking cargo ships in the south Atlantic Ocean. Three smaller ships from the Royal Navy tracked her down and inflicted sufficient damage for her to be scuttled off the coast of Uruguay. This good news was a considerable boost to civilian morale.

November and December - the BEF continues to build up its forces on the Franco-Belgian border. However, we were unable to send out any armoured divisions due to the failure to re-arm in response to Germany's actions before the declaration of war. Meanwhile, with the situation in the East settled, German troops were being transported back to the western front in preparation for an invasion of France.



1939

1938 - 1939

ON THE HOME FRONT

1938 - In anticipation of war the Ministry of Agriculture and Food prepares ration books.

May 3 - Farmers urged to plough up land for food production.

September - The evacuation of London begins. Over 1½ million people were evacuated to all parts of the country. The people who accepted the evacuees - "billetters" - were paid 10/6 (52p) per week for the first child and 8/6 (42p) for each extra child.

1940

THE FRONT LINE

EUROPE

January & February - British Expeditionary Force building up strength on Franco-Belgian border to cover the end of the Maginot Line. Belgium declined to allow Allied troops on her soil claiming neutrality and believing that Germany would respect this neutrality.

February 1 - Russia renews attacks on Finland

March 12 - Finland capitulates. Military support from Britain and France was promised but not acted on. Then it was too late, which was just as well as all our forces were required in France.

March 18 - Hitler meets Mussolini and declares no intention of attacking westwards.

April 9 - Germany invades Norway and Denmark. Germany relied on importing a lot of iron ore from Sweden for its armaments production. The invasion was carried out to protect these supplies. Within 48 hours total control was achieved helped by Nazi sympathisers in Norway led by Quisling. Britain made an attempt to re-capture ports at Narvik, Trondheim and elsewhere but by early May we were forced to withdraw.

May 10 - Chamberlain forced to resign over his poor handling of the War so far. Churchill appointed as Prime Minister.

May 9-10 - Germany attacks Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. A complete tactical surprise was achieved by the Germans and their subsequent progress using Blitzkrieg (combined devastating air and ground attack) methods was spectacular.

May 15 - Holland capitulates.

May 22 - BEF falling back to Dunkirk. Due to losses and the need to reorganise their armoured forces, the Germans hold back at this stage allowing the BEF to consolidate for evacuation. It is now clear that this was a decision by the local commander, Runstedt, because the German High Command could see the probability of delivering a crippling blow to our forces.

May 28 - Belgian army surrenders.

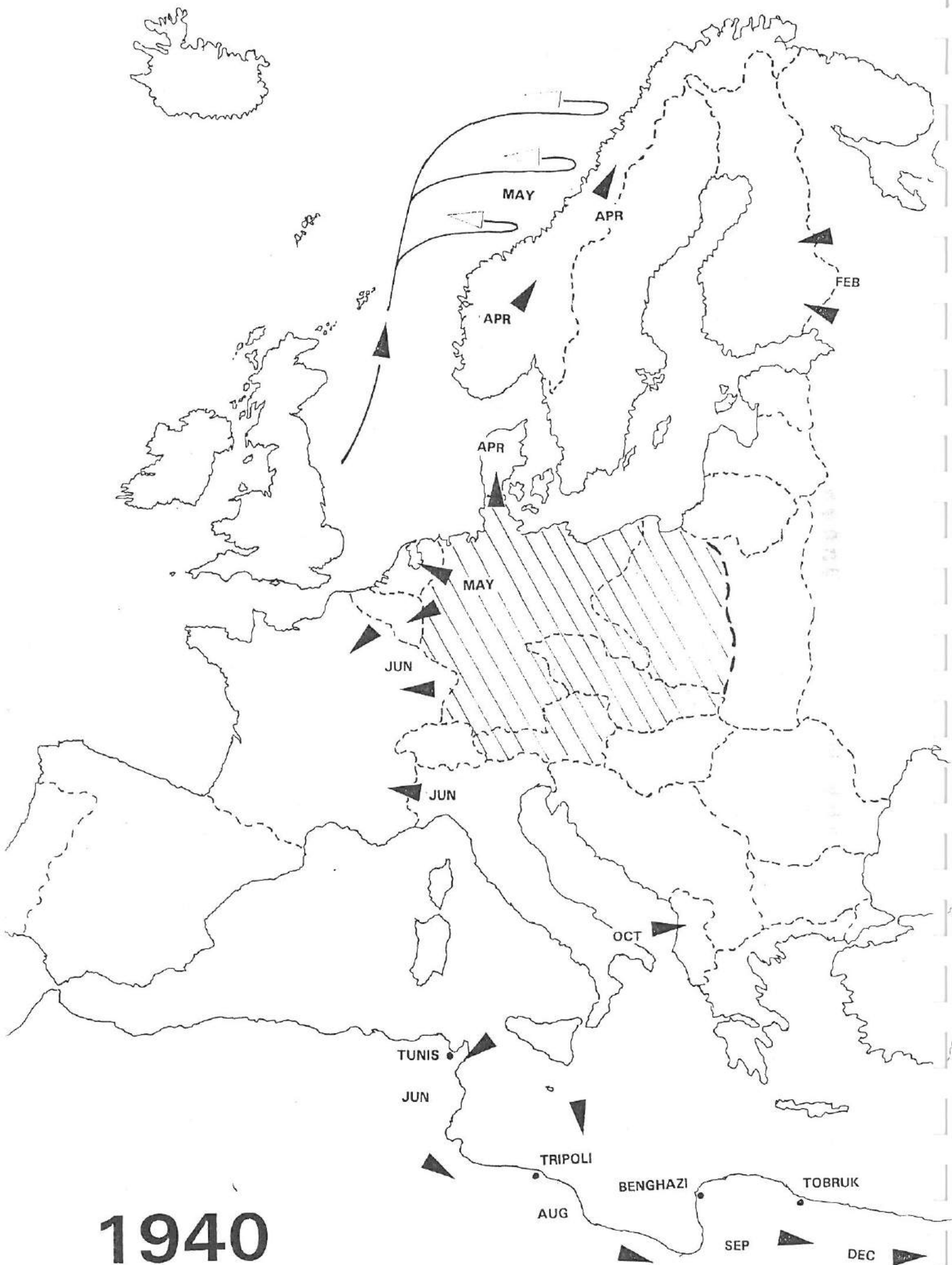
May 28 - June 4 - Dunkirk evacuation. The decision of Runstedt not to press on with his attack allowed the BEF to establish a strong perimeter. This, coupled with a spell of exceptionally calm weather, enabled us to evacuate more than 338,000 British and Allied troops and a great deal of equipment.

June 5 - German army continues to invade France. Enters Paris June 14.

June 10 - Italy declares war seeing the chance of easy victories - attacks France across its Alpine border but fails to make any progress.

June 12 - Britain bombs Milan and Turin to show Italy that joining Germany means that it will be on the receiving end from our troops.

June 18 - France capitulates, Vichy government formed under Marshall Petain.



1940

1940

July - August: Preparations for the invasion of Britain. The first date for a landing was set by Hitler as the middle of August. However it was essential to establish air superiority to permit the transportation of troops and equipment across the Channel. Because of the fierce resistance put up by the RAF in the Battle of Britain the date was first put back to September 15 and then September 21. On September 11 the date was put back again to September 24 and then on September 17 the invasion was postponed indefinitely. The invasion would have been a truly massive and unprecedented undertaking for one country to undertake. After the war strategic studies showed that a landing could have been achieved but that it would have been repulsed after 3-4 weeks. The lack of air superiority, the difficulties of having enough transports to keep the army fuelled and supplied and the poorer weather conditions in October would have combined to cause failure.

July 10 - Battle of Britain begins. The German Luftwaffe had a 3-1 advantage in aircraft comprising 1015 bombers, 346 dive bombers, 933 fighters, and 375 heavy fighters making a total of 2669 aircraft. The battle had three phases: July 10 - August 18 the attacks were on convoys, ports and general attrition of the RAF; August 24 - September 27 full scale attacks of daylight bombing raids on London and on RAF stations; finally from October the Luftwaffe switched to night bombing of London and centres of industrial production.

August 15 - The day of greatest air activity - there were 5 major actions during the day resulting in German losses of 76 to our 34.

September 15 - Luftwaffe made its last concentrated effort against the RAF and its airfields. At one stage all the RAF's aircraft were in the air. By the end of the day the Germans had lost 56, the RAF half that number. The failure of the Luftwaffe to gain control of the air convinced Hitler to postpone the invasion, a further consideration among the German High Command was the propagandist effect of a failed invasion. Strategically, Goering made the mistake of not deciding on a strategy and pursuing it. One or two more days of attacks after September 15 could have resulted in the destruction of the RAF.

September 7 - Goering orders night bombing raids on London - "The Blitz".

September 7 - November 3: An average of 200 bombers per night drop bombs on London. As well as high explosive bombs, incendiary bombs and bombs with delayed action fuses were employed.

28 October - Italy invades Albania and declares war on Greece. For several months beaten back by Greek troops from Greek border in mountainous country fighting.

November 11 - Italian fleet severely disabled for 6 months after brilliant airborne attack on Taranto harbour.

November 14 - Coventry blitz, followed by raids on Bristol, Southampton, Liverpool and other cities.

November - A crisis in paying for the war was building up - we had spent \$4500 million in cash and had only \$2000 million left. On November 5 Roosevelt was re-elected and revived an 1892 statute that allowed leasing of military equipment. This led to the Lend-Lease Bill under which equipment and food was sent over without payment. It was very fortunate for us that Roosevelt was favourable to our cause as there were plenty of Nazi sympathisers in the USA (not least being the US Ambassador to Great Britain, Joseph Kennedy). For Roosevelt to support our cause was a political gamble as the USA was not officially at war with Germany until the end of 1941.

1940

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Britain was dependent on imports of food, fuel and munitions to be able to continue fighting the war. With the fall of France the German Navy had the whole of the western and northern coast of France from which to launch their attacks on Allied shipping. Admiral Doenitz considered that the prime role of the U-Boats should be to destroy merchant shipping and this policy was pursued throughout the war. The U-Boats and aircraft operating on combined missions soon made serious inroads into the quantity of supplies that reached British ports.

In June 1940 there were about 35 operational U-Boats. In the first week of June 1.25 million tons of cargo was imported, by the end of July this had reduced to less than 750,000 tons per week.

In the week of September 15-22 a convoy of 27 ships was sunk, and during October 63 ships were sunk by an average of only 12 U-Boats at sea. The Germans perfected the wolf pack technique for their attacks at night - by operating at night on the surface and staying submerged during the day they became highly successful.

There was a desperate need for radar methods to detect the U-boats when they were on the surface so that our aircraft could then attack them. After some successes at sinking U-boats, the battle moved to mid-Atlantic where we could not protect our ships.

RUSSIA

December 18 - Hitler announces the "Barbarossa Directive". This initiated the planning for the offensive against Russia - probably his greatest strategic error.

NORTH AFRICA

The North Africa campaign was necessary to protect Egypt and the Suez Canal which was our shortest supply route from India and the oilfields in the Middle East.

July 3 - 8: French warships in North African ports taken over by Royal Navy or destroyed or made unusable.

June - August: Italian troops were stationed in the North African desert, principally at coastal garrisons in Libya.

September 13 - Italians advance on Egypt.

December 9 - British Army counterattack in the desert which ended in the surrender of Italian troops on Jan 22.

1940

ON THE HOME FRONT

Food

January 8 - Food rationing begins with controls on the supply of butter, sugar and bacon. Every family was issued with ration books and had to register with their local grocer, butcher, etc which became the only shop where they could use their ration books.

Curious new foods started to arrive in the shops. There was a substitute sausage compounded of soya-beans, bread-crumbs and chopped wind-pipe. From the USA came Spam (spiced ham flavoured with sugar), Treet (a kind of mince-meat) and Mor (chopped pork-shoulder-meat tasting like ham). Eating in restaurants was still possible but restricted to "one dish meals" which was quite often a rissole although under a variety of names to impart greater significance: Pojarskis, Kromeskies a la Russe, Croquettes, Chevapchichi, Salisbury Steak, Boeuf Britannia and Savoury Balls.

The jam ration was 8 ounces (about 250 gms) per calendar month which was one small pot about 2½ inches (65 mm) high. Cheese was rationed to 1 ounce of Cheddar (usually) per person per week. That was a piece measuring 1¼ x 1¼ x 1 inches (32 x 32 x 25 mm).

There were some extraordinary shortages such as onions - the allowance was 2 lb per person per year. Eggs were down to two per ration book per week and real eggs became known as "shell eggs", the alternative was powdered eggs.

As the population started to come to terms with rationing they found ways to beat the system. However, fish was never rationed, nor were potatoes and there was always encouragement to grow your own food as far as possible. Of course, fishing was severely restricted for obvious reasons so fish was in very short supply. There was always endless queuing for any unrationed food that was available.

Home Defence

May 1940 - Home Guard (Dad's Army) formed from the Local Defence Volunteers. In time 1.5 million volunteers join up to prepare against a possible German invasion.

The Home Guard and the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) were responsible for administering many regulations devised for the safety of the civilian population. The most well-known, of course, were the black-out regulations - no light to be showing at night to guide enemy bombers. However, decoy lights were positioned in the countryside which is one reason why there are bomb craters miles from any military target.

With the threat of invasion beaches were closed to the public and mined or barricaded against invading forces (very restricted sections were kept open for swimming). The Government started to issue leaflets advising people what to do if the invasion occurred. Also more and more people were put onto rotas to do fire-watching at night and were taught how to correctly smother incendiary bombs.

August - The Government issued a leaflet called "Beating The Invader". It was full of instructions on how to harass the enemy using anything from a pitchfork to a petrol bomb. In particular there was not just advice but orders to the population to "Stay Where You Are" - the lesson of the effect of refugees blocking the roads in France and Belgium had not been lost. Everyone was reminded how important it was for our troops to be able to get at the enemy if they invaded.

1940

Clothing

June 1940 - Clothes rationing under consideration by the Government.

Anne Jarrett: My Grandfather lived at Hillside Farm (now the Toll House in Church Lane) and was not very pleased with the local ARP Warden, Major Chappell. One of the Warden's jobs was to report any unlocked vehicles since they could be used by enemy troops for transportation. He was out rounding up his cows, "and he should have known that", when the Warden found his unlocked car. Presumably he was fined since a ticking off would hardly have resulted in a long term resentment!

Mrs Rose Booty: When the war started I was 25 and was married in December 1939 as my husband was going to be called-up in January. He went off to the Royal Artillery to man the searchlights at Colerne.

I stayed in London where I had a job as a machinist in the City. We were issued with gas masks and given training in how to use them. I would not wear mine - my glasses kept misting up and I couldn't see a thing!

There was little happening in London until after the Battle of Britain. Then in the autumn of 1940 the blitz started. Every night German bombers came over and we had to sleep in the shelter in the garden. The sky would be full of aircraft and the sky bright from the light of burning buildings. I lived in the Mile End which was about a mile north of the docks - the principal target - there seemed to be a ring of fire around us every night.

