

GROVE NEWS

Monday 4th September 1939

Mr Morgan

WE ARE AT



Neville Chamberlain making the announcement live on the BBC last night.

Last night, it was announced that Britain is now at war with Germany. Speaking from the cabinet room at 10 Downing Street, Mr Neville Chamberlain declared that Germany had not responded to requests to leave Poland and thus we are now at war with Germany and her allies.

Tensions between Germany and Europe have been high for months now and this was the final straw. Mr Chamberlain had been striving to maintain the peace for months but has ultimately failed.

Adolf Hitler had led his German army into Poland on September 1st in an attempt to regain land that had been lost as a result of WW1.

Germany had previously entered the Rhineland in 1936, Czechoslovakia in 1938 and now Poland.

In March, Mr Chamberlain promised Poland that Britain and France would come to their aid if Germany invaded and he has remained true to his word.

Mr Chamberlain had requested that Germany withdraw their troops from Poland by 11am yesterday morning or face the prospect of war. Chamberlain added that "I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received and that consequently, this country is at war with Germany."

Hitler responded with "Britain need expect nothing other than annihilation as an enemy of Germany."

France, who are closely allied to Britain, followed suit by declaring war on Germany at 5 o'clock yesterday evening.

At this stage, it is unclear what is going to happen next. You may be required to enlist in the armed forces to remove Germany from Poland and other countries across Europe.

Blood will be shed and lives will be lost but in the words of King George VI "There may be dark days ahead but with God's help we shall prevail."

Britain and France declare war on Germany!

Britain and France are at war with Germany following the invasion of Poland two days ago.

At 11:15 in the morning, Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, announced the British deadline for the withdrawal of German troops from Poland had expired. He said the British ambassador, who is in Berlin, had handed a final note to the German government this morning saying unless it announced plans to withdraw from Poland by 11am, a state of war would exist between the two countries. During his radio broadcast, Mr Chamberlain continued: "I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received and consequently this country is at war with Germany."

Similarly the French issued an ultimatum, which was presented in Berlin at 12:30pm, saying France would be at war unless a 1700 hour deadline for the troops' withdrawal was adhered to.

Later that day, King George has called upon "my people at home and my peoples across the seas". He continued: "I ask them to stand calm, firm and united in this time of trial. The task will be hard. There may be dark days ahead and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield. But we can only do the right as we see the right and reverently commit our cause to God."

With immediate effect, the National Service (Armed Forces) Act has been passed making all men, who between 18 and 41, liable for conscription. The armed forces have already been mobilized for war and in July the first Territorial Army conscripts were called up.

Latest reports from Poland say the Germans have bombed a number of towns and cities, some with little or no strategic importance. About 1,500 are reported to have been killed or injured in the attacks on Friday and Saturday.

In his broadcast to the nation, Mr Chamberlain spoke of his sadness that "the long struggle to win peace" had failed. He continued: "I cannot believe that there is anything more or anything different that I could have done and that would have been more successful." Yesterday there was anger in the House of Commons over the Government's apparent delay in taking action against Germany. Labour's deputy leader Arthur Greenwood had accused the Prime Minister of vacillating when "Britain and all that Britain stands for are in peril".

Today's declaration of war was received with rousing cheers. As Mr Chamberlain informed the House Britain could not take part in a five-power conference proposed by Italy while Poland was being invaded. It has also been received with great enthusiasm in the Polish capital, Warsaw, where crowds took to the streets outside the British and French embassies cheering and singing.

Wellington

I was on holiday with my parents in Llandudno when War was declared. Being nearly five I knew something important was happening from the concern shown by all the adults. We went to the Prom and looked out to sea where there was a large tanker and I remember my father telling me that there would be many more ships soon.

The smell of the gas mask remains with me. The gas mask was contained in a brown cardboard box which was carried everywhere and I also remember vividly the air-raid drill of walking from school into horrible dank underground shelters where often frogs would be hopping around.

On hearing a siren today my mind turns to the times when we heard them over Wellington (Shropshire) especially at night time. The bombers used to fly over us on their way to Liverpool and bombs were dropped, probably accidentally. If I was staying with my grandparents the cellar with its earthy smell was our refuge and I remember one night especially when we were woken up by the whole house being shaken and a terrible noise. My uncle, who was on leave, tried to pacify me by pretending to be Hitler with a moustache which he stuck to his upper lip. When I was at home we also had a cellar but ours was cold, very cold and just Mum and my three sisters would trail down there with eiderdowns. Dad was on ARP duty.

I seem to remember staying with another aunt in Walsall the night Coventry was bombed. At that time we had to go outside to an Anderson Shelter in the garden.

