

THE WARTIME DIARY OF MARTIN PARKER, EVACUEE

Friday 7 June 1940

Mrs T is joining a cookery school to learn how to make the most of what food we've got. Meat, butter, bacon and sugar are rationed already, but everyone says lots more food is going to be in short supply soon. Mrs T goes to lectures about wartime stuff and is in the WI. They've got a jam centre at Forest Row. Everybody round here has to grow loads of fruit and the jam ladies are going to make jam for everyone. They are even making it from carrots, not sure how that will taste. Me and my mates are planning to go fruit picking in the hedgerows in September too. Yummy, can't wait!



Mr T gave me some cards of the wildlife of Ashdown Forest.

Monday 3rd June 1940

I've been living in Nutley nearly six months now, getting used to things around here. School's all right, not as big as St Mary's, our old school in Lewisham. Well I s'pose anywhere would be a squash: there's us lot from St Mary's as well as some older kids from a school in Southwark. AND all the local children. They're not half bad. Things looked a bit dodgy at first, a few fights between the boys, and some of the girls acted a bit sippy, but now most of us get on.



Saturday 8 June 1940

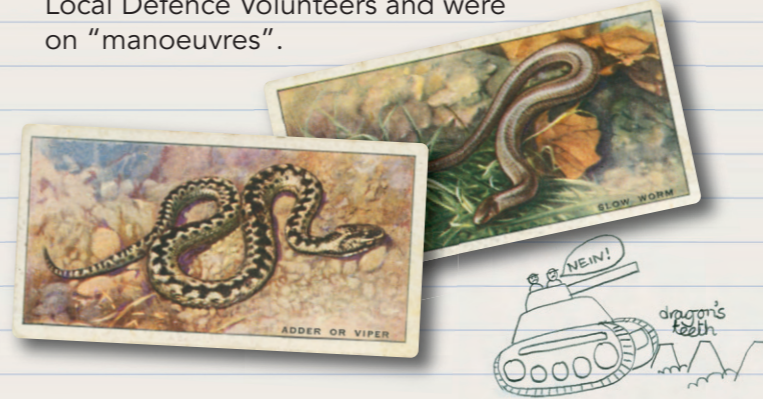
My pal Jimmy (one of the Nutley mob) came round with Billy and John from St Mary's (known them since we were nippers). Went for a kickabout in the forest, but on the way met a bunch of kids we know so ended up playing battles till it was almost dark. You have to get indoors before the black-out or you'll most likely get run over or fall down a hole or something. We're not allowed to show a light because enemy planes will see it and bomb us.

Mon 10 June 1940

After school we all met up on the battlefield of Ashdown Forest for another glorious victory. Jimmy and I were moving along behind gorse bushes trying to get close enough to take a pot shot at Cliff (one of the enemy) with Jim's catapult. Cliff was skulking about in a clump of pine trees thinking he was camouflaged, but his red jumper (knitted by his gran) made him an easy target. Just as we started to run for the next base, Jim let out a yell. I turned round to tell him to shut his cakehole, but he'd vanished! Then I saw him down a sort of gulley in a pile of old dead leaves. Before I could call him a twit and help him up, the ground started to move. Mounds of leaves and twigs seemed to rise up

before my eyes, then muddied faces appeared beneath them. I thought Hitler had sent his paratroopers for us! Then I heard a familiar voice: "Might have known YOU'D get in on the act Martin Parker".

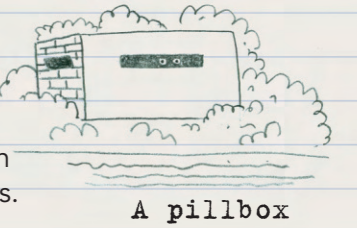
Peering out from between bits of moss and bracken I recognized the face of Mr Thompson who was dressed up like a bush. The other blokes with him (all disguised as bushes) had a good laugh. One of them was Jimmy's Uncle Bert, another was our next door neighbour. Turns out they've all joined the Local Defence Volunteers and were on "manoeuvres".



Mr T explained that the forest is a good place to practise special exercises in case Hitler really does turn up. Jim had fallen into a slit trench, which is a narrow pit dug in the ground where a soldier can hide to protect himself and fire at the enemy. There are the remains of bigger trenches in the forest too. They were dug by soldiers in the First World War to practise for when they would have to fight in France and Belgium.