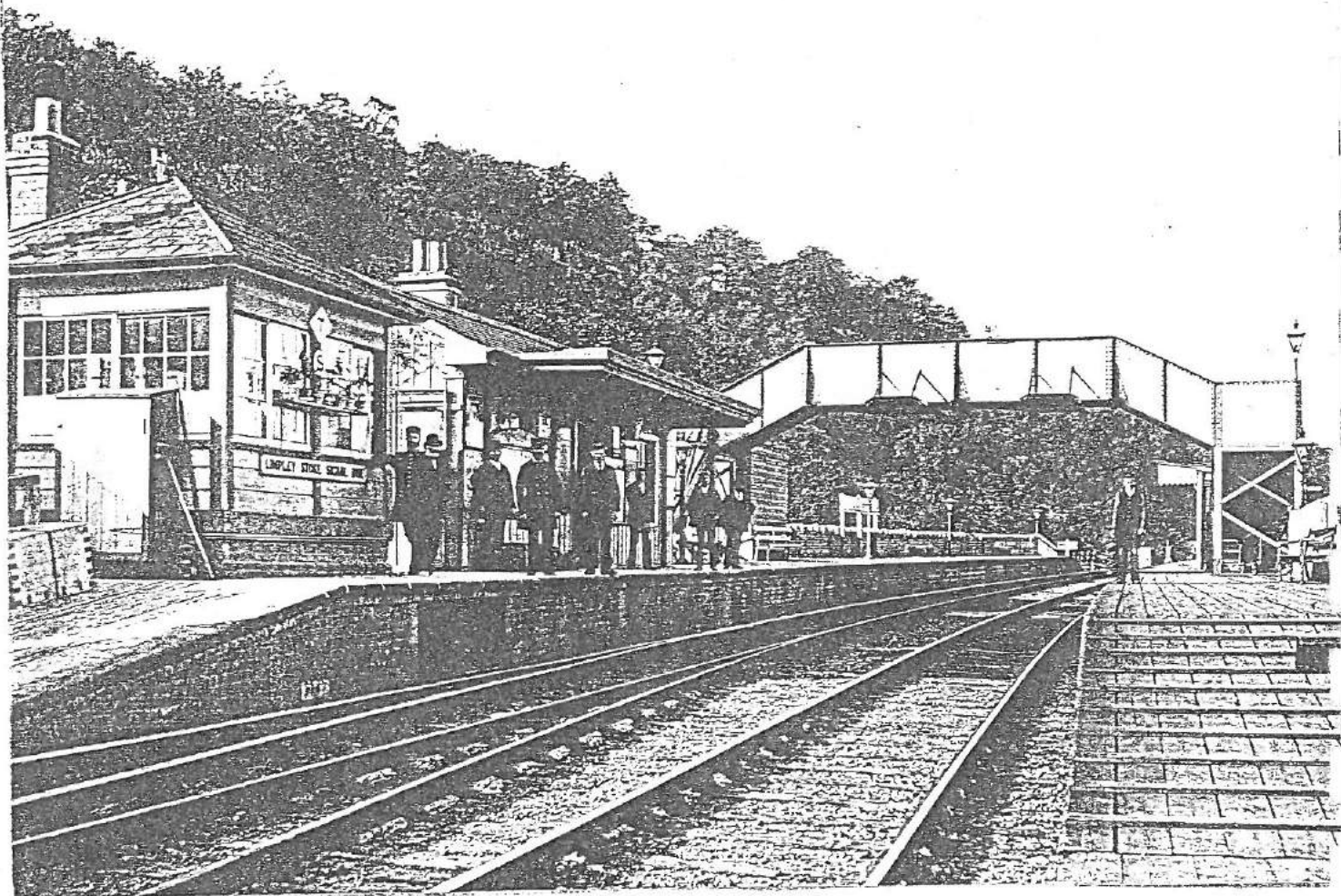
Several times I was bombed out of the house we were living in. There was no let-up in the bombing for about 6 months. In March 1941 I moved out to Amersham but by Sept 1941 had moved back to the Mile End to stay with my husbands parents. Then I was called up for War Work. At first this was looking after the bonded warehouse at Euston Station and sweeping the station. Fortunately my husband was able to complain when he came home on one of his leaves and got me transferred to the telephone exchange at Commercial Road (almost in the City). I was known as a TFA - Temporary Female Assistant.



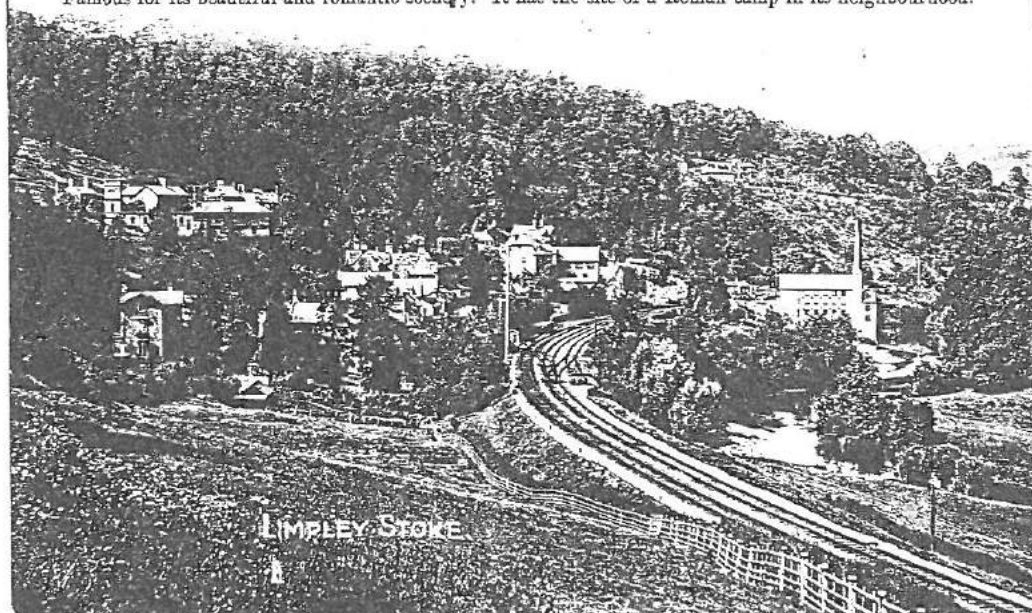
Major Chappell - Limpley Stoke's Air Raid Warden



The lady at the left, front is Flossie May who came to Limpley Stoke as an evacuee. She married locally and still lives in Bath. Second right at the back is Madeleine Brown who lived at Limpley Stoke through the War and is still here at The Firs.



Famous for its beautiful and romantic scenery. It has the site of a Roman camp in its neighbourhood.



Limpley Stoke Station and sidings. The Luftwaffe failed to put them out of action but Lord Haw-Haw mentioned the attack in one of his broadcasts.

THE HOME FRONT

LIMPLEY STOKE IN THE WAR

Sid Huntley: I well remember when the war started but it was a long time before anything happened in this area. The only visible signs were the Blackout, increased activity in the railway marshalling yard (situated between Limpley Stoke and Freshford stations), the removal of all road signs, the building of Pill Boxes for defence against invasion, the forming of the Home Guard and, of course, rationing of everything.

(Had the German invasion succeeded, Limpley Stoke would have been on the Front Line because part of our strategy was to use the Kennet & Avon Canal and the Somerset & Dorset Railway as a defensive position - the "Green Line". This is why pill-boxes were built in this area and they can still be seen along the Wellow Valley together with the tank traps known as "dogs-teeth" near Stony Littleton and Single Hill).

During the first few months the Germans used to send a bomber which circled over this area all night and before leaving at daylight dropped a few bombs on the Corsham Ammunition Dump. They did this to drive the workers to their air raid shelters and stop production. When the Firewatch was formed the workers continued to work until warned to take cover.

At this time I had a small Radio & Motor-cycle business in a workshop at the rear of the Rose & Crown pub. I did not volunteer but expected to be called-up at any time and so ran the business down. When I was called-up I was graded as Class 4 and told to get a job on the land. Instead I installed a few machine tools in my workshop and made special tools, etc for the war effort - my wife used a capstan lathe or the milling machine and I worked a centre lathe.

I was a member of the Limpley Stoke Firewatch service and was recruited into the Limpley Stoke Rural Fire Service when it was formed in 1942 with a Mr Bush of Midford Lane in charge. Its equipment consisted a 2-man hand pump, axes, stirrup pumps, a number of canvas buckets and a large canvas water tank. This last was to be filled by helpers using buckets and was the supply for the 2-man pump. We were issued with arm-bands and klaxons to be sounded if there was a gas attack.

We provided the transport and the equipment was loaded into my van every night. We were properly trained to use it by an officer of the National Fire Service. The duty of the R.F.S. was to try to rescue injured persons and afterwards to try to contain any fire until the main fire brigade arrived.

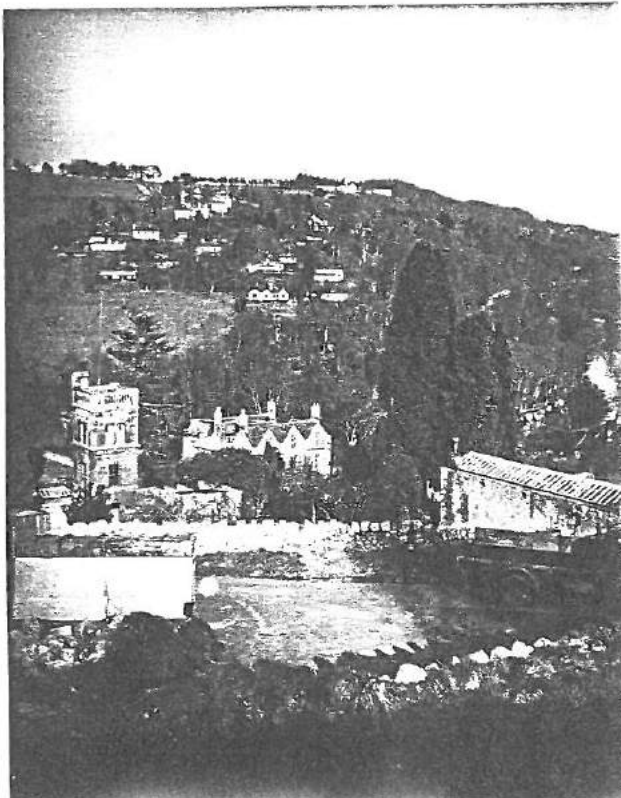
Nothing much happened to Limpley Stoke from enemy activity during the war. The only incident was early on when a number of incendiary bombs fitted with "howlers" were dropped across the valley one night. One ignited in the grounds of what is now the Cliffe Hotel, another in the river, one at the base of a nut tree in "Little Canada" (the houses at the bottom of Winsley Hill) and the last at the base of an electricity pole near "Rowas Lodge" at the top of Winsley Hill. They all burnt out without causing any damage.

These incendiaries were evidently meant for the railway marshalling yard as, a few days later, a fellow watcher told us that she had heard Lord Haw-Haw say that they had bombed Limpley Stoke marshalling yards!

On a quiet night you could hear the German bombers coming. They seemed to come from Westbury and used the river and railway to navigate past Bath to Bristol. On the nights of the Bath Blitz you could see the planes quite clearly as they flew over the woods and the sky was bright from the flames in the city.



Limpley Stoke Home Guard marking the end of the War with a victory march past the Rose & Crown Pub.



A view across the valley to Winsley Hill and "Little Canada" where two incendiary bombs landed

THE HOME FRONT

LIMPLEY STOKE IN THE WAR

Sid Huntley (continued): My wife and I were outside on the day the Germans tried a saturation bombing raid on the Bristol Aeroplane Co works at Filton. About 60-70 bombers came over in perfect formation and carried out their raid. A short time later they returned, still in perfect formation, as they had caught us unprepared. The next day they tried it again but we were ready for them with both our aircraft and anti-aircraft guns. They were all over the place and as they were returning we saw one of our aircraft shoot down a bomber - it crashed near Norton St Phillip. Unfortunately the fighter pilot was killed by the rear gunner of the bomber.

The A36 was a very important road for moving troops and equipment from Bristol Docks to Warminster and Salisbury Plain. Sometimes at night, when returning to base, enemy aircraft would strafe the road - you could see the tracer bullets directed onto the A36.

Towards the end of the war an American aircraft returning from a reconnaissance flight encountered very thick fog over England and running out of fuel the pilot had to bail out. The aircraft crashed in a field between Peipards Farm and the A36. This was the only time the Limpley Stoke R.F.S. turned out in earnest. We had just loaded the pump, etc into my van when we heard the aircraft coming down. When we got to it all we found was a hole in the ground and a jet of flame coming from it - the aircraft had completely disintegrated.

Miss Violet Duck: Our family delivered milk to Limpley Stoke all through the war. At the end of 1939 the family stopped making cream and butter as any surplus was required by the Government for further distribution. The cows were milked by hand and the family kept a lot of chickens so we sold eggs in the village and once a week took them to sell in Bath Market and I always had a penny bun from Mrs Cook's at the top of the market. During the war they sold for 1/- (5p) a dozen - my Father said that this was not enough so we brought them back and preserved them in water-glass. We also bottled a lot of fruit - plums, loganberries, gooseberries, blackcurrants and made our own jams.

Four evacuees, a mother and 3 daughters, came to Midford Lane in 1940. The two older girls stayed at our house while the others lived further along the lane. One girl, in her excitement, started jumping up and down on a chair but my Mother quickly told her to stop!

I was a fire-watcher for Upper Limpley Stoke which just meant looking out of the window and immediately reporting any fires that I saw. My brother Arthur was an Air Raid Warden on Winsley Hill ensuring the "Black-Out" regulations were adhered to, i.e. no lights to be seen in any building from the outside.

One night I heard bombs exploding and took shelter under the kitchen table, whilst I was there I knitted some socks. Later I found out that the bombing had been in Bath and not Bristol as I thought. The pack draper, who lived in Morland Road, was killed on the first night of the raid - he had visited the farm regularly selling curtain materials, etc.

At the end of the war a special certificate was sent to me for my efforts in the war - I had knitted twenty pairs of sea-boot stockings, without heels, for the sailors.

April 1940. 129

WARTIME RECIPE

CORNISH PASTIES.

- 1 Oxo cube
- 1 lb meat
- 1 lb potatoes
- 8ozs. pastry
- Mixed herbs
- Salt and pepper
- 1 small onion

Make the pastry, divide into four portions and roll them into rounds $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick. Cut the meat, potatoes and onion into dice. Season with salt, pepper and herbs. Dissolve the Oxo cube in two tablespoonful of water and use it to moisten the meat mixture. Divide into four portions and place one on each round of pastry. Damp the edge, fold over and seal the edges together. Bake in a moderately hot oven 10 minutes. Reduce heat and cook one hour in all. Four large pasties.

