



Memories of an evacuee

By Colin Bell

When I was 11, I changed school, I went to what would be, it was Itchen Secondary School, its Itchen Grammar School now and I turned up with my mother at the school just outside Bitterne. We were to all be taken by bus to Southampton Central station because we were evacuated on block to Andover. This was the 1st September 1939, war broke out 3 days later. We were taken down to Southampton Central by bus but had to make their own way there. Our parents had to go by bus, just to wave goodbye and that sort of thing. There were people crying but I thought it was wonderful, it was an exciting thing to do.

I didn't know anyone to start with but I think I knew one of the boys' I was billeted with. There were three of us billeted with an old age pension couple, that was just temporary. One of them I knew...slightly, and the other one had come from a private school and he cried all night. But that was only temporary and we were broken up and I went to a couple that had a son of their own. It was a lovely house and then she developed cancer and I had to leave. I think her name was Miss or Mrs Jones. When I lived with her I didn't get home till it was dark, because it was winter and we finished at half past 4. She used to put my food in front of me and then sit in a corner and glare at me. But that was only temporary.

Then I was sent to another place, which was near Andover station and there were 2 of us evacuees and they had 2 children of their own. The father was away in the Army and 2 lovely ladies staying there used to pat me on the head and give me tuppence now and again. When my mother visited, she found out that they were prostitutes. But during that time, I was in that house I spent most mornings on Andover Junction station. And I became very friendly with the porters, and all that, they let me sit in front of their fires. I used to have a cup of tea with them and I used to help them now and again. One of them used to give me a penny every now and again for the help.

During the time, I spent on that station, I saw three trains arrive, this was at the time of Dunkirk. Three trains, LNER trains...you could tell that they were LNER trains by the different colour doors. All these French and Belgian soldiers came out and stood on the platform and they were all dirty and covered in mud. Some had uniforms and some had half uniforms and some had bits of luggage and some were only in blankets. The thing I remember more than anything is the silence, they just stood there and looked down, didn't move, didn't talk to one another. The reason they were taken to Andover Junction was because on the other side of the platform was a Great Western Depot. There they would be put on the Great Western trains to be taken down to places like Ludgershall in Tidworth where the Army camps were. I should never forget that day, the silence. I mean I was an



evacuee myself but I didn't lose everything but they did, they lost home, wives, and family Every Armistice Day I bring them to mind. They must have been rescued from Dunkirk. It was that time. This was why they had all the mud over them, you know the sea stuff and all that. I never really found out.

In the summer of 1939 I was sent to work on a farm in Houghton. It was owned by the parents of the lady I was staying with. I was sent down there with them and I helped on the farm. They actually paid me for it as well and I made great friends with the farmer's son. He used to take me rabbit shooting and that sort of thing. I saw the beginning of the LBD which became the Home Guard. I saw them on a green practicing with broom sticks and rakes on their shoulders and the farmer's son was in charge of them because he was the only one who had a gun. The farmer's son must have been about 19 or 20. He wasn't called up because he was in that sort of profession but while I was there I saw a lot of the Battle of Britain. I saw German planes fly across and the Spitfires attacked them, several times we had to dive into a ditch. Bullets flying about but I never saw anyone hurt. I saw a lot of planes shot down but I never saw anyone hurt at all.