At school everything was in short supply. We had to write between lines and on the covers of our books. The excitement of getting a new workbook remains with me and generally the shortages of my childhood years still affect me today - saving paper, washing plastic bags, making something from nothing etc. We had ink in inkwells and no biros of course. We had sufficient food as my grandfather had a shop and food from the country was exchanged for other goods in short supply. We kept ducks in our back garden and my grandfather kept pigs and hens in the back yard. He also had a garden full of vegetables. My sisters and I used to quarrel though over queuing for a pound of sausages every Saturday morning. The queue stretched out of the shop and down the road. The first bananas after the war were WONDERFUL. Our diet was plain and simple but, knowing nothing of exotic foods, didn't really bother us.

Clothes were in short supply and the market, together with a friend who was a dressmaker, enabled my mother to clothe us but I can remember my grandmother and aunt supplying coupons from time to time. Generally ration books were a part of life and carried everywhere.

VJ Day was a day to remember. Everyone was gathered in the Square in Wellington. Fireworks were being thrown and one landed in the pocket of my aunt's coat and we smelt burning!

My main overall recollection was the pitch-blackness of night-time and of having to carry a torch when walking.

Coventry

We (mother, father and I, aged 7) were living in Coventry when war broke out. I was evacuated to my grandparents in New Bradwell (nr todays Milton Keynes) for the first six weeks of the war but that first year was very quiet and I was soon home.

We were all issued with gasmasks - I understand that in fact they would have been pretty ineffective in the event of a gas attack, and were awfully smelly. We had gas mask drills at school to get used to them. They had to be taken everywhere and came in a brown cardboard box with string on to wear over your shoulder. Going out at night became quite a business as you also had to have a torch (partially blacked out) to see where you were going. Windows had to have dark curtains so no light appeared on the outside, and were also criss crossed with tape in case of bomb blast. Another thing we all had were Identification cards and we all had to memorise the number - I can still quote mine though often have trouble remembering our phone number.

My school was at the top of our road and probably not very far though it seemed a long way in those days. My mother was always reminding me that if the air raid siren went then I had to knock on a door and ask for shelter until it was all over - can you imagine telling a child that today? We had air raid drill at school when we all went into the shelter, read comics and ate our Horlicks tablets - it beat lessons any day - and the shelter smelt very musty and damp. As so many schools were bombed we had to share our school with others which meant half day schooling - not that we minded that. Also if there had been an air raid and it started before a certain time, then we didn't have to go in so early

One occasion I still remember well was when my mother took me to the cinema one afternoon to see a Deanna Durbin film - half way through the siren went - and no-one moved. Then there was a couple of loud thumps and the audience rose as a man and quietly made their way out. We were just in time to see the German bombers dropping their bombs on the Standard car factory - which was very exciting (I thought). Another time we were having a picnic and several German planes flew overhead. All wartime children could recognise our planes and theirs. At no time can I ever remember feeling frightened - in fact we all thought it was pretty exciting. For boys, carving planes from balsa wood was a favourite pastime.

During November Coventry had three very big air raids. Each night when the siren sounded we went into the Anderson shelter which was shared with the family next door - grandma, two wives, two girls and a rather smelly terrier - the budgerigar was left inside! Being the smallest I slept in a hammock - great fun. I had a special "siren suit" (like Winston Churchill's) in bottle green and there was always a packet of Marmite sandwiches. During a lull in the bombing we would go outside to see the sky lit up like a gigantic firework display, but mostly I slept through it all - good training as it still takes a lot to wake me up once

asleep. I never gave a thought to how worried the grown-ups must have been - not knowing if their husbands were safe - they were both air raid wardens - and never knowing where the next bomb would drop. And the amazing thing is their fear never transferred itself to me - either they were very good at hiding it or else I was totally insensitive! After one raid my mother insisted we walk into the city centre as she had taken a pair of shoes to the repairers and wanted to make sure the shop was still standing. As no buses were running it was quite a long walk - but the shop was still there and the sight of the cathedral burning will stay with me forever.

Then my mother decided that her family in Rugby would be worried about us so we cycled the 10 or 12 miles over to Rugby though I think my Dad must have pushed me most of the way.

Food was rationed of course and when I see the small amounts we had in those days I can hardly believe it. Everyone dug up their flower beds and planted vegetables instead to eke out the rations. My mother made sponge cakes with dried eggs - they rose about half an inch and were like lead to eat. But we were never hungry though now I wonder how little my parents ate so that I shouldn't go hungry. It does make you wonder how they kept going - never getting a decent night's sleep, constant worrying, days without gas, water or electricity. I'm not sure we would cope as well as they did.