LEMON WHIP

- 1 pint packet Chivers' Lemon Jelly, a breakfast cup stale white breadcrumbs. 1 teaspoonful lemon juice.

Make up the Jelly as directed on the packet and place a small layer in the bottom of individual moulds. Whisk the remainder when cool, adding the lemon juice and breadcrumbs when thoroughly whisked. Fill the moulds with this mixture and when set turn out and decorate with plain chopped jelly, if required.

FACTORY, HILTON, CAMBRIDGE

June 1940

January 1940

This is Mrs. Chamberlain's recipe for her new cake:

Weigh two eggs and take their weight in margarine, self-raising flour and golden syrup.

Cream the margarine and syrup together, add well-beaten eggs, then sifted flour. Bake in moderate oven for three-quarters of an hour.

A RECIPE FOR POTATO CAKES

A soldier's wife has written asking for a recipe for potato cakes. Here is an excellent one:—

Potato Cakes.—Boil some floury potatoes in their jackets, skin them while still hot and rub them through a sieve. Measure out three-quarters of a pound of the sieved potato. Now sieve half teaspoon of Borwick's Baking Powder and a pinch of salt with six ounces of flour, and rub in two ounces of margarine. Add the potato to this mixture, mixing well and adding enough milk to make a firm paste. Roll out this on a floured board to half an inch thick, cut into rounds, and bake quickly on a greased baking-sheet. They should be served hot, and are excellent for tea or with light supper dishes.

Items from Mrs W P Chesterman's recipe book (above). As the effects of rationing began to be felt, potatoes (which were always unrationed) featured in many dishes.

Right: Recipes for dried eggs. Most housewives were not convinced of the merits of using dried eggs but usually had no choice. Cakes, sauces, Yorkshire pudding, etc were not too bad but some of the recipes did not work at all well. Omelettes tended to be leathery and "scrambled eggs" were just awful!

FOOD FACTS

Five delicious dishes from one packet of dried eggs

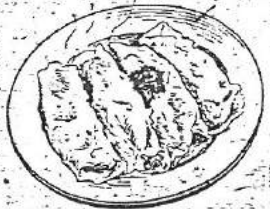
They'll taste exactly as if you'd used shell eggs!

Here are five different family-size egg dishes you can make from a single packet of dried eggs!

Your family will think you've used shell eggs — if you don't tell them otherwise. Most people, unless you announce it beforehand, simply can't tell the difference. And, after all, there really is no difference. Shell eggs are three-quarters water, and dried eggs are simply shell eggs with the water and the shell taken away.

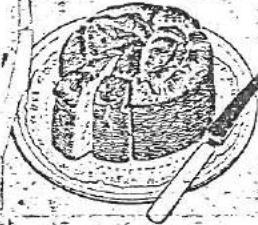
2½-minute Omelette

These omelettes are actually easier to make than they would be if you used shell eggs — and they take only 2½ minutes! Just the thing to serve for dinner or supper. They take the place of meat because eggs, you know, are also a protein food — the very same kind of food as meat.



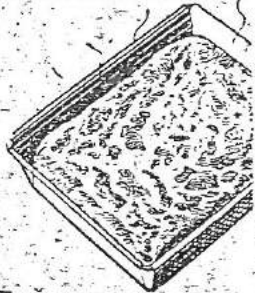
"Pre-war" Madeira Cake

Light and nourishing — the egg in it gives this delicious cake a real pre-war flavour. Use dried egg, of course. Dried eggs are finest shell eggs with the shell and the water taken away. The white and the yolk are blended together so that you can get the same even mixture every time.



Yorkshire Pudding

Another body-builder for the children, and one that father-likes, too! Light, golden brown, creamy in texture. It takes one egg, but the new allocation of dried eggs makes it possible for the average family to use a dozen eggs a week, which is more than most people used in peacetime!



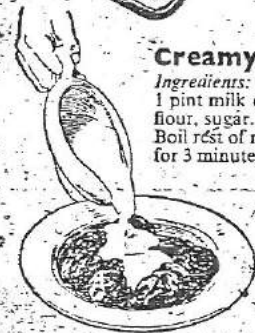
Father's Fancy

Ingredients: 2 lb. cooked potatoes, 1 onion chopped, 2 tablespoons chopped parsley, 2 eggs, 1 pint milk, 3 oz. grated cheese, salt and pepper. **Method:** Dice potatoes, mix with chopped onion and parsley. Reconstitute eggs, mix with milk, cheese and seasoning. Pour this mixture over the potatoes. Bake in moderate oven till golden brown. Then watch the whole family down it with delight!



Creamy Custard

Ingredients: 2 dried eggs (unmixed), 1 oz. flour, 1 oz. sugar 1 pint milk or milk and water. **Method:** Mix together egg, flour, sugar. Mix to smooth cream with a little of the milk. Boil rest of milk, pour on to mixture, return to pan and boil for 3 minutes. Your family will love it!



RECIPES for the omelette, Madeira cake, Yorkshire pudding, and many other delicious egg dishes are given in *Cookery Leaflet No. 11*. Just write to the Ministry of Food, London, W.1, and it will be sent to you free of charge. Then you can show your family there's no egg shortage in your house!

You are allowed one packet of dried eggs per Ration Book every 4 weeks (2 for green books)

Don't mix dried eggs till you are ready to use them

Radio Note: The Kitchen Front is now broadcast from Tuesday to Friday only, 8.15 a.m. THIS IS WEEK II — THE THIRD WEEK OF RATION PERIOD No. 3 (Sept. 19th to Oct. 16th)

1941

THE FRONT LINE

EUROPE

The London Blitz continued until May when Germany shifted its attention to Russia. From Jan - May German night bomber losses increased to 10% of sorties - helped by the increasing success of our fighters using radar guidance.

March 1 - Germany invades Bulgaria. During March the Yugoslav government signed a pact with Germany. The nationalists rejected it, kicked out the King and the Government and proposed to resist any German action. Hitler was infuriated because it delayed the start of his Russian offensive scheduled for May 15. He ordered immediate and harsh action.

March 31 - Earlier in 1941 German forces joined Italians in North Africa. Axis forces advance eastwards with superior armour and air power.

April 2 - Germany invades Hungary.

April 6 - Germany attacks Yugoslavia by air and land

April 20 - Yugoslav capitulation - German forces continue into Greece.

April 24 - Greece capitulates, British forces re-group on Crete.

May 20 - Airborne German forces attack Crete

May 23 - Seaborne German troops join attack. Royal Navy repulses the ships and after May 24 the Germans abandon attempts to land forces by seas.

May 26 - Overwhelming German forces on Crete - evacuation begins.

June 2 - Remaining British forces on Crete capitulate. However - 5000 Germans killed - their only airborne division destroyed which seriously hampered their campaign in Russia.

December 7 - Japan attacks Pearl Harbour. Hitler was totally surprised by this and the major benefit for us was that the US was now officially committed to joining us in the fight.



1941

1941

RUSSIA

Events in the Balkans and Greece delayed the Germans in their build-up of the Eastern Front. This was probably a critical delay because the offensive did not start until June 22 and the Germans knew that operations would be curtailed during winter months.

The Russians were warned that Hitler was organising an invasion but ignored us and were totally unprepared - they continued to believe that Russia and Germany were united in a joint cause to eventually destroy western capitalism. They publicly attacked the UK and US right up to Hitler's declaration of war. Furthermore, all through 1940-41 Russia had been indifferent to the war in Western Europe and had continued to give Germany economic aid.

Hitler regarded it as an ideological war to eradicate communism and hence ordered ruthless treatment of Russian troops (which led to the corresponding post-war treatment of Germans by Russians).

After a month the German forces had advanced 300 miles. Then the army wanted to continue to advance to Moscow but Hitler ordered advances over a broad front and to the south. At the end of September, Leningrad was encircled but not taken. Too late the Army re-attacked Moscow as winter approached. Transport of supplies to the front was a very major problem. Roads were breaking up and the Russian railway was inadequate.

In early October German forces were 40 miles from Moscow but Russian resistance and the onset of winter weather prevented any further advances.

NORTH AFRICA

With the Germans having conquered all the territory that was important to them in western and southern Europe the main scene of the war shifted to the North African desert. The difficulties of supplying Rommel and our shortage of tanks meant that military action was subdued until November when we launched an attack. Rommel counterattacked and reached the Egyptian border. We repulsed this and pushed the Germans back to Tripoli.

Unfortunately U-boats started to operate in the Mediterranean causing sever damage to our ships and enabling supplies to reach Rommel. The balance of power seemed to be constantly swinging one way and then the other.

1941

ON THE HOME FRONT

June 1940 - June 1941: civilian casualties were 43,381 killed and 50,856 seriously wounded. In fact in the first three years of the war there were more civilian casualties than military.

March 5 - Essential Work Orders introduced - these defined jobs that were protected against call-up. These included teachers, farm workers, bakers, dentists, pharmacists, etc some of whom had to be kept at home to keep the civilian population functioning.

June 1 - Clothes to be rationed. Initially the allowance was 66 coupons a year.

December 8 - Shortages of labour apparent, some 2 million were needed for the forces and for munitions and manufacturing. Unmarried women now faced call-up: female conscription was announced. Registration was required of women up to the age of 40. Single women in 20's sent to join the Police, Fire Brigade or other non-combatant roles. The new conscription rules covered 1.7 million single women. Soon afterwards the minimum age for women was lowered to 19. Men aged 18½ - mid 40's were now included in the call-up.

December 31 - "Make Do and Mend" Department created in the Board of Trade to publicise suggestions for patching clothes and mending curtains and bed-linen (sides-to-middle). Worn out stockings could be cut into 'clips' and made into rugs. Pre-war golfing plus-four trousers could be made into overcoats, scarves into childrens dresses, etc. "Thrift is the Fashion" was the message personified by "Mrs Sew and Sew".

In fact the impact of the campaign was limited - poorer and working class women would already have been well-versed in these methods. As for making a new overcoat out of two old ones - there were hardly any to be had anyway! For many women there was precious little time for dressmaking as they were very busily employed in the factories or on the land.

Darning wool, which was not rationed, was purchased in large quantities for knitting into socks. When the Government realised this was happening they ordered the hanks to be cut at one end so that the wool was in short lengths and could be used only for darning.

Old knitted clothes could be unravelled and the wool used to knit new ones. The wool was gathered into skeins and washed and would dry straight. If you were expecting a child you had a special allowance of knitting wool (in exchange for coupons of course). Often if people had a spare blanket they would dye it a darker colour (because they were usually cream coloured) and then make coats or jackets from it.

An idea that did not catch on was to repair shoes using old inner tubes from car tyres because leather was in short supply (it was needed for boots for servicemen). Eventually shoes with wooden soles appeared. The soles were hinged where it would normally bend under the ball of the foot - they were very uncomfortable!

Anything that was reusable was reused. Saving of oddments became a habit - bits of string, small bits of soap were squeezed together to make a new bar, wrapping paper (Christmas gift wrapping paper would be carefully ironed and saved for the next year), butter paper would be kept to grease a baking tin. Actually there was quite a shortage of paper and chocolates could no longer be wrapped and cigarettes were sold loose, there were no labels on jars of jam and no more Christmas cards. Envelopes were to be used and reused until they had disintegrated. Old habits die hard - some people still hoard string and paper!

Through all this the Government kept on exhorting the civilian population to think positively: "Dig for Victory", "Save Waste Paper", etc and a notice was circulated to pubs, restaurants, hotels, etc saying "There is NO depression in this house. We are NOT interested in the possibility of defeat and we do NOT discuss it".

THE WAR AT SEA

FROM THE ARCTIC CIRCLE TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

Action Stations

Bob Davies (Lower Stoke) was a Signaller on *HMS Aurora*, a cruiser launched in 1936. It had six 6-inch guns, eight 4-inch guns (used both for normal shelling but mainly anti-aircraft) and six torpedo tubes.

The war could be said to have started a little earlier for the Navy than most other people. In late August 1939 they set sail with bright-work dimmed and guns manned in response to the signal from the Admiralty: "Fuse all shell; ship all warheads. Prepare for war."

During "Action Stations" Bob's duties were to stay on the bridge to send or receive messages and generally keep a look-out. Messages were sent either by flags or semaphore during daytime or by torch at night. The torch was mounted on a pair of binoculars so it would point exactly at the ship to which he was signalling. This helped to avoid detection by the enemy, also the messages were kept very short, e.g. the letter N for enemy in sight followed by the bearing.

Norwegian Patrols

Their first action was off the coast of Norway in April 1940 during the attempts to re-capture the port of Narvik (following the Nazi invasion of Norway). They suffered daily attacks from aircraft and finally a bomb found its mark and destroyed one of the 6-inch gun turrets.

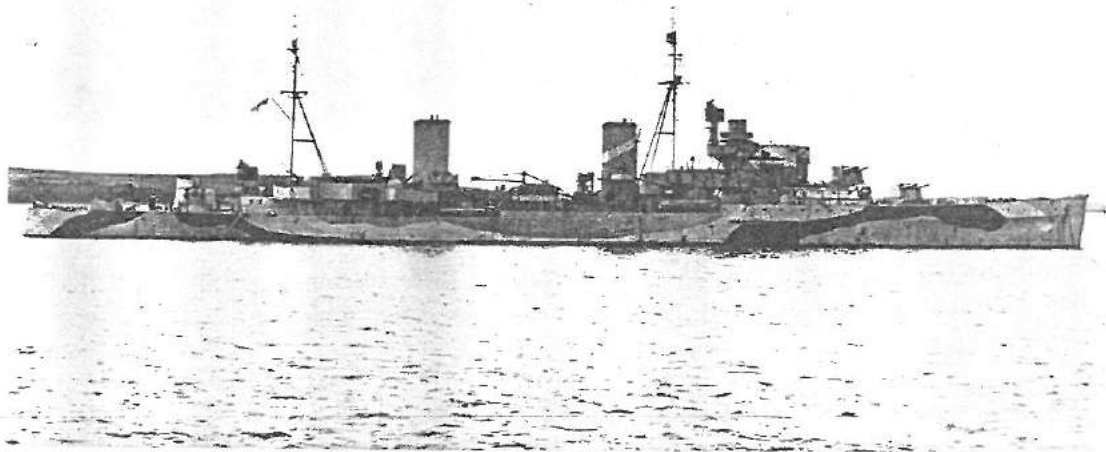
The *Aurora* returned to Portsmouth in May 1940 for repairs and was then stationed off Sheerness to help repel the threatened invasion. In May 1941 they were sent into the Atlantic to help track down the *Bismarck*. Although diverted to escort the damaged *Prince of Wales* and help pick up survivors they had the satisfaction of locating and sinking a U-Boat supply ship.

