

THE WAR

I was six when the war started, and eleven when it ended, people ask me what I remember about the war, it is odd the things you do remember. The sounds are clear. The air raid warning siren, and the all clear, also a siren, but different obviously. The sound of air raids, the guns shooting. My mother could distinguish the sound of the German plane engines and say "there goes another one " and sure enough the warning would go off, and the shooting begin; the barrage balloons like large elephants in the sky. At night one could read a newspaper at our house by the light of Plymouth burning 18 miles away. The 'black out', a very real necessity as a bomber plane off-loading bombs on his hasty way home is obviously going to look for a light to drop them on, and we were on their direct route home.

There was the rationing of course. Country folk suffered less than those in large towns. In fact I remember my mother sending chickens by post to London friends, and also Daffodils - she reckoned they needed some colour in their lives. I suppose her father sent his goods by post some of the time, so she learned how to pack them. I was in London once, long after the war, visiting friends, when some Daffodils from her arrived and it was remarkable how fresh they managed to look. Then there were always rabbits to catch, eating rabbit in England was quite common in those days, since then they got a disease called Myxamatosis and people never quite went back to eating them the same way after that. Anyway in those days they were much sought. I used to go 'rabbiting' with the Frood boys. They had a tame ferret that would - 'ferret' them out of the burrows, and then Nell the whippet dog would give chase and catch them. As I was the novice, and the female probably, it was my task to kill, skin and draw them. I can remember the tensions that surrounded the news broadcasts, the general talk of war enemies, and the fear when the war effort was not going our way. We were having a bible study the other day and some were saying that God spoke to them in dreams at times, I had to sadly inform them that more often than not in any dream that I remembered, the Germans were chasing me up hill and down dale! Going around with a gas mask slung over your shoulder if far from home, I remember. And clambering under the table in the middle of the night as we did not have an Anderson shelter. These shelters were large table like constructions made out of cast iron, The idea being that if one's house collapsed, the people in the shelter would remain safe. I don't think they would have been much help against a direct hit, mostly folk used them as tables - in the meantime. As far as the actual war was concerned, you or your family or friends were either killed or not, but the effects of the war in a country last generation after generation.

Doc being at that time too old to go to war, became a police reservist and had a police uniform. My mother said that of all his achievements he was most proud of that uniform. Again I think because he was small. When he died they gave him a police funeral of which I feel sure he would also have been proud - but that was still much work and many years away. He worked up quite a considerable local practice, in the absence of other doctors who were called up. This practice extended through some of the other little coastal villages. We had sold our Austin eight by that time, but had to get another little car for this reason, as far as I remember it was a two-seater, and had a canvas draw-over roof. It had to be cranked up to persuade it to start.

George, Doc's son, ended up in the Burma campaign, and sent to him the most extraordinary and interesting letters of his experiences, largely to do with the appalling conditions that the wounded Japanese soldiers were left in by their retreating army. It always struck me as such a coincidence that he should be witnessing the fighting as it took place over the rubber plantations in which his father had invested all his money. Doc took the loss of all his investments badly as one can imagine. Along with the realisation that the convalescent home was not to be, and that somehow he had to build a home for his family out of what he had in the way of building