

## **A schoolgirl remembers 1939-1945 by Kathleen McCarty**

In September 1939 my sister Mary aged 11 and brother, John aged 6 and myself Kathleen aged 12 went into the unknown with most of the pupils from our South-east London school. We three had never had a holiday away from home before, just days out, so we left our parents with some excitement and apprehension.

We were first evacuated to Lowfield Heath, a village near Horley, Sussex (now close to Gatwick airport). People willing to accommodate children from London congregated in the village school and made their selection. We three were fortunate to be housed together on a poultry farm and we had a very happy time. This period was known as the 'Phoney War'. Nothing happened for some time, just the testing of an air raid siren which to us was frightening. Eventually some of us returned to our homes in London - but then the air-raids started for real. So in 1940 we evacuated again, this time to Newton Abbot in Devon, with gas masks!

Again we were fortunate to be billeted together with a very nice couple and their daughter. They were caretakers of a very large office block with living quarters at the top of the building. This was near Newton Abbot Railway Station. One afternoon enemy aircraft flew over Courtney Park next to the station and bombed the troop train, which was stationary. Two aircraft swooped low over the park firing machine guns. On another raid the garden of the block we lived in received a direct hit and our foster mother's brother and her mother killed.

Education was seriously disrupted - I received permission to leave school aged 13.5yrs to get a job, our father was ill so we returned to London in 1942. Landmines were dropped on residential areas and waves of enemy bombers came over day and night dropping bombs. We had our air-raid shelter called a Morrison shelter in our sitting room which was like a steel table. When the siren sounded we and our pets would shelter under this. Some folk had corrugated Anderson shelters in their gardens, but these would sometimes let in rainwater so had to sit in damp areas. The London underground was a safe place to shelter in a raid, but we lived in South London and had no tube underground. The drone of enemy aircraft on a moonlit night was frightening - we would ask "Is it one of ours?"

The unmanned missiles called V1s also known as Doodlebugs and V2 rockets were particularly dangerous. When doodlebugs went over they made a droning sound and then cut out and no one knew where they would land and then explode. The V2 had no sound just an explosion.

We wondered would the war ever end, consoling ourselves "It'll be over by Christmas"...