Their next move was in July 1941 for a spell of duty around the north coast of Norway and Spitzbergen. Being summertime and north of the Arctic Circle they were sailing in sunshine 24 hours a day. On their way home in September they encountered a German cruiser and destroyer which were duly sunk (but not without some damage to a sister ship).

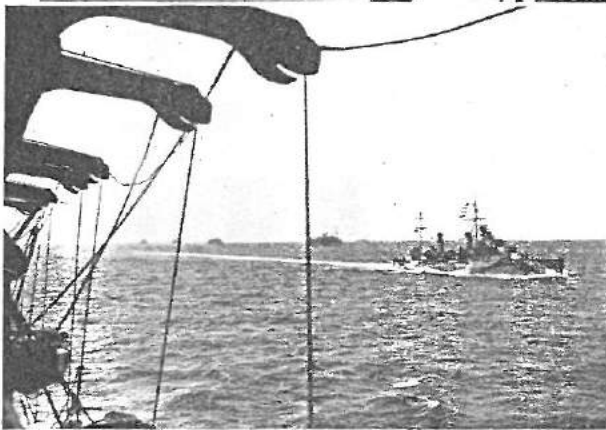
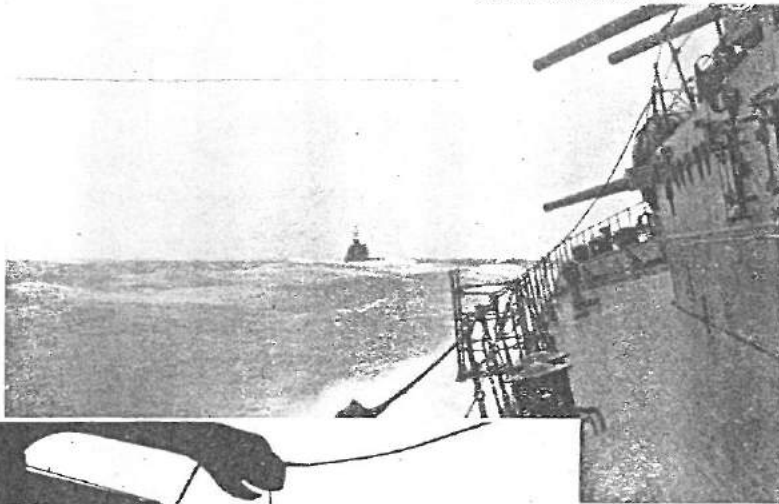
The Mediterranean

October 1941 - off again, this time to Malta to help defend the island and protect our convoys. By now the Germans had captured Greece and Crete and our troops in Egypt were totally dependent on our convoys to sustain them. For the convoys going through the Mediterranean, Malta was a vital strategic point to hold as it had a large harbour for shelter and aircraft to harass the enemy. For Rommel and the Afrika Korps it was equally vital that their convoys from Sicily to Tunis, Tripoli and Benghazi should get through safely.

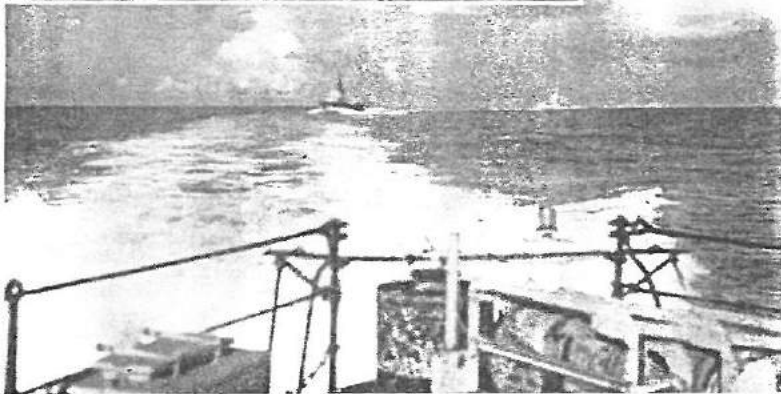
Aurora was joined by the destroyers *Lively*, *Lance* and *Penelope* to form Force K. The arrival of Force K was sufficient to deter almost all the Italian ships from attempting the crossing to Africa. On November 8, Force K sunk a convoy of 10 merchant ships and 2 destroyers all of which were carrying munitions or fuel. After this action the Italian press dubbed the *Aurora* the "Silver Phantom." Further successes ensued until the *Aurora* hit a mine in December about 15 miles off Tripoli.



H.M.S. Aurora



H.M.S. Aurora at sea - in heavy weather (top), in a convoy heading for Oran for the "Torch" landings (centre) and looking for action on a patrol out of Malta (bottom).



The *Aurora* was in dry-dock in Malta for repairs until the end of March, 1942. By now the Luftwaffe had returned to Sicily and were mounting constant bombing raids which interrupted the repair work. Their next duty was to escort convoys off the west coast of Africa and then lead assault convoys for the "Torch" landings on November 8. This was followed by some action near Oran which resulted in the sinking of several ships of the French Navy that refused to join us (they had been under Vichy-France control).

Sicily and Greece

As we gained control of the Mediterranean their main activities were protecting our convoys and inflicting whatever damage they could on any enemy ships foolish enough to come within reach. On July 10, 1943 the *Aurora* joined the battle fleet preparing for the invasion of Sicily. They had the honour of starting the liberation of Europe by firing the first shells in the bombardment that started at 0115 hours. The next few weeks were spent shelling Italian ports and attacking shipping whenever possible. After the Italian surrender on September 8, they went to support the landings at Salerno with a bombardment of enemy positions.

Their final voyage was eastwards to the Greek islands to help winkle out the German troops that were still in that area. This was difficult work as the enemy had plenty of air cover and were sending aircraft to bomb Allied ships. On October 27 they were hit by a bomb from a Stuka which did a lot of damage and killed a number of the crew. Bob had been on duty on deck as usual - luckily he had been sent below a few moments before the bomb landed or he would probably have been killed when it struck.

The *Aurora* had had more than its share of luck with no casualties between Norway and the Aegean and had been responsible for sinking 1 cruiser, 10 destroyers, 3 minesweepers, 7 landing-craft and 21 merchant ships with nine more destroyers are claimed as damaged. In achieving this 4,453 rounds of 6-inch shells were fired and the 4-inch guns were worn out three times.

After this incident the *Aurora* was repaired in the dockyard at Taranto and then supported the Allied landings in the south of France. Bob transferred to destroyers for the remainder of the war and retired from the Navy in 1948.

H.M.S. BEAUFORT

LIMPLEY STOKE'S ADOPTED WARSHIP

In 1942 the Government ran a scheme to encourage savings by setting definite targets. The records do not show that Limpley Stoke adopted a ship single-handed but participated in an adoption by Bathavon Rural District. The entire district invested over £200,000 and so was able to adopt *H.M.S. Beaufort*, a destroyer.

The *Beaufort* was launched in November 1941 and was sent out to the Mediterranean for convoy escort duty and to support the assaults on Sicily and the Greek islands. Bob Davies remembers the *Beaufort* as it accompanied the *Aurora* on several occasions.

The relationship between the adopted ship and the local communities was usually very close with visits and dances being arranged. Also it gave a purpose to the supply of scarves, balaclavas and woolly socks that were knitted by the community.

1942

THE FRONT LINE

NORTH AFRICA

Jan 21 - Rommel attacks again and recaptures Benghazi.

May 26 - Fresh offensive by German forces. During the spring and summer the Germans were able to transport a lot of desperately required equipment to replenish their forces. Similarly, the British commanders felt unable to launch a new offensive. Also our supply lines were longer - either along the length of the Mediterranean from Gibraltar to Cairo or right round Africa.

June 20 - Tobruk captured by Rommel.

June 24 - Rommel advances in to Egypt - stopped at Alamein about 130 miles from Cairo. At this point Rommel had only 12 tanks fit for battle, communications and fuelling were very difficult and the RAF was achieving air superiority.

1 - 26 July: General skirmishing in the Alamein area.

August 30 - Rommel pushes forward hoping to reach Cairo. Repulsed by the British VIIIth Army now under command of Montgomery. There were further problems for the Germans due to our increasing control of air and sea. We were now able to seriously damage their communication lines from Sicily to Tunis and Tripoli thanks to the efforts of the RAF and Royal Navy to keep Malta operational.

October 23 - The Battle of Alamein. This raged until November 4 when Rommel started to retreat. This action marked a turning point of the war in that from here on the Allies were on the offensive.

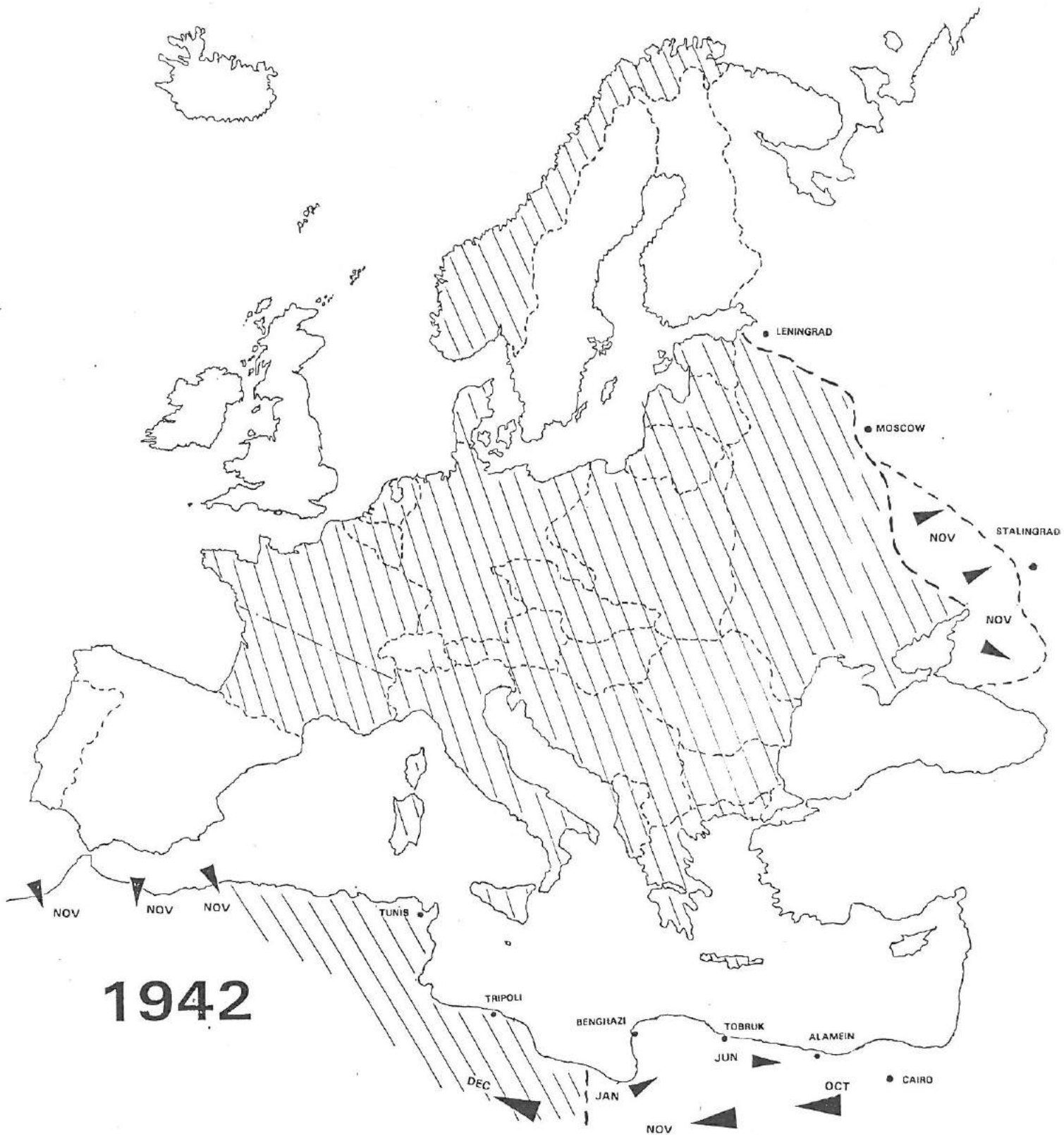
November 8 - US and British troops landed in North Africa - operation 'Torch' - on Moroccan and Algerian coasts. These areas were controlled by Vichy-France and Tunisian ports had been helping to pass supplies to Rommel. Within 48 hours the French forces capitulated but this had the effect of giving Hitler an excuse to occupy the whole of France. He particularly wanted their Naval ships in Toulon. Many of the French Admirals were anti-British but a few brave officers organised the scuttling of the whole fleet (73 ships).

The German High Command sent troops to North Africa to help Rommel resist our operations. However, by December 28 Montgomery was approaching Tripoli and the Torch forces were at the Tunisian border (somewhat bogged down at this point by heavy rain).

FAR EAST

Japanese troops advance through Malaya - the realisation that Singapore had no defences facing mainland Malaya and lack of air superiority meant that the end was inevitable.

February 15 - Singapore capitulates with 85000 men surrendering to inferior forces.



1942

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

The U-Boat fleet had grown to 100 operational at any time. By the end of January 31 ships totalling 300,000 tons had been sunk off US and Canada coast. During February 71 ships were sunk (384,000 tons).

The German navy wanted an Atlantic offensive which would have increased the rate of sinkings. It would not have taken much more for the shortages of food and raw materials to have stopped Britain from continuing to fight. Hitler once again, fortunately, imposed his strategic opinion on his Admirals having decided that Britain was going to launch a new offensive in Norway. He insisted on keeping the battleship Tirpitz in a Norwegian fjord as a threat against our Home Fleet instead of letting it loose in the Atlantic. Also the Germans were short of fuel oil.

In March a further 480,000 tons of shipping was sunk. In the period January to July over 3,000,000 tons, including 181 British ships, was sunk at a cost of only 14 U-Boats.

The situation continued to be critical, in August 108 ships were sunk (over 500,000 tons) and by October 196 U-Boats were operational. Matters grew worse - in November 117 ships were sunk, more than 700,000 tons.

Meanwhile - the Russians wanted us to launch a second front in western Europe to draw German troops away from the Russian front. Due to, amongst other factors, to the success of the U-Boat campaign we did not have enough trained men, equipment or boats to ensure success. It was decided to have a landing in North Africa led by the US - the 'Torch' landings.

RUSSIA

In April 1942 the Eastern Front ran from Leningrad past Moscow to the Black Sea. Advances were ordered by Hitler at the southern end to capture the oil fields east of the Black sea. The advance ground to a halt in November at Stalingrad.

November 19 - February 2 Battle of Stalingrad. Against military advice Hitler was determined to take Stalingrad. The winter weather and Russian determination resulted in a very substantial victory and the German offensive never recovered from their losses. From this point the German Army was in retreat.

A contributing factor to the defeat of the German troops was the materials used in their uniforms - made from viscose and rayon they had very poor heat insulating properties and far from being waterproof tended to absorb water. They must have had a very miserable time.

