

My Recollections of the War

!8 pages

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Article No. 8

I started writing my wartime experiences in response to TV programmes and articles that I found annoying because of the many inaccuracies in the events they were supposed to portray. I felt the urge to record my experiences of the war as I remembered it. Fortunately the web has helped me ensure that my memory has not distorted the facts, especially the sequence of events.

At the time of writing the intention was simply to record my experiences principally as a memory exercise, but I have found that it has also brought back memories to others who had also experienced the war.

I was twelve when the war started in September 1939 and was already interested in transport, especially aircraft. There were plenty of people around for me to admire and eventually to meet and even to work with. These are the memories that I am happy to recall, together with the wartime conditions prevailing at the time.

My introduction to the popular music of the time came whilst working at RAF Kidbrooke in 1941, where the "Skyrockets" was the resident Royal Air Force dance orchestra. This was the start of my interest in music. The Ted Heath Orchestra, now recognised as one of the world's greatest swing bands, was lead by trumpeters Kenny Baker and Stan Roderick. Stan later became one of my neighbours and was surprised to hear that I had attended most of their 100 London Palladium concerts and even had records featuring some of his early pre-war solos. Stan was badly injured in a defence action at the time of Dunkirk and was later repatriated on a stretcher. He had many wartime and musical stories to relate.

In many ways I consider myself fortunate to have lived at a time when we all had a common interest -to survive- whilst able to listen to popular music and entertainment that has stood the test of time.

One of my friends told me that June Balshaw of Greenwich University might be interested in this article as she was collecting first hand information on the last war, so I sent the following e-mail attaching a copy:

"Dear Dr June Balshaw,

Some years ago my daughters asked me about my wartime experiences and having nothing better to do decided to put into writing the things I could remember. When finished I realised that there was little in it that would be of interest to anybody else, I think my daughters also confirmed this.

However the article has now been read by people of a similar age to me and apparently it has reminded them of their own personal memories, so perhaps it wasn't a complete waste of time after all.

Looking back no one experience stands out, just little things that together contributed to my wartime experiences, similar to many others who were too young to have played a more active part in the war. It is these individual experiences that I find so interesting and impossible to recapture in so called reality television programmes.

I understand you are still interested in receiving wartime experiences and therefore have attached a copy of an article recalling my wartime experiences hoping that you too may find something of interest".

I received the following reply:

"Many thanks for your email and the enclosed account of your wartime memories. Your memories have provided a very interesting personal account of the war and will

Page 2

be a valuable addition to our archive.

Many thanks for your help and interest in our project. It is much appreciated”.

I was also made aware that the Daily Telegraph was asking for personal accounts of the war and so sent them a copy with the following reply:

“Thank you very much for sending us your Recollections of the War article, we all found them interesting and intend publishing them in the near future

Again thank you,

Emma Firth

Daily Telegraph”

Whilst people of my age evidently found something of interest in my article and have encouraged me to record more of my experiences, I was disappointed that it appeared of little interest to the younger generation.. Perhaps I should not have been surprised as the war must seem to them like ancient history. After all there are far more important things for them to talk about and, if seeing films based on the war, entertainment value is much more important than accuracy in facts.

Today it does not seem important that so many lost their lives in order that they should enjoy their freedom, but hopefully one day the significance of the Battle of Britain will be appreciated.

Alan Mann