

WAR-TIME SUTTON : EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARIES OF GWILYM

O.GRIFFITH. 1940-41

BY GWENDA PICK

Dear Mr Lea,

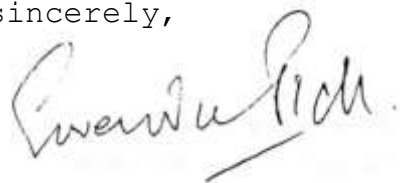
On one of the Local History walks around Sutton you showed interest in the war-time bombing of the town. None of us could remember much. But now I have been reading my father's diaries for the period 1940-41 - over a thousand pages!! - and have extracted his references to air raids and to his experiences in the Home Guard. It is not a definitive account of air raid damage but it gives some idea. We were living in Goldieslie road at the time and between it and the main Lichfield-Birmingham road was a large open space with two tennis clubs and fields or waste ground.

It amazes me how little I remember: the screaming bomb I recall very clearly; and the fact that there were more bombs after the last entry in the diary because I joined the WAAF in the November and was appalled to find myself in comparative safety while Sutton was still being bombed.

Anyway, I hope this may be of interest to you.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gwenda Pick". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Gwenda Pick".

5.6.40. Yesterday I did my first few hours' duty with the L.D.V. It was the kind of duty which I should choose as the last of all possible choices – stopping the unending stream of traffic on a busy road to examine identity cards and drivers' licences; doing this encumbered with a Lee– Enfield loaded with ball cartridge, and – without my spectacles! Three hours of this and two hours of rifle drill and target practice.

14.6. Paris has fallen. The news came through this– morning while I was on guard duty. It was received by our section – some half–dozen of us in the guardroom – without comment. Then someone proposed a game of darts.

17.6. When I reached the L.D.V. H.Q. I heard the news of France's capitulation, though the details had not come through. Suddenly we heard the shout, "Call to arms" and hastily seized our rifles. When we got outside we could see the police with rifles in their hands tumbling into a police car and we got into two following cars and were off. Each man of us had five rounds in his magazine and a clip of five in his pocket – no more. Parachutists, we were told, had landed in the region of Elmdon airport. We travelled at 70 and even over 80 mph and picked up more armed police at Coleshill. The one in our car said: "I was just having my bloody dinner and thinking of having three hours bloody sleep when this bloody call came in". Later he said, cheerfully, "Better bloody death than to live under 'itler" As we swirled along through the peaceful, sunny countryside we saw mothers and nurses quietly pushing perambulators, golfers playing on the links, lovers wandering through the lanes. After about an hour, probably less, in which we made a circuit of the area – lanes and by–roads – a policeman brought the news that the search was "off". The warning of parachutists had been given, it is said, by a schoolgirl who later confessed she had seen nothing. And so home to tea.

N.B. We had no uniforms (except our section leader), only our armlets, so that had we been taken (i.e. if the Germans had landed in strength) we should have been treated, I suppose, as francs tireurs. And what sort of a fight could we have put up with only 10 rounds of ammunition apiece and no small arms or bayonets? Still, we were willing enough.

25.6. Rifle practice tonight at the usual miniature range. Allowed five shots. Ammunition short.

26.6 . Last night the Midlands were raided from the air. We expect them over here tonight – at any minute now. Odd how we accept these things. They are in fact such a mad invasion upon life that they seem unreal.

1 a.m. To bed after air–raid alarm which brought us all to the kitchen at midnight.

27.6. It is clear that the Government expects an invasion at any moment. Last night Eden renewed his appeal to the general population to "stay put" and not crowd the roads.

At rifle practice two nights ago I overheard one L.D.V. inquire of the instructor if he would be allowed more than the ration of five rounds if he bought his own ammunition. Reply a hesitant, "Yes, perhaps".

The rifleman shooting next to me failed to put any of his five shots on the target. At the rate of two practice nights per week he should reach some stage of proficiency by 1945.

1.7. Went as usual to L.D.V. H.Q. to do my three hours guard. Four of us spent our morning in the basement hall of the Congregational Church, whiling away the hours by shooting with an airgun at a target on the wall. No drill, no training, no musketry, not even an issue of uniform. And we were told yesterday by the Ministry of Information that it would be only a matter of days, perhaps hours, before the invasion was launched upon us. We have been ordered to parade on Saturday next for 'instructions'. I do not mean that there has been no drilling at all in our section. We have had informative talks on the various mechanical parts of the Lee-Enfield rifle, and I have had one refresher drill in sloping arms etc. What we need is actual practice in shooting, taking cover and the like - an intensive course - and then specific training in our particular duties as a section. I joined on May 17th; it is now July 1st and I am no more a "parashootist" today than before I joined.

Watched a German plane on reconnaissance at a great height, about 5 this evening. It left a trail of white in the sky over the city. The machine was unchallenged.