EUROPE

All through 1942 the RAF were striking back at Germany with an increasing bomber offensive. Unfortunately its effectiveness was limited due to the difficulties of finding targets at night and above cloud. There was a lot of pressure from the Government for a radar system that would enable accurate bombing of targets and detection of U-Boats which attacked at night but on the surface. Despite great efforts the technical breakthroughs were not achieved until late in 1942 but were to have spectacular effects in 1943.

1942

ON THE HOME FRONT

March 3 - Utility Regulations introduced. These controlled a wide variety of activities to ensure that vital resources were not wasted. These included the number of button-holes and sizes of seams and pleats in new clothes.

The hemline of skirts was raised several centimetres, there were no turn-ups on trousers and jackets had to be single-breasted. Shirt tails were 5cm (2 inches) shorter and the widths of sleeves, skirts and hems were curtailed. Also, to encourage long production runs, a limit was set on the number of basic designs that could be produced by any firm each year: six styles of womens underwear and fifty dress styles, with patterns designed to make the best use of the material by minimising wastage.

The Board of Trade also regulated the range of materials that could be used in clothes and the prices that could be charged to prevent profiteering. A woman's tweed winter coat cost £4/3/11 (£4.20) and man's suit a little more, always assuming that you had the coupons to allow you to buy them. Forbidden materials included steel and rubber (except for ladies and childrens underwear and industrial garments). In fact, with the growing shortages the ration of coupons was cut down to 48 per year.

March 17 - Coal, gas and electricity to be rationed.

April 14 - Government banned the use of embroidery on womens nightwear and underclothes.

April 25 & 26 - The Bath Blitz.

July 26 - Rationing of sweets begins.

Food rationing continued with most items being in short supply - dried eggs were a common substitute for fresh ones and fresh meat, although available, was very strictly rationed. Limpley Stoke may not have been as hard hit as the cities and towns - with plenty of farms around there would probably have been a flourishing Black Market!

THE BATH BLITZ

25 & 26th APRIL 1942

The "Baedeker Raids"

Bath was the most severely damaged city of all those that were attacked in the so-called Baedeker Raids (the other cities were Canterbury, Exeter, Norwich and York). The principal reason for these raids was the success of the RAF in bombing Lubeck on the Baltic coast of Germany in March 1942. Although not a target of prime importance it was the first time that the RAF had managed to inflict extensive damage on an industrial target because previously its bombing accuracy left much to be desired.

Hitler was furious that a beautiful city had been all but destroyed and was worried that this marked the start of a bombing campaign that would seriously damage Germany's industrial base. He issued a directive on 14th April that ordered "...preference is to be given to attacks that are likely to have the greatest possible effect on civilian life...terror attacks of a retaliatory nature are to be carried out against towns other than London..."

In 1939 the population of Bath was about 67,000 but with the influx of evacuees and the occupation of the hotels by the Admiralty (and the opening of the Foxhill establishment) the population had increased to nearly 80,000 in 1942. There were other military targets - the Stothert & Pitt factory and the underground storage of munitions (although the Germans probably did not know about the latter).

The First Night - April 25th

Prior to April 1942 Bath had suffered an occasional bomb from aircraft heading towards Bristol where there were significant targets. When the raid began on the 25th April (a Saturday) the general feeling was one of relaxation in that Bath was not expected to be a target and so the population had not been prepared for the sort of emergency action that would be required.

Between 80 and 90 aircraft attacked and the first bombs began to fall at about 10.55 pm. The assumption was made that the target was Bristol and the fire engines headed west. They immediately ran into damage as the gas works had been the first target. This was so that the fires resulting from the explosions would act as a marker for following aircraft. Because of the lack of defences the aircraft came in very low and were able to drop incendiaries in concentrated patterns.

The all-clear sounded at 12.11 am. Gradually the population emerged from shelters (both official and make-shift - there were only enough public shelters for about 20% of the population). During the early hours of the morning many people walked to-and-fro across Bath to check on relatives and property (remember that telephones were few and far between even if they were operating). However, the Germans had decided to give Bath special treatment and at least half of their aircraft were refuelled, rearmed and sent straight back for another go.

At 4.35 am the sirens sounded again and this time, with many fires still burning had no difficulty finding their target. Again the gasworks and the western end of the City seemed to be the main target but bombs fell in all areas.

THE BATH BLITZ

Although there were Hurricane, Beaufighter and Defiant aircraft stationed at Charmy Down and Colerne the protection they offered was very limited. Because of their losses in daytime raids during the Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe switched to a night bombing. At this stage in the war, the RAF had very little experience of night-fighting and interception was more by luck than judgment. However, one Defiant claimed a Dornier 217 - they were to have better luck the following night.

The Second Night - 26th April

On the Sunday many people decided to flee the city on the basis of a general rumour that the Germans would be back that night to finish the job. Some 10000 people decided to leave although many did not go far - a lot slept rough at Brown's Folly, no doubt unaware that there were many tons of ammunition stored beneath them in the caves!

The night of 26/27 was clear and cold and by midnight many began to walk back into Bath. At 1.15 am the sirens sounded and 83 bombers proceeded to attack. On the first night the aircraft had flown mainly north-south, this night they flew east-west and the two flight paths crossed over Kingsmead Square. The majority of the damage was inflicted on this second raid.

This time the RAF were ready for the raid as experience showed that there was usually a second attack. As soon as the raiders were reported 10 Hurricanes and a number of Defiants were scrambled and pressed home their attacks. A further 4 German aircraft were shot down.

It was on this night that the Assembly Rooms was hit. An estimated 25-30 incendiary bombs landed on the roof which created a fire that was beyond the capabilities of the fire service to deal with. Also the Francis Hotel was hit, a bomb landed on the lawn in the middle of the Circus and another on the lawn in front of the Royal Crescent. Fire fighting was hindered by high winds and low water pressure; the Fire Guard were overwhelmed by a concentration of incendiary bombs and the Station was put out of action with the line to Bristol closed.

The all-clear sounded at 2.45 am and with daylight it became clear that damage was localised rather than widespread and that the Abbey, Baths and Pump Room were undamaged.

It was later estimated that the city had been hit by nearly 400 high explosive bombs, and well over 4000 incendiaries, These had destroyed 329 houses and rendered unfit for habitation another 1000. There were another 16000 damaged houses. There were 417 deaths.

Wylda Chesterman: Just before the Blitz my parents had to leave Bath so I was staying at a hotel in North Parade. On the first night we saw and heard the Rugby Club stand and St John's RC Church being hit. We hurried down for shelter in cellars that ran underneath North Parade.

We emerged early on Sunday morning to see the damage. My particular memory is of glass everywhere - it had come from the windows of the Empire Hotel and all the North Parade houses.

On the Sunday night I was firewatching with a friend at St Johns, Bathwick (opposite the Fire Station). When the bombs started coming down the curate asked us to walk all round the church and keep checking for incendiary bombs - it was rather frightening!

After this second night of bombing I came out Avonside at Limpley Stoke and stayed with the Gorham's for about a month until my parents returned.

THE BATH BLITZ

Sir Bernard Lovell - extracts from wartime diary:

Sunday April 26th: (Living at Swanage) The war has pressed on us this week. Monday morning we were awakened at 7.15am by cannon fire and machine gunning. 2 Me 109's attacked the station and dropped bombs which knocked down a grocery shop and made a hell of a mess in Station Road. 3 people were killed and 11 other casualties. Worst of all after nights and days of sirens and odd aircraft Bath was heavily attacked last night. My Father managed to ring up this afternoon with the message all the family were alive but that their houses were knocked out. A terrible mess apparently.

(A subsequent note mentions that an uncle and aunt of his were saved because they got under the kitchen table before a bomb brought the house down on top of them)

Tuesday May 5th: Bath was bombed again last Sunday night. By Monday afternoon we were very worried about Bath since there was no news so I got in the car and drove up. A lovely spring afternoon, reached Bath at 4 pm and found it in an appalling mess. (He had been stopped by the Army from entering Bath because of the chaos but eventually found his way through the lanes around Hinton Charterhouse). Eventually reached my parents-in-law and found them in a windowless, doorless and almost roofless house. The Bear Flat was just gone completely and the whole of that residential area completely wrecked. Beechen Cliff was shocking and looking over Bath there seemed to be hundreds of roofless houses. In-laws did not need much persuading to come back with me to Swanage and when we drove out at 7.30 hundreds of people were walking out to sleep under hedges etc. Poor Bath! Destroyed as a working city; quite unbelievable. No trains, telephones, gas or water.

Ethel Griffin: I came to Freshford after the bombing raids on Bath and later moved to Limpley Stoke. Up to the time of the Blitz I lived on Lansdown Crescent in a semi-basement with my parents. I was working at Stothert & Pitt on secret work - making landing craft for the invasion of France, road-making equipment, cranes and oil pumps.

Our house took a direct hit and we lost all our furniture and crockery. At the time I had been visiting friends in Westbury. There were no buses or trains running as a result of the air-raid and it was late evening before I arrived home. I ducked under a policeman's arm and entered a cordoned off area to go to our house. My parents were alive but a few minutes before the bomb landed my Father had been standing at the front of the house. Feeling exposed, he and a friend decided to go to the rear of the house which saved their lives.

Madeleine Brown: I came to Limpley Stoke as a baby in a long gown and have lived here all my life. I well remember the Blitz - our house shook violently from the blast of some of the bombs.

Sid Huntley: The sky was bright with reflected light from the flames and you could see the aircraft quite clearly as they flew up over the woods. The day after the Blitz the Germans sent over a reconnaissance plane to assess the damage. Our people expected this and had stationed mobile anti-aircraft guns around Bath, one at Upland Farm. They fired at the plane and you could hear the shell splinters falling. I have a small piece which fell in our driveway. We used to have a few machine gun and cannon shellcases which came down during a dog-fight - large numbers would come clattering down.

1943

THE FRONT LINE

NORTH AFRICA

North Africa - Germans under Rommel fought back in Tunisia in February and March. During April and May the Allies had them encircled and they finally surrendered May 12. By now there was very strong pressure from Russia to establish a second front in France.

EUROPE

July 10 - Invasion of Sicily

August 17 - Capture of Sicily complete although the bulk of German forces escaped to mainland Italy. However 1100 Axis planes were destroyed or captured.

July 25 - Mussolini deposed. Hitler orders German troops into Italy to resist any Allied invasion. This has the effect of fatally weakening his Russian front and limited the potential for resisting a second front in France.

May 16 - Dambusters raid.

July 24 - August 3: First major bombing attack on a German city, Hamburg, using airborne radar navigation. 75% of the city was destroyed and the German High Command were very worried that another 5 or 6 similar attacks would cripple their ability to manufacture munitions and bring about a rapid end to the war.

September 3 - Italy invaded - British VIIIth Army landed in the toe of Italy. Negotiations went on with General Bagdolio for the Italian forces to capitulate immediately. However, prior to this German forces had been moving into Italy and on September 8-9 encircled Rome.

September 8 - Italy surrenders, however with German forces taking over the fighting continued unabated.

September 9 - US forces land at Salerno.

November: Hitler ordered German forces to defend Rome. Strategically he had little choice since a rapid advance up Italy would have enabled Allied forces to invade France from a southern landbase. However, in the longer term this continued to reduce his forces available to resist a landing in France and resist the Russian advances in the East.

RUSSIA

July - December: On the Russian front German forces were gradually pushed back to within 100 miles of Russia- Poland border



1943

1943

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

The situation was extremely grave. By the end of 1942 there was a strong possibility that Britain would not be able to continue fighting because of the losses to merchant shipping. Not only were military supplies affected, the shortages in food were becoming acute.

In 1940 and 1941 there were 4,000,000 tons of shipping sunk per year. In 1942, with the USA in the war, that figure nearly doubled. U-Boats were sinking ships faster than they could be replaced.

Fortunately in 1943 the US shipbuilding programme really got going and the position was reversed with replacements exceeding losses. In April 1943 there were 235 U-Boats in action but now radar was fitted to our aircraft. During April and May Doenitz gave orders for the U-Boats to stay on the surface and fight. 56 U-Boats were destroyed and the survivors were withdrawn from the North Atlantic. The effect on our shipping was dramatic:

August 1, 1942 - May 21, 1943 - 3,760,722 tons sunk

May 22, 1943 - September 18, 1943 - 207,227 tons sunk

September 19, 1943 - May 15, 1944 - 314,790 tons sunk

U-Boats sunk -	in May 1943	40
	in July 1943	37
	in October - December 1943	53

By the end of 1943 the exchange rate had dropped from 40 merchant ships sunk per operational U-Boat sunk to only 3 and continued to reduce to less than one.

1943

ON THE HOME FRONT

February 18 - Parliament approves the principle of the Welfare State. At last the Government could begin to think about post-war business.

September 23 - Pay As You Earn income tax collection scheme announced.

December 2 - Ernest Bevin announced that conscription for men now covered the ages 18 - 51 and for women 20 - 50. The Government could never really decide whether mothers should be at work and some of the issues relating to women at work survived long after the war. For instance - in January 1944 women in metalwork and engineering earned on average £3-10s a week as compared with £7 for men.

Production of coal was falling below the critical level of 200 million tons per year so 30000 men below the age of 25 were to be conscripted to work in the mines. Selection was to be by ballot and these men came to be known as the "Bevin Boys".

In order to save fuel it was ordered that baths were to be no more than 5" (12.5cm) deep. King George VI had insisted that the Royal family should not get special treatment and ordered that all baths in the Household should have a mark painted on them 5" above the bottom.

By Christmas there was a severe shortage of turkeys. Each butcher was to be supplied with only 15 turkeys per 800 registered customers. How some butchers decided which customers would receive a turkey can be left to the imagination!

Beer was still unrationed but by now was down to half its pre-war strength.

WAR IN THE AIR

"FOR YOU THE WAR IS OVER"

Routine Ops

John Allen (Upper Stoke) joined the RAF in 1942 at the age of 18. In August 1943 he joined 90 Squadron, No 3 Group, Bomber Command. Based at Tuddenham in Suffolk he was the flight engineer on Stirling Bomber aircraft and was commissioned to the rank of Pilot Officer on 7th April 1944.

The Stirling bomber was a 4-engined aircraft capable of carrying 6 tons of bombs (typically ten 1000lb bombs). Cruising speed was 160 mph fully loaded and the aircraft was used on main targets such as Berlin, Cologne, and Hanover. Because the Stirling could not carry as large a load as the Lancaster and did not have sufficient altitude it was eventually replaced by the Lancaster for main target missions. In fact, in order to reach Turin the pilot had to fly between the highest peaks in the Alps in order to get across with a full bomb load.

