

The Diary
of
Brionaidh
Macduff
1939-1945

This is my diary, written just after World War II. I was born on 16th October 1932 and have two older siblings, Janet and David, all born and bred in Glasgow. We lived in the city with our parents and my mother's side of the family were close by. I was only 7 years old when the war began. When air raids started, it was too dangerous for us to stay and we were evacuated.

All the children in our part of the city had assembled in the school playground. We all had name tags and gas masks around our necks. We marched to the train station and boarded a train, everyone waving to their family. After what felt like a long journey we met the people that we had been forced upon. No one had any idea of what lied ahead, or when they would see their family again.

We all stayed with a middle-aged couple in a small village in Ayr-shire. Air-raids were still a small risk so I helped make the Anderson shelter at the back of the house. We started a new school and made some friends, most were also evacuees. Many of my friends couldn't read or write so we were split up during class. Most of the teachers were woman as the men had been sent to war.

I was too young to do any work at first but when I grew older I became a land girl and earned 32 shillings a week. I worked on a farm near their house and harvested or planted the crops. It was great as we all made friends and it kept us busy. I wanted work in the forces but Mr and Mrs Mackay wouldn't hear of it. "We don't want the blame if you die," they would always say. I suppose they were right, mum and dad would be devastated.

Eventually it was safe to go home. We were upset a little upset because we had grown quite close but it was brilliant to see mum and dad again. Our house had been hit in an air-raid so we had to live with Granny and Granddad Schultz as their house was undamaged.

Money and food was scarce as the freight ships had been torpedoed by Hitler. Food was rationed equally and collected each week. When a certain amount of points were gained, luxuries, like jam, became available. My ration book was green, like Janet's and David's. Adults ones were brown. Clothes were also rationed in a different way. Coupons were available from the grocers and once you had a certain amount, an item of clothing could be bought. There were also mend and make-do classes to encourage material to be reused.

I continued my work as a land girl and help mum and granny around the house. Close to the end of the war, when I was 13, I went to the local primary school to help do after school play with the children.

My sister, Janet, the middle child in our family and was 12 years old when the war begun.

When she was a bit older, Janet worked a few days a week in the munitions factory. She earned roughly 5 shillings an hour. The work was boring but she kept at it. There were strict rules at the factory like: not allowed to wear wellies outside the factory.

On one occasion, a building containing highly flammable compounds went up in flames. Janet was working at the other end of the factory in a different building and wasn't affected.

Her work consisted of putting gunpowder into shells, which then led to handling much more dangerous substances like lydite. Many of the factory workers had suffered from lydite poisoning, which could cause death. Janet wasn't going to take that risk and left the factory.

She then helped harvesting crops for the local farmers and we occasionally worked together. She had always loved being outside and valued the fresh air more than ever after working in the stuffy factory for so long.

At home, she took up the role of mum when she was at the WVS centre. She collected the vegetables from the garden and prepared the meals. She helped granny clean the house and learnt how to sew and knit. Sometimes she helped with the "Mend and Make-do" classes.

When we were in Ayr she became close to a boy her age. When we had moved back home she met him again and now that the war is over, they plan to marry.

David is the oldest child in our family and was 16 years old when the war began. He had left school at 14 to work on granddad Macduff's dairy farm in Culbokie. He worked there for 3 years and earned 6 shillings a week.

Three months after his 17th birthday, David decided to train in the Royal Air Force. Mum objected bitterly to this, David was convinced that it was the right thing to do. He persuaded her that he would be fine and convinced her, with the help of dad, to let him go. When he turned 18 he was able to fly planes over Britain in an effort to protect us. His wage was about £3.

He gradually moved up the ranks and seemed to have a talent and knew what he was doing. He flew through many small air-raids and helped to surround and capture many German bases.

On Thursday 13th March 1941, his team were flying towards Bathgate as there was warning of an air-raid. The raid was so close to our homes (we were in Ayr at the time though) that mum could hear them from the house and in the Anderson shelter. She said that there had been shrapnel everywhere the next day.