If there is a general summons I must, by arrangement, wait at home until some member of the mobile unit collects me in his car. We have been given a code word, to be changed every week, and told to take with us iron rations (bully beef, biscuits, chocolate) in case we are cut off from supplies. Uniforms are to come through next week, plus helmets and respirators.

15.7. Yesterday a Welsh maid from Harborne, visiting our own maid, said that on Saturday night an air raid alarm sounded in their district and that she and the family repaired to their shelter. After remaining in it some two or three hours she volunteered to inquire at the warden's post if the all clear might be expected soon. She found the warden taking his ease and was told that there would be no all clear signal at all since the warning signal had been a mistake. He manned his point with stupidity and obstinacy: the 'raiders approaching' signal should not have been given and therefore the 'all clear' could not be allowed. The consequence was that some families remained in their shelters all night.

24.7. Got up at 5 for guard duty: a lovely rain-washed morning with a clear blue sky and the moon like a pearl in it. So heavy-eyed at the guard post that I was afraid to sit down (I was guarding the armoury, where sitting down is permitted) lest I should drop off to sleep. Had less than four hours' sleep last night.

For some obscure reason all our Lee-Enfield rifles have been replaced by an American gun, slightly shorter and heavier, with a magazine for only a clip of 5 and no cut-out. As we have all been used to the cut-out (which is a device for keeping the breech unloaded) this change might lead to bad accidents. For the custom on changing guard is to port arms and examine the breech by pulling out the bolt, then shutting it back and pulling the trigger. To treat this gun in the same way would mean firing off a cartridge 'unbeknownst'.

The name Local Defence Volunteers has been changed to Home Guard. Germany refers to the L.D.V. as 'gangs of murderers'.

27.7. Attended a Home Guard and Civil Defence parade in Sutton Park, inspected by the Earl of Dudley. I should think about 400 of the Guard mustered (at Park Road Wharf) and marched through Sutton to the Park. We had thunder and lightning and torrents of rain and were well soaked. Lord Dudley seems a manly being and took pains over his inspection; he addressed us also very sensibly.

31.7. Drove this-evening with Mr D. , an auctioneer, to Kingsbury for rifle practice. It was a lovely evening, the countryside bathed in mellow sunshine, the cornfields ripening, the elms and oaks casting long shadows in the meadows, the scent of roses from wayside cottage gardens coming up to us whenever we stopped at a village to buy tobacco or to inquire our way; and save for barbed wire barricades here and there and an occasional soldier strolling out with a village girl, no sign of war. When we got to the butts, where some of the Home Guard were trying out their American rifles at 400 yards, there were, of course, signs and sounds a-plenty. We should have machine gun sections, Bren guns, mortars, armoured cars, but I see no signs of them. Nor have we a signalling section.

3.8. Woes of a Home Guardsman: Last night, towards 1 a.m., the air raid sirens sounded then the telephone rang downstairs. I answered the call and a voice said, "Report for duty, please, at once". I inquired where I was to report and was told, "At your post". Accordingly, I tumbled into my clothes, put on my steel helmet, packed some iron rations, and took a soldier's farewell of the family. "Parachutists, I expect," I explained, "Give 'em beans" exhorted G., and thus heroically admonished I set off down the deserted streets, expecting to be whirled away in a police car or some other chariot of war to the scene of action. Arrived at the post, I found that no signal had been given, no call sent out, and no attendance was needed. Nothing was to be done but return unheroically home. ... The explanation seems to be that the section leader of some Civil Defence unit (A.R.P. or the like) was calling up his reserves and dialled my number by mistake. That, or a rather good hoax.

5.8. Up at 5 for Guard duty at 6. Heard cheering bit of gossip: soldiers' leave has been extended from 48 hours to 7 days; police holidays are taking their normal course. This means obviously that the authorities are not expecting that the invasion of this country will be attempted just now.

6.8. We have now dug up the lawn at the back of the house and planted potatoes, parsley, turnips, swedes, carrots, haricot beans, peas and cabbage: a wartime garden. A new coalhouse we are having to build to house the reserves of coal we are advised to put in against the winter, when supplies may be hard to obtain, and underneath this we are having an air-raid shelter. The cost all told will be £100.

As Home Guards we are required, naturally, to stand to our posts when on duty in an air-raid but, unlike the A.R.P. or fire-fighting staffs, have not yet had our issue of steel helmets or respirators. I think our local section has some half dozen helmets and no military respirators. I bought a helmet some weeks ago in a hat shop (15s).

9.8. We were got out of bed twice over last night, once, about 1.15 a.m. by the noise of bomb explosions or gunfire, and again by the sirens about an hour later. This morning in Sutton, rumours about where the bombs fell were thick as flies - far more rumours than bombs, though one or two fell fairly near us.