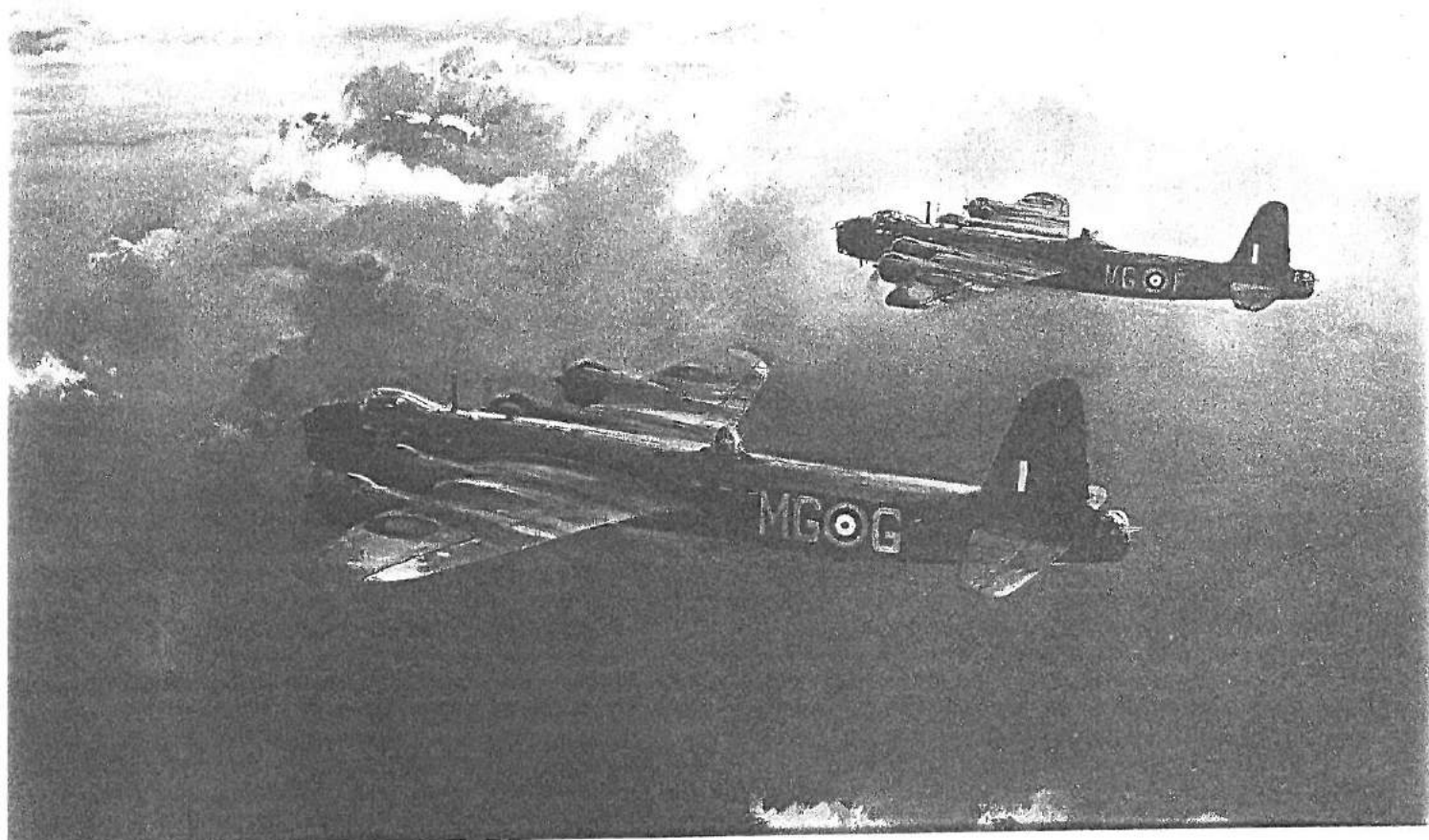
Shot Down

After this the Squadron was employed on missions were against shipping, docks and supply drops to Resistance and Maquis groups. On 10th April 1944, John's aircraft was on a supply drop run to France (John's 22nd mission). With D-Day less than one month away (although it was rescheduled for June 6th) every successful delivery of arms to the Resistance was vitally important. When they arrived over the drop zone there was no signal from the ground that the reception party was ready. After circling a few times the pilot headed off to their alternate drop zone. When they were less than 800 ft above the ground a salvo of ground fire from a heavy machine gun emplacement raked through the starboard wing. The engines caught fire and controls were damaged.

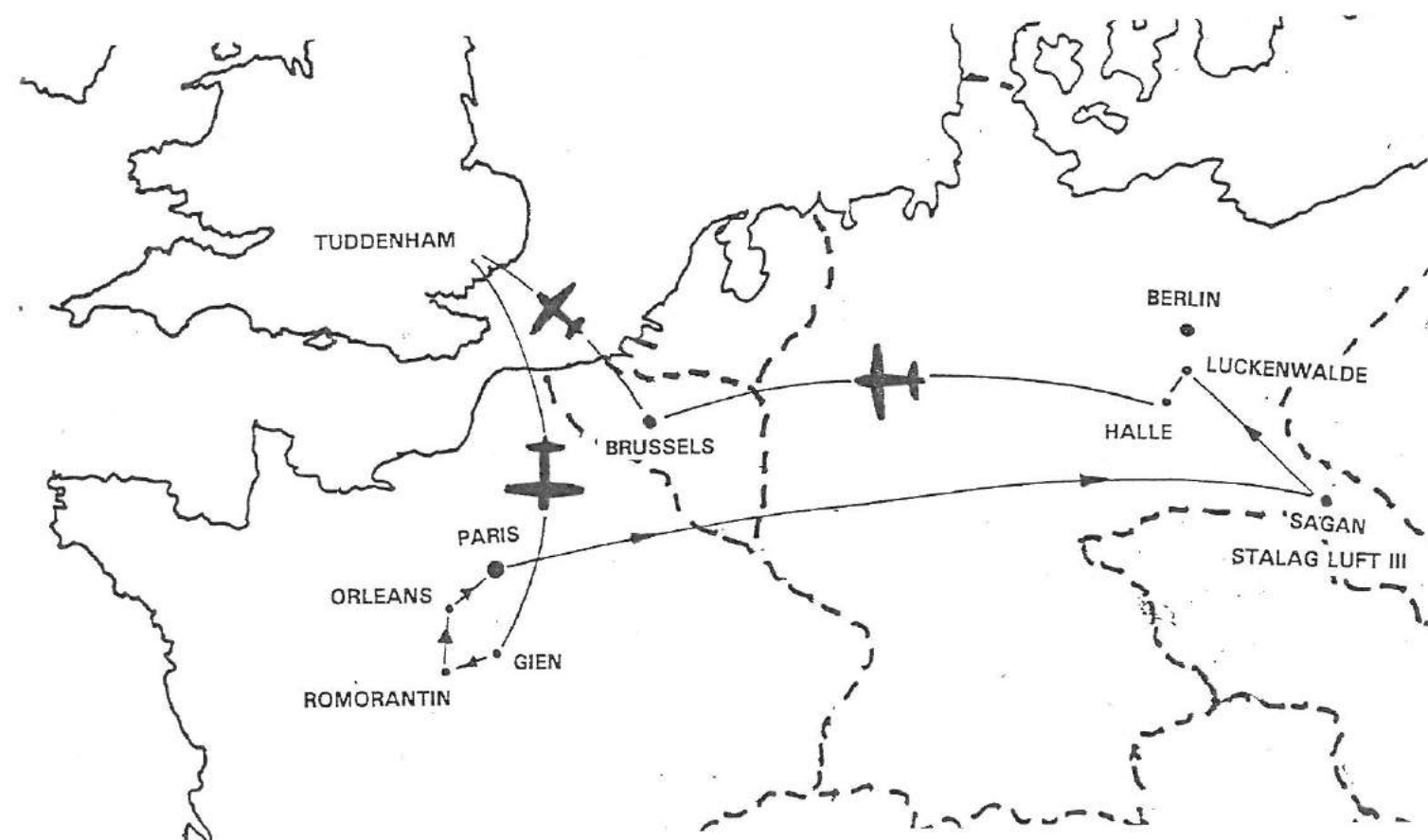
The pilot managed to steer the plane towards open agricultural fields for a crash landing. John remembers a violent thud and the rear crew members bouncing around the fuselage area. John sliced open a hand as he scrambled out of the plane but to this day cannot recollect exactly how the injury occurred.

On The Run With The Resistance

The plane had stooped at the end of a potato field near to some woodland not far from the town of Gien, about 100 miles south of Paris. John escaped with two other crew members not knowing if the others had survived. After leaving the burning wreckage, they hid in dense woodland until first light and then they approached a farm. The owners daughter helped them with food and shelter and her father made contact with the Maquis who then took John to a large chateau where they hid in the grounds. He worked with the Resistance for six weeks before capture on 11th June 1944 after being spotted in open country near the chateau by the pilot of a Fiesler Storch reconnaissance aircraft who directed troops to capture him as he hid in woodland.



"Stirlings Outward Bound" by Robert Taylor



Captured

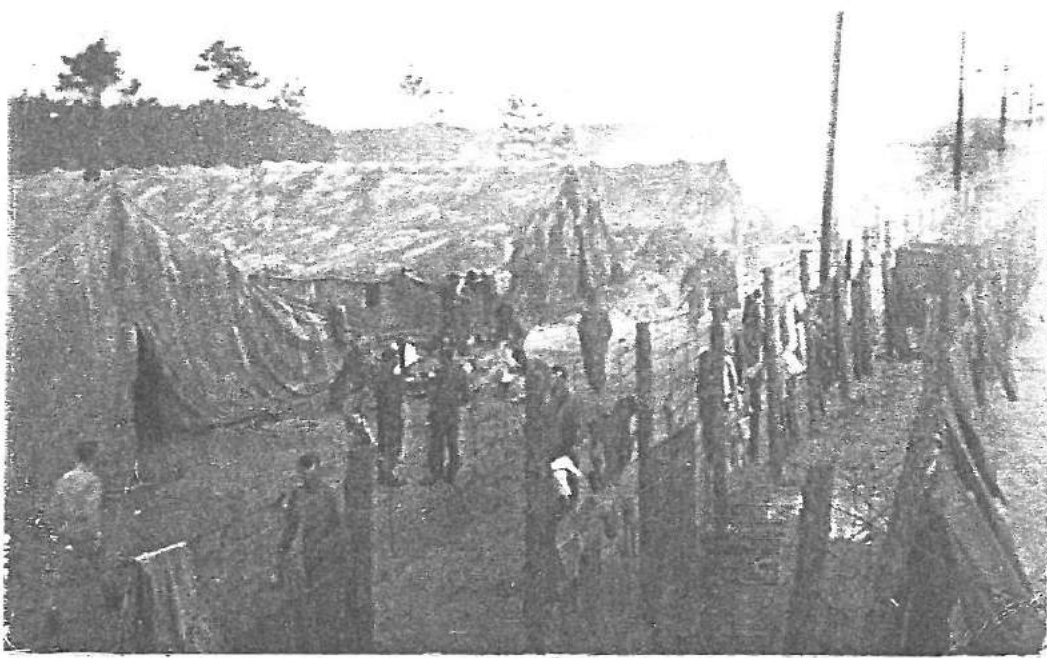
The Germans were searching the area for French civilians who had killed the driver of a German supply lorry with a load of vegetable produce destined for the local German garrison. The troops captured John just after he had hidden his revolver and ammunition in the undergrowth. They surrounded the woodland and arrested them, John was taken with a former veteran of Dunkirk, who was with their party, to Romorantin (about 50 miles south-west of Gien), the local German Garrison. Like so many other captured servicemen he was told "For you the war is over."

John and the others were given brutal treatment by the Germans who assumed at first that they were either members of the Maquis or British agents as they had been captured in a fight with the Maquis and not by their aircraft. The situation was complicated by the fact that John claimed to be an officer but because his commission was awarded just three days before the flight he was still wearing a Flight Sergeants identity disc. Tied up with thin wire and beaten, John was moved to a Gestapo prison at Orleans where he endured 25 days of solitary confinement and interrogation.

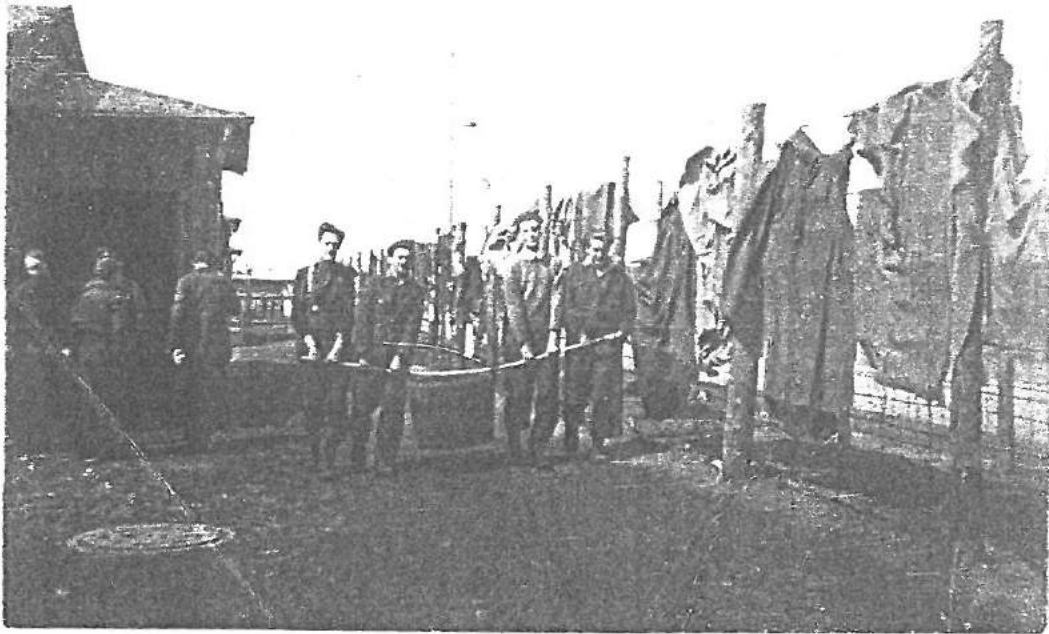
Whilst in Orleans the American B-17's were bombing the town continuously as the town was on a major supply route to the Invasion front. From here they were transported in cattle trucks to Paris, forty men to a truck designed for eight horses. They were then paraded through the streets of Paris where they were kicked and spat upon by supposedly French civilians - this episode was pre-arranged by the Germans. Eventually in August he was sent to Stalag Luft 3 at Sagen in Eastern Germany. Here the entire crew of the aircraft were re-united.

Liberation

Shortly before John arrived at Stalag Luft 3, this Camp had been the scene of the "Great Escape" which resulted in 50 Officers being executed by the Gestapo. As a result new arrivals were instructed not to undertake any escape attempts for the time being. Eventually it was realised that liberation by Allied Forces would soon occur and that it was better to sit tight and wait. In due course the Russian Army began to approach the area and John and the other inmates of the Camp were made to march to another camp at Luckenwalde, south of Berlin. This was a strategic move by their German captors hoping to ensure that they would be overrun by American forces. The Americans did indeed reach the camp first, but because it was in the area that the Allied Governments had agreed would come under Russian control, the Russians insisted that the inmates stay there. They had to wait until the Russians had decided how to repatriate them and at first it was proposed to send them home via Odessa and the Black Sea. Fortunately they were handed over to American forces in early 1945.