That was the Glasgow blitz. The massive raid took our house and as David had been caught in it everyone assumed he was dead. After a month there had been no telegram so there was still hope.

When one did come, mum burst into tears before it was open. Dad read it and reassured her that it was ok. David had been badly injured as his plane had come down in the blitz. He was the only person in the plane to survive but his injury was so bad that he had to have a leg amputated.

When Janet and I had returned from the Mackay's we were shocked to see that he was still alive. We had been told about the blitz and all the damage caused. David had changed so much. He was no longer the smiling boy that had left 2 years ago. His face was rough and he looked sullen and depressed. His eyes were unfocused and he looked traumatised. What shocked me most was the stump that was there instead of his leg.

It was as though this was worse than dying, this going backwards-becoming "in-cable" and having to rely on others.

My mother, June, had lived in Glasgow her whole life and was 33 at the beginning of the war. She was a housewife before the war but knew that she had to do something to help.

In 1940 she joined the Woman's Voluntary Service (WVS). They cared for families whose houses had been bombed and managed the military canteens. They also prepared food parcels and were there to assist in any emergency.

They had to buy their own uniforms but didn't have to use their valuable coupons. The coats and dresses were bottle green, trimmed with wine colour. They had wine-coloured cardigans, green and wine scarves and felt hats with badges and hat-bands. The uniforms were long lasting so she only needed one for the whole time that she took part.

When the blitz hit Glasgow, mum was rushed off her feet. Many needed first aid and some needed special care. She was sent to find shelter for the people that had been made homeless. The mobile canteen was always busy as there were extra wardens on patrol.

She also had to organise recycling campaigns as there weren't enough extra resources. When the evacuees came back to find that they had no home or family to go to she had to care for them with a team of other women. They also had to administer medicine when these children were ill.

Big shops and warehouses distributed clothes to the WVS centres. These were exchanged or rationed if there were bombs dropped and people had no extra clothes of their own. Articles of clothing were bought in thousands to help relieve the situation.

Mum loved doing this even though she didn't really get paid. She liked to know that she was doing her bit to help in war. Despite the dangers that she could have faced she continued with her good work. At times she was so focused on the welfare of those in her care that she forgot about the commotion outside the centre.

My father, John, was 39 at the start of the war and came from Culbokie. He went to Glasgow to study engineering and was a trained civil engineer.

He was well known for his talents and was asked to help in the manufacture of the war ships and fighter jets. After they were built he had to make sure that they were always safe and did regular maintenance checks.

He took part in the making of Spitfires, Hurricanes and the new Boulton- Paul Defiant. It was essential that these were made to the highest standard so that more of the opposition would be lost than the lives of our own pilots.

His team helped to develop new methods of shooting and more efficient guns etc on the aircraft. Many of their designs had an effect on how well the allied forces did in the air. The team also designed huge ships to transport soldiers and supplies abroad to war zones. These also had to be strong in case of an attack at sea.

When the war was nearly over, his expertise was no longer required in that department. Instead he designed roads and bridges to replace those that had been torn down in the conflict. He had been recommended by the company he had worked for and was soon out on many different projects that would bring the country back to normal.

Margaret Schultz was my maternal grandmother, and married in 1905. She had lived in Glasgow since she was born and at 52 years old, was a retired seamstress before the war.

She decided to use her talent and held "Mend and Make-do" classes twice a week in the city hall. These classes taught people how to use the material they had to mend other items of clothing. She showed them how to mend a torn dress using material from other clothing, which looked great. These classes were useful as it meant that people could save their coupons for when no mending could fix the clothing.

When she wasn't holding or planning the classes, she took up first aid so that when a disaster happened, she would deal with minor injuries while nurses sorted out more life threatening ones. After her training she put her practical skills to the test. The team would walk around the streets wearing tin hats looking for anyone that required assistance. When the siren rang, they had to go to the first aid post, opposite the church, and deal with the situation.