Near here there's a real army camp with lots of Canadian soldiers. But Mr T's lot are really important as well, because they have to keep watch all the time, especially during the night. They look out for aliens hiding in places like sheds or barns or hedgerows, and report anything unusual. He told us they have to have pretend battles and learn

strategies to outmanoeuvre invading troops. They are going to have a practice next Saturday where they will ambush another platoon who will pretend to be Nazis.



A pillbox

Friday 14 June 1940

Mr T is going to take us to see some dragon's teeth. They are concrete things that have just been put up near here to stop enemy tanks in their tracks. Mr T knows the places where they are building pillboxes, overlooking river valleys and on the coast. They are half-buried, concrete or brick rooms with slits for a soldier to look out of for anything suspicious.

Funny, I used to think the countryside would be boring, but it's jolly interesting really.

Me, Martin Parker

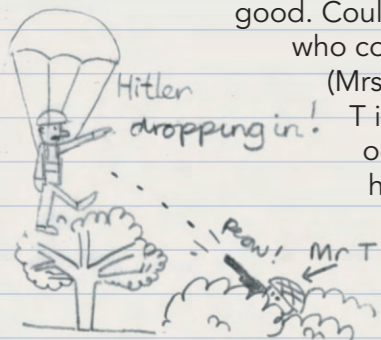


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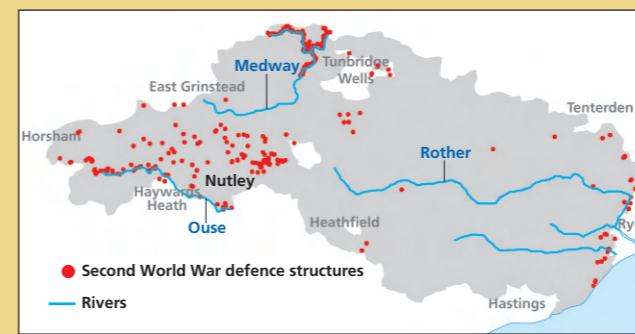
Me and Jimmy and the gang are helping the war effort. We're always on the look-out for anything suspicious and we've got a jolly good way of sending secret messages to one another. You get a dandelion and use the gooey juice to make marks on paper. Then you make it into a paper aeroplane and fly it to another gang member. The marks are a secret code. A triangle means "Meet me at three o'clock", a square is "See you after dinner"... Well I won't tell you everything or it won't be a secret. But the best bit is that it just looks like plain paper, because the dandelion juice is invisible until it dries. Why don't you try it?

When we first arrived everyone got taken to this posh woman's house. Well, it wasn't actually her house (I bet they thought we'd scuff the floor with our boots or pinch the silver or something) it was a socking great barn. Blimey it was about the size of St Paul's cathedral! So there was us lot from both schools, AND our teachers, all being sized up by the ladies from the village. Thought they were going to be snooty, but they were quite kind really. Bit bossy though. We all had to have baths.

Me and my sister Eileen got taken to Mr and Mrs Thompson's house. We were lucky, they don't mind what we do (as long as it's safe) and the grub's good. Could do with a bit more, but who couldn't? They are quite old (Mrs T is 40 and Mr T 42). Mr T is in a reserved occupation, so he doesn't have to go and fight in the war. He does important work on a farm near here, growing food for the country.



WHERE IN THE WEALD?



The area's rivers, the Medway, Ouse and Rother, formed natural defence lines; its open heaths were valued training grounds. Explore heaths at:

- www.highweald.org/leechpoolandowlbeechwoods
- www.highweald.org/buchancountrypark
- www.highweald.org/broadwaterwarren
- www.highweald.org/ashdownforest
- www.highweald.org/hastingscountypark
- www.highweald.org/cinderhillwood

Exhibits at:

- Battle Museum; East Grinstead Museum; Eden Valley Museum; Hastings Old Town Hall Museum; Yesterday's World, Battle**

More online at:

- www.ashdownforest.org/enjoy/history/monuments.php
- www.ashdownforest.org/wild/birds-n-beasts.php

High Weald

1907-1930 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes, lived in Crowborough

1919 Forestry Commission established and large scale conifer planting began to appear across the area

1926 Winnie the Pooh published

By 1935 almost all hop farms around Bodiam were owned by the Guinness Brewery

EVENTS

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| 1910 George V became king | 1914 Start of First World War | 1918 End of First World War | 1922 Tomb of Tutankhamun discovered at Luxor | 1928 Women over 21 allowed to vote in UK | 1928 Mickey Mouse created by Walt Disney | 1930 First football World Cup held in Uruguay | 1932 Empire State Building, New York, opened | 1939 Start of Second World War | 1945 End of Second World War |
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