The Camp Compound at Luckenwalde.



The daily soup ration arriving.



Liberated by American forces

1944

THE FRONT LINE

EUROPE

January 22 - Allied landings commence at Anzio behind the German front line. Fierce counter attacks by the Germans delayed advances until March 1st. Further fierce fighting continued until the end of March. This offensive continued to seriously affect the German capability to resist the D-Day landings by tying down forces in Italy.

April - May: Preparations for the invasion of France - operation "Overlord". Plans prepared for 176,000 men, 20,000 vehicles and thousands of tons of supplies to be shipped in first two days.

May 11 - Allied offensive in Italy now pushing towards Rome.

May 28 - D-Day set for June 5th. Because of the need to have the right combinations of tide and light the right conditions were only available every two weeks.

June 4 - Allied forces enter Rome.

June 5 - Bad weather delays D-Day by 24 hours. Because of the bad weather the Germans were convinced that an invasion would not take place. Also they were convinced that it would take place not in Normandy but the Pas de Calais and an elaborate series of deceptions were performed to reinforce this opinion.

June 6 - D-Day.

June 6 - July 20: The Germans are slow to bring their reinforcements into play as they thought a second landing would still take place at the Pas de Calais. There was strong German resistance at Caen which impeded the development of the Allied forces beachhead.

June 12 - First V-1 Flying Bombs land on London.

June 17 - More strategic errors in the defence of northern France because of Hitler over-ruling his Generals. They wanted to withdraw to the Seine and fight a mobile defensive battle that might have had some chance of success. Hitler ruled that there was to be no withdrawals and a fight to the death both here and on the Russian front - once again his belief in his superior strategic skills were to help the Allied cause.

July 20 - Bomb plot against Hitler by some of his generals - unsuccessful, unfortunately, which only reinforced Hitler's belief in his own invincibility.

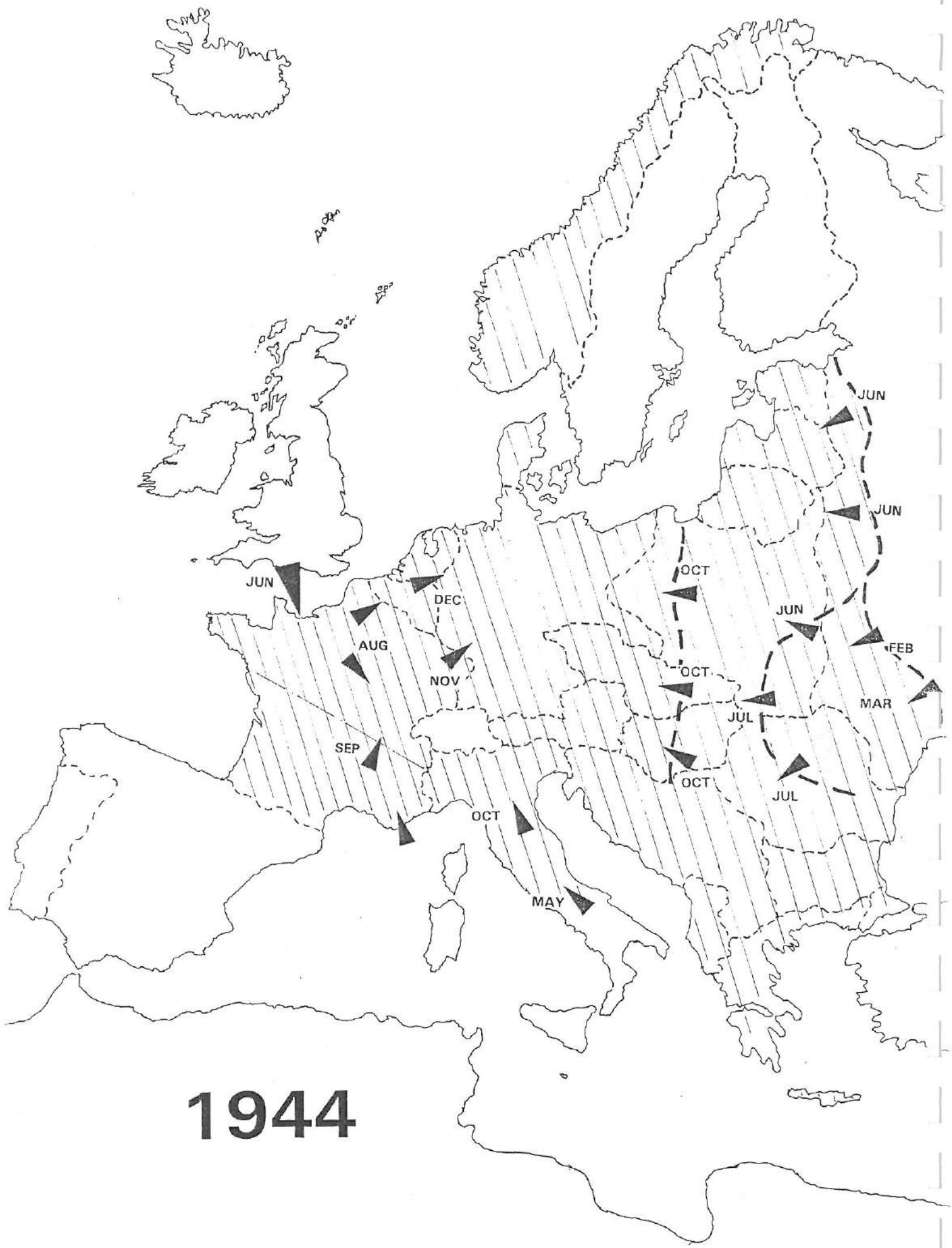
July 25 - US forces break out from the Normandy beach-head and lead the advance inland.

August 15 - US forces land on the south coast of France.

August 24 - Allied forces enter Paris.

September 3 - Brussels liberated.

September 4 - Antwerp liberated.



1944

1944

September 11 - Forces from D-Day landings and south of France join up.

September 12 - German garrison at Le Havre surrenders. This was an important event because the supplies for the Allied forces were still being shipped through Normandy at the rate of 20,000 tons per day.

September 17 - 25: Battle of Arnhem. It was considered vital to establish a bridgehead across the Rhine and this battle was nearly a great victory. In the event the German resistance was too strong and although the bridges at Nijmegen were captured we could not hold the bridge at Arnhem.

October 4 - British forces land in Greece.

October 14 - Athens liberated. By November 12 the rest of Greece had been liberated.

October 24 - Allied advance in Italy stops at Bologna. Stiff resistance by the German forces combined with exhaustion of our forces and appalling weather delay progress through the winter.

November & December: The Allied forces had advanced on a broad front from the Channel coast to Switzerland. Now it was seriously hampered by unusually heavy rain in November and that target of crossing the Rhine by the end of the year had not been met. The fierce resistance by the German forces both here and in Italy also meant that troops could not be diverted to the Far East to increase the pressure on the Japanese.

December 16 - von Runstedt leads a major counter-attack in the Ardennes with very strong armoured forces. The attack, although anticipated, was a surprise when it occurred. Our defence rested heavily on US forces and lasted until the end of January when the Germans had been pushed back to where they had started with heavy loss of men and equipment. It was the last major German offensive of the war.

1944

RUSSIA

During January the German line was pushed back from Leningrad and in February it was pushed back at the southern end. By June the Russian Army had pushed the Germans back to the border with Poland, Rumania and the Baltic states.

July 22 - Russian forces cross the Vistula and are poised to recapture Warsaw.

July 31 - Warsaw Uprising. At 5pm the resistance in Warsaw totally surprised the German troops by launching an uprising to help the advancing Russian forces and hasten the liberation of Warsaw. Although the Russians were only 10 miles away all air activity ceased and the army stopped attempting to advance.

August 4 - German counter attacks to the Uprising commence. The RAF manages to drop some supplies but still the Russians do nothing to help.

August 22 - Russian forces enter Rumania.

September 10 - Finally the Russians start to attack the German forces outside Warsaw.

October 2 - Polish resistance inside Warsaw surrenders having fought for more than 60 days, often in appalling conditions. The only means of communication between different sectors of the city was through the sewers and in the final stages practically all the fighting took place literally underground.

The Russians chose not to support the uprising because they wanted to be sure that communist sympathisers would establish a post-war puppet government. The whole episode was a disgraceful betrayal of trust in the pursuit of political ends.

September - Russian forces entered Bulgaria and turned north into Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

FAR EAST

In December 1943 British forces entered Burma from India. The Japanese had been steadily increasing their forces and mounted a counter-attack in February. Initially they were successful but our troops dug in and were supplied by air drops. After 10 days the Japanese supplies were exhausted and we had managed to disrupt their supply lines. The Japanese forces broke up into small parties to fight their way back.

In February the Chindits under General Wingate started their attacks behind the Japanese front line.

March 8 - The Japanese counter-attacked again and, again, the key to the battle was supply lines. We were able to keep ours supplied by air long enough to ensure that we could keep our troops fighting until they could force an advance through the Japanese lines in to the interior of Burma. This was finally achieved by the end of June.

Progress continued to be made despite the monsoon weather that turned all roads into mud. Because of the need for troops and equipment for the D-Day landings no extra support could be sent to Burma, but by the end of the year we had two bridgeheads across the Chindwin river ready for the main advance into central Burma.

1944

ON THE HOME FRONT

January 18 - The first of the "Bevin Boys" start training for work in the mines.

February 1 - Clothes rationing lifted.

April 30 - The first "pre-fab" house goes on show in London. It was estimated that at least 500,000 would be required to help replace the housing destroyed by bombing. These houses proved to be remarkably durable - some are still in use in Bristol.

June 13 - First V-1 Flying Bomb lands on London. Immediately they were nick-named "Doodlebugs".

July 18 - Increasing V-1 attacks result in renewed evacuation.

September 8 - First V-2 lands on Chiswick.

December 3 - Home Guard disbanded.

During this year the black-out regulations were eased and "dim-out" regulations were imposed.

Mrs Rose Booty: In 1944 we thought that there would not be any more bombing. On June 13 I was out in the street when I heard a most peculiar noise - a sort of rattle-rattle-rattle. Looking up I could just make out a cross shape and everyone around was wondering what on earth it could be. After a while the sound stopped and then we heard a distant explosion. The next day we found out it was a flying bomb - the V-1 which had already been given the nickname Doodlebug.

We soon learnt that as long as you could hear the noise of the engine the bomb would miss you. The time to worry was when it stopped overhead as you then had to run for cover. One day I was at the telephone exchange (where I worked) and we heard the noise of a V-1. It stopped overhead and then there was an almighty explosion next door. It destroyed two pubs which was a pity!

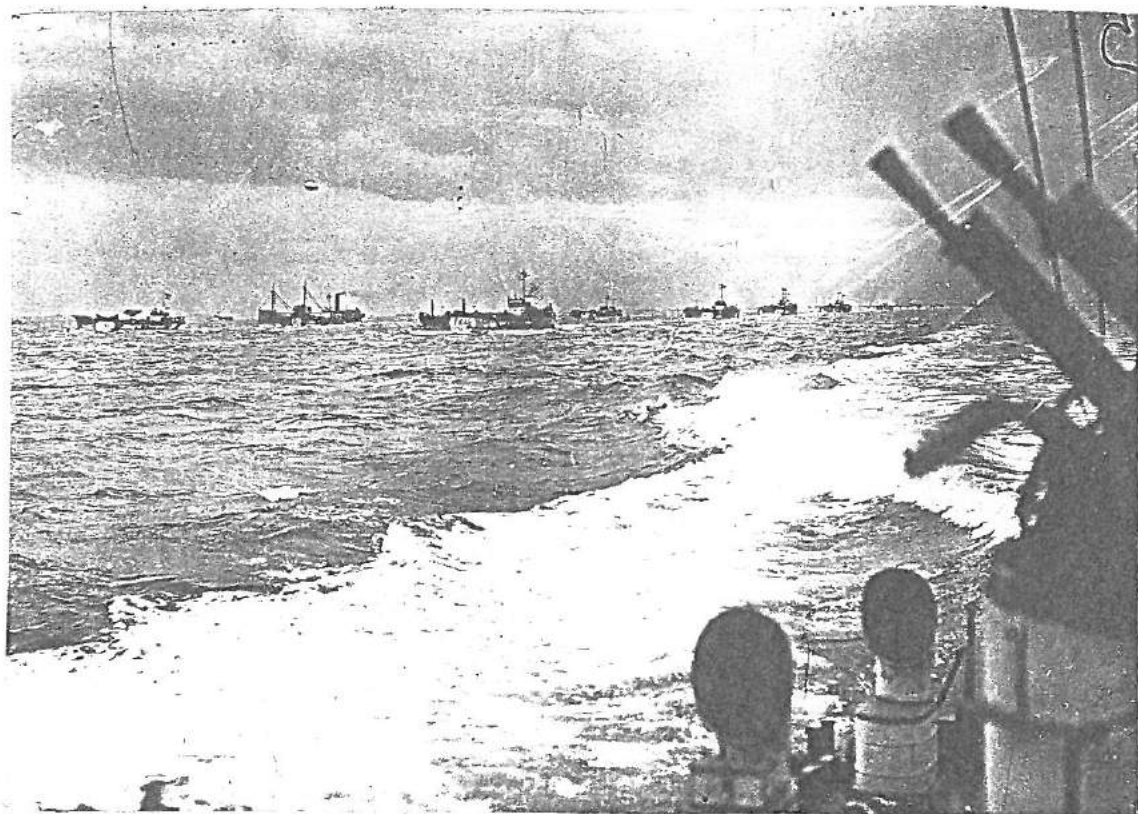
I also remember the V-2 but there was nothing you could do about those. The first thing you knew was the explosion when it hit the ground. I heard and felt a few explosions but we just had to ignore them.

Sid Huntley: I remember the night before the morning of D-Day when hundreds of aircraft flew over carrying troops and towing gliders to France. The sky was full of aircraft as far as one could see and there were several layers. It went on for hours and hours - a sight never to be forgotten and one hopes never to be repeated.

Peter Challen: I was evacuated to India at the beginning of the war and the ship sailed round South Africa to avoid enemy action. In 1944 I returned, via the Suez Canal, and I was at boarding school in Essex. Every night we had a master looking out for V-1's from a sand-bagged observation post on the roof - if he saw one a bell rang in the dormitories and we had to get under our beds for safety. One day he saw one coming very low, it passed about 20 feet away from the tower of the school chapel and landed in a field half a mile away. There was a terrific explosion but fortunately no casualties.