The first real emergencies were during the blitz. Loads of houses had been destroyed, leaving many injured or fighting for their life. She was rushing about with the team trying to help as many people as she could. As she was only trained in first aid, there were many people that she couldn't help. The nurses had so many serious cases that there wasn't enough people or time to help everyone.

Now that the war is over, she is glad that she helped to so many people but admits that at times she felt that she could have done more to help those in a more serious state.

Norbert Schultz was my maternal grandfather. He was born in Munich but moved to Glasgow with his parents in 1890 to escape poverty. He had his own joinery business and was 57 years old at the beginning of the war.

He couldn't really do much as a joiner so he trained to be an air raid warden. He helped the police, and other volunteers, to protect citizens when the frequent air raids took place.

Other duties included ensuring that the blackout was observed, sounding air raid sirens, ensuring that people went into public air raid shelters in an orderly fashion, checking gas masks, evacuating areas around unexploded bombs, helping to rescue casualties from bomb damaged properties, finding accommodation for people who had been bombed out, judging the damage and informing the Control Centre to send out the rescue services.

At the beginning of the war, the wardens had no uniform, so they wore their own clothes, with the addition of a steel helmet, Wellington boots and an armband. In May 1941 full-time and regular part-time wardens were issued with blue serge uniforms.

During the blitz the wardens were regarded as heroic. In the aftermath of air raids they were there first dealing with any problems. Most of the work was similar to the WVS and medical/emergency services. He surveyed his sector during the raids to make sure that everyone was safe, often risking his life for others.

Unfortunately, during a large air raid during the blitz, he was helping a fellow warden and lost his life. Even though his life was lost, so many others had been saved.

Agnes Macduff was from Inverness and was a primary school teacher in Culbokie. She was my paternal grandmother, and married in 1898.

Before the war she came close to losing her job but because the men were being called up for war, she was needed more than ever. The school became quite crowded with all the evacuees. Many were illiterate which made teaching hard. She took the class that was least advanced and soon had them all up to the standard of the rest of the school.

When she wasn't teaching, she helped around the dairy farm and when the war got serious, she trained to become a nurse. After four years training, she was ready. She went in the ambulances and saved many lives. The dress she wore was pale primrose colour, as she was a junior nurse. When she became a senior near the end of the war, she wore a pale blue dress, and sisters wore green. All had soft, white collars and cuffs. She also wore a brown cape lined with light fawn and matching shoes and stockings. Starched wrap-around aprons were worn on duty and were removed when leaving the wards.

The blitz brought so much death that she thought that she couldn't go on. Then she realised that she was making a difference. Her work continued and when she became a senior nurse she became very determined do her best to help the casualties, most of which were from the air-raids.

She still worked as a nurse part time after the war as well as teaching at the primary school.

Donald Macduff, my paternal grandfather, owned a dairy farm in Culbokie. During the war, he provided milk for rationing and joined the home guard, also known as Dad's Army.

The people in the Home Guard were volunteers who were either too old or too young to fight. At first they had no uniform apart from an armband that said L.D.V (Local Defence Volunteers). They also had to make their own weapons which often consisted of pieces of pipe with knives or bayonets fixed on to the end, pickaxes, crowbars and dummy rifles. There were many donations of rifles and shotguns and as time passed they were given proper weapons. Most of these were from the previous war or Canada and America.

In 1940, uniforms were issued. At first only some got the khaki battle clothing and later all were given steel hats, greatcoats and water proof capes. The Home Guard was formed to delay an enemy invasion force for as long as possible and to give the Government and the army time to organise a front line.

They trained in the evening in such things as weapons handling, unarmed combat and basic sabotage. There were complaints made that too much time was spent on drill as instead of learning about proper soldiering.

He liked to think that he was helping to bring the war to a close and had the great experience, without as much danger.

Bibliography

Internet

BBC

Channel 4 history

Wartime memories

Learning curve

Spartacus

Websites from Google

Books from school