Preparing for invasion by fitting guns and camouflage to Sherman tanks



Crossing the English Channel

WAR ON THE LAND

THE LIBERATION OF EUROPE

Tony Turnbull (Upper Stoke) was a student at Glasgow University when he joined up in 1939. He was able to finish his degree before joining the 76th Highland Field Regiment R.A. as a 2nd Lieutenant in June 1940. As part of the 3rd Infantry Division he was stationed in the south of England on anti-invasion duty until 1944.

The D-Day Landings

In June 1944 the 3rd Division, the last away from Dunkirk, joined with the 50th British Division, the 3rd Canadian Division, the 6th Airborne Division and the Americans to be the first to return to France.

For the invasion the Divisional Artillery had their 25 Pounder Guns replaced with American 105 mm Self Propelled Guns mounted on Sherman Tank chassis. These were waterproofed to allow them to drive through the water onto the beach.

On June 5th they were loaded onto LCT's (Landing Craft Tanks) and taken over to France - at 6.50 am on the 6th June the guns started firing and carried on until the Infantry landed on Sword Beach at 7.25 am. During this time they fired over 200 rounds a minute, about 104 tons of high explosive in addition to that fired from the Navy and rocket ships. They then returned to the beach for their own landing at about 8.30 am.

In order to land the guns and tanks it was first necessary for someone to wade ashore to check that there were no shell-holes in the sea-bed between the LCT's and the waters edge otherwise the guns or tanks could end up submerged and useless. Tony's GPOA (Gun Position Officer's Assistant) volunteered for the job but did not want to get his clothes wet so he undressed and went ashore stark naked but still wearing his steel helmet!

Once ashore Tony's troop of 4 guns were stuck on the beach for 4 hours - it was impossible to move forward due to the congestion of men and vehicles ahead of them and they had to wait for mine clearance to be done. During this time, amongst other targets, they fired over the heads the 6th Airborne Division at Pegasus bridge which they had captured in the early hours of the morning. Eventually they were able to move to a Gun Position further inland. Tony's Troop Commander with his Observation Post Assistant and Signaller had all been killed during the landings so he took over command and was immediately promoted to Captain.

Establishing the Beachead

The Division progressed inland but were bogged down by fierce German counter attacks around Caen. Montgomery's plan was to capture Caen on the first day - in the event it took 6 weeks. The German armour, by holding on to Caen, hindered the buildup of the beachead for the American forces which had landed further west on Utah and Omaha beaches. Eventually the American forces were able to break out and make rapid progress to the south and then east to join up with the other Allied forces at Falaise where the German armies in Normandy were almost totally destroyed.



The Chateau de La Londe



Sherman Tanks in Holland pushing eastwards towards the Rhine

Meanwhile Tony was working in support of the South Lancs. as their Forward Observation Officer. The immediate task was to clear the Germans from the Chateau de La Lande just in front of Caen. This operation was so difficult that this area became known as the "Bloodiest Square Mile in Normandy". Initially the Chateau was captured easily in a silent (no guns) night attack by infantry. However the enemy were quick to respond with heavy and accurate artillery fire followed by a tank offensive that recaptured the position. Faced by 30 Panzer tanks and supporting troops, now dug in to a relatively secure position, it took the British forces 6 days of intense fighting in almost World War 1 trench warfare conditions to overcome the enemy. In so doing our losses were high but theirs were worse - yet another German division so badly mauled that it had to withdraw and reserves had to be committed to the fight.

The clearance of Le Lande enabled the attack on Caen to be resumed. The siege on Caen was finally successful after a 450 bomber raid on 7th July. From Tony's position he saw a huge cloud of dust rise to obliterate the evening sun; it took about half an hour to roll towards his position.

After this the 3rd Division with several Armoured divisions crossed to the east side of the Pegasus Bridge hoping to break out and go on to Paris. In fact they were stuck again due to the lack of surprise, the superb 88mm guns on the German tanks and the weather which broke again and converted the ground to several inches deep mud.

Heading East

In August the Divisional artillery returned to using the 25 Pounder guns. The next big move was from France to Belgium and then on to Holland. It was strange to think that in one night they were able to drive from the Seine to Mons passing through the battlefields that had seen 4 years of fighting in World War 1.

In September and October there was a lot of rather nasty fighting in Holland to try and reach the 1st Airborne Division which had been dropped at Arnhem. On one occasion Tony and his O.P. party had cautiously crawled forward until they reached a little bank. His signaller put the wireless set on the bank, raised his hand to adjust the set and a bullet passed through his wrist. The signaller promptly stood up and walked back our lines and out of the war!

As they progressed through Belgium, Tony saw a number of V-1 flying bombs going overhead to Antwerp after the Allies had recaptured it. The Germans were determined to prevent us from making best use of the port. In Holland Tony witnessed V2 rockets as they were being fired from Holland to England. Reporting on the bearing of their vapour trails enabled the RAF to attack the launch sites - as the launchers were mobile this had to be done as quickly as possible.

On February 27, 1945, his first day in Germany, Tony was involved in an attack through the Reichswald Forest (part of the Siegfried Line) during the clearance of the west bank of the Rhine prior to the assault across the river. The action proved extremely costly, especially in officers. Tony was wounded by gunfire and evacuated to Nijmegen, then Bruges and finally after a 2 week stay in hospital there was flown back to Swindon. After 2 months in a Leicester hospital he went back to Scotland just in time for VE Day.

Footnote - the wartime strength of an Infantry Division is 17,000 men. The casualties suffered by 3rd division between 6 June 1944 and 30 April 1945 numbered 16,241 killed, wounded and missing.

1945

THE FRONT LINE

EUROPE

January - February: The German Army continued to offer stiff resistance as the British forces pushed eastwards from France into Belgium. The objective was to establish a bridgehead over the Rhine from which to launch the final advance across Germany. Further south the US forces advanced to Dusseldorf and Koblenz.

March - The Rhine was crossed and a bridgehead established; by the end of March the US forces were in Frankfurt and the Ruhr was encircled.

April 9 - Allied forces start a new offensive in northern Italy having been delayed throughout the winter by bad weather.

April 12 - President Roosevelt dies.

April 13 - Russian forces enter Vienna.

April 26 - Mussolini shot by Italian partisans.

April 25 - US and Russian forces meet at the Elbe river.

April 29 - German forces in Italy surrender.

April 30 - Hitler commits suicide.

May 8 - Hostilities cease following total German surrender.

FAR EAST

August 6 - Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

August 9 - Atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki.

August 14 - Japan surrenders.

1945

ON THE HOME FRONT

May 9 - Channel Islands liberated. These were the only part of Great Britain to be occupied by the Germans. By the this time the population was near starvation - a typical meal was a stew of cabbage and rabbit skins.

August 21 - President Truman rescinds the Lend-Lease Act and thus stops Britain importing food from the US without having to pay.

Even fiercer austerity conditions prevailed with food, tobacco and petrol imports reduced. British products were largely reserved for export to pay for our imports. The situation was made worse by the shortages of food in Holland- as the German forces retreated they opened floodgates and flooded the low-lying area of the countryside. Now the Dutch were almost at starvation point so Britain had to spare whatever it could to help them.

The Ministry of Food had to continue issuing its regulations and gloomy exhortations to economise and not waste anything: "In canteens and restaurants, don't ask for bread unless you intend to eat it. Bread means lives! Don't waste a crumb!"

VE-DAY 1945

Sir Bernard Lovell - extracts from wartime diary:

Tuesday May 1st

Last Saturday the news leaked out that Himmler had offered unconditional surrender to Britain and the US but not to Russia! The reply was, of course, that only unconditional surrender to Russia as well would be contemplated. Since then the world has been agog and London believes the end could be imminent. Count Bernadotte - the Swedish intermediary - has again seen Himmler's representative and more news is expected within the next 48 hours. Hitler is said to be dead or dying and it is believed that Himmler is the only one of the gang who still exercises any authority. Germany is indeed in a mess. The Russians have almost cleared Berlin and we have met them on the Elbe. Italy has been almost cleared and the tally of prisoners everywhere is enormous. Mussolini has been captured, killed and publicly maltreated in Milan.

A week yesterday all dim out and black out restrictions were removed and Joyce and I went in to Bath on the 10pm train to see the lights from Beechen Cliff. What a moment! Afterwards we walked home in a marvellous moonlit night with nightingales singing around us.

Tuesday May 8th

THIS IS VE DAY! The war in Europe is over at last!! Great events have happened in quick succession in the last few days that it is impossible to realise the meaning of this climax. Last Wednesday left the children at Fordside (Limpley Stoke) and went back to Malvern to clear up. That night it was announced that the German armies in Italy had surrendered to Alexander and this included a large part of Austria and 2,000,000 men. The next day the whole northern group surrendered to Montgomery - another 2,000,000! In fact there are surrenders all over the place and the only question was how long the Germans would hold out in Norway, the Channel Islands, the French ports and Czechoslovakia.

Returned to Fordside on Friday night, and had a game of golf with Johnnie (Gordon Chesterman, now living in Freshford) on the Saturday.

Monday I went to Bletchley Park and in the afternoon heard the BBC say that two hours ago the German Foreign Minister had broadcast that Germany was surrendering unconditionally. Churchill was expected to speak later in the evening. I left for Bath at 4.30, and although there were a few flags appearing, there were no great demonstrations or excitement and it was not until I reached Fordside that I realised this was not VE Day after all. The 9 pm news announced that the morrow would be VE Day and Churchill would broadcast at 3pm and the King at 9.

So here we are all safely together on this day. Very warm and balmy with the children asleep after lunch because tonight, in fulfilment of a long standing promise, they can stay up as long as they like. We hope to take them into Bath tonight. This morning Johnnie has hung a big Union Jack from the roof and the village is full of flags. The tremendous relief and joy today is tempered by the knowledge that even at this hour the nations are again squabbling. In San Francisco, where the nations of the world are assembled to frame the international peace charter, the British and Americans cannot agree with Russia over the Polish business and at the week end, when Molotov said that the 16 Polish "democrats" had been arrested, the talks were suspended.

(The Polish business was to do with the Russians manipulating a puppet government into power and literally eliminating the popular leaders of the Warsaw uprising and the resistance. This was contrary to their promises to allow free elections)

VE-DAY 1945

Friday 11th May

To continue the story of VE Day - Churchill spoke at 3, but didn't have much to say. Johnnie and I then had a super game of golf at Sham. But the climax came in the evening. We listened to the King at 9 and then all the family drove into Bath. Arrived at an Aunt's house on Beechen Cliff at about 10 just as the bonfires were lighting up. What a sight Bath was from there. Joyce, Johnnie and I then walked into the town and it was quite unforgettable. Hundreds of children stoking enormous bonfires on blitzed sites, streets full of singing and merry crowds, a few fireworks going off but best of all to see the Abbey, the Weir and Sham Castle floodlit again!

It was quite impossible to grasp that the war was over, the lights were up and these hundreds of people were celebrating again. It was a perfect evening for celebrations too - marvelously warm and calm. We climbed back to Beechen Cliff about 11pm and Susan and Bryan were still wide awake and happy and all the way home they were shouting goodnight and cheerio to the passers by.

Then at midnight Johnnie lit up the Fordside bonfire, the nightingale sang and Stewart Macpherson described the scenes at Piccadilly at 12-15.

V+1 day (Wednesday) started off well - we all drove to Bath again and walked through the streets to see the decorations. How amazing to see Russian flags flying in Bath! I went to the golf course in the evening and stayed there until 1030 when the lights came up on Sham and Bath with its Abbey floodlit and bonfires and fireworks looked a dream. There still seemed to be plentiful rejoicing to judge from the noise coming up.

Susan Driver (who was living at Fordside at the end of the war, aged 7):

About a week before VE-Day I was sent upstairs by Granny to tell my parents that "Hitler is dead". After a few days we heard the announcement of the end of the war on the radio and Grandfather (Mr W P Chesterman) said an extra long grace before supper for gratitude and a prayer for those who would not see loved ones again. We listened to the King's speech on the radio and then drove to Beechen Cliff with the canvas roof of the car down. Johnnie managed to sit with his legs sticking out over the side of the car and somehow had obtained a large bag of oranges. He threw one to every pretty girl he saw.

I particularly remember the lights in Bath and the feeling of joy that it was all right to show lights again and that it was possible to make a car journey for no particular purpose. Petrol had been rationed for so long that everyone thought about whether any journey was really necessary.



8th June, 1946

TO-DAY, AS WE CELEBRATE VICTORY, I send this personal message to you and all other boys and girls at school. For you have shared in the hardships and dangers of a total war and you have shared no less in the triumph of the Allied Nations.

I know you will always feel proud to belong to a country which was capable of such supreme effort; proud, too, of parents and elder brothers and sisters who by their courage, endurance and enterprise brought victory. May these qualities be yours as you grow up and join in the common effort to establish among the nations of the world unity and peace.

George R.I.

POSTSCRIPT 1946 - 1989

The end of the war did not mean the end of hardship for a very considerable time. The political consequences of the Allied victory are well-known, suffice it to say that the defeat of one dictatorship was replaced with the imposition of another in eastern Europe. The communist bloc under Stalin and his successors made the lives of millions a misery which was not relieved until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

The following events record the slow progress back to normality.

1946

February 7 - Food rations to be cut in response to world shortages. Butter, margarine and cooking fat cut down from 8 to 7 ozs per person per week.

March 8 - Good news - bananas at Covent Garden for the first time since 1939. Also clothing regulations eased - you could now have as many pleats, pockets, buttons, fur trimming as you wanted always assuming that you had the requisite number of coupons.

May - Bread rationed for the first time due to the reduction in wheat imports.

August - Newspapers report a flourishing Black Market in chocolates, nylons and perfumes.

December 12 - Lack of coal from the mines led to a slowing down of industrial production. Now a 4-day week was introduced for many factories in the Midlands.

Britain's reserves were all but exhausted with £4000 million of foreign investments gone and exports below half of the pre-war level.

1947

22 January - Meat rations reduced again.

28 January - Power cuts as freezing weather brings the country to a standstill. This was the coldest winter since 1880-81 and although coal was being produced the bad weather prevented it from being moved by rail or road.

The freezing weather continued until March whereupon the thaw caused flooding of 500,000 acres of wheat and the drowning of 2 million sheep.

1948

July 27 - Bread rationing ends.

September 9 - Footwear rationing ends.

1949

March 15 - Clothes rationing ends.

April 24 - Chocolate and sweets rationing ends.

POSTSCRIPT 1946 - 1989

1950

May 26 - Petrol rationing ends 10 years after it was introduced. Ironically this also marked the start of Bank Holiday traffic jams!

1951

January 27 - Meat rations reduced yet again. The weekly allowance of fresh meat was equivalent of 4 ozs of rump steak. Processed meat such as spam and sausages were quite easily available.

1952

February 21 - Identity Cards abolished.

1954

July 3 - All food rationing ends - meat was the last food to be rationed.