12.8. The birds have nipped off the leaves of all our peas, planted two weeks ago. Sowed a fresh lot this-morning.

I reported to the Home Guard post yesterday at 8 a.m. A new order has come through that in future when the air-raid sirens sound all our Home Guardsmen are to report at Sutton Park. This is one of the illuminating afterthoughts of our local High Command and incidentally ignores the fact that we are not as yet provided with steel helmets nor army respirators. It also ignores the fact that our Home Guard is made up of city business men who volunteered in response to the War Office call for "parashots", but who certainly had no thought of turning out every hour of the day and night every time an ordinary bombing raid signal was given - and turning out to no purpose. A.R.P. wardens, the special police and firemen do by rote, so that the same man is not on duty every night. But according to this imbecile order the whole personnel of the local H.G. must double to the Park whenever the sirens sound, night or day - just as if it were a church bells alarm; and having arrived at the Park what are they to do? Nothing. Thanks to our balloons the bombers do not come within rifle range.

14.8. Bad raid last night from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. In the factory in which J. works two of the women came from homes more or less shattered by bombs, and one of the women was injured, but both of them came to work, pale and a little subdued, momentarily, but without a notion of self-pity.

I went to the rifle range this evening and, on the merit of my poor shooting, received "pass-out" certificate as one "qualified to handle a service rifle"; also I tried on my uniform - perfect Dartmoor cut and style.

16.8. Air raid last night from 12 to 3.30. As usual we took cover in the kitchen.

20.8. We were roused from our beds by the siren as usual but the All Clear sounded before 1 a.m. Immediately afterwards the bombers were audibly overhead again. I went out to the garden and found it was only a laggard plane or two, but some 400 incendiary bombs were dropped, all told.

And now we can look back upon an eventful week of mass attacks in which our national morale has been fairly tested and the invaders have lost an average of 80 planes a day. Whether or no this marks a real crisis in the "Battle of Britain" and the main threat of invasion is over, history alone will tell us. At our Home Guard H.Q. we had been warned to expect a serious attempt at parachute invasion. Certainly it has not come off.

21.8. Up until 4. a.m., thanks to the raiders. They came over at midnight, but though the droning of the machines filled the sky and the searchlights were busy from the first, the warning sirens did not sound until 3.30 a.m. when the raid was almost over, and half an hour later we were given the All Clear.

22.8. This-afternoon M. and a group of ladies (our neighbours) practised fire-fighting with the aid of a stirrup-pump. The instructor, loaned for the occasion from the fire-fighting staff of a city firm, lectured the group on the properties of the German incendiary bomb.

I am told that Spitfires went up last night to engage our local raiders. If this is so it is good news. Retiring to bed early (9 p.m.) to try to snatch some sleep before the usual raid. I must be up at 5 for Guard duty.

22.8. We have had two uninterrupted nights. Raiders were in the neighbourhood yesterday but in daylight.

23.8. Up at 2 this-morning, aroused by the noise of raider planes. Decided to wake the family and we piled down to the kitchen as usual, the womenfolk with their knitting. Got back to bed at 3.30. One of our own planes was also up, greatly to our comfort. Our air-raid shelter should be completed by the weekend.

25.8. Up last night at 2 a.m. and back to bed at 5. We had one screaming ("terror") bomb which did not explode.

Went out with the A.R.P. warden last night to watch the sky. It was a great spectacle for the searchlights and A. A. guns were in full play. The interlacing beams of the searchlights, sweeping up to a tremendous height, were really beautiful and the sparkle of the bursting shells, twinkling like sudden stars, was fascinating to watch. When the whistling bomb began to fall (it was a long-drawn-out descent) the warden cried "Look out!" and was on his stomach while he spoke. I made for the house but the bomb came to earth before I reached the door. A piece of shrapnel or shell splinter came down with a clank into our neighbours' garden.

26.8. The usual raid began at 10 o'clock last night and we were up until 5 a.m. To-day the time bombs have been exploding - one went off a few minutes ago.

27.8. Raided from 10 p.m. last night to 5 a.m. The bus into Birmingham had to take a circuitous route owing to so many streets being closed. The Market Hall is smashed.

28.8. We retired early to snatch a sleep but the sirens blew us out of bed at 10 and the raids lasted until 3.30 or 4 a.m. On guard duty at 6. Another raid warning at lunch time but this blew over. As I walked into Sutton about 5.30 a.m. only a few solitary workmen were abroad. They all had a cheery greeting. One called out to me, "Noisy night again!" "Yes", I said, "We shall have to do something about it." "I am thinking of writing a postcard or two myself" he shouted.

29.8. Raids as usual from 10 p.m. to about 3. No local A.A. fire but I think one or two of our planes were up.

30.8. Raid warning before 10 p.m. though the night was moonless and inky black. The raiders came droning over in relays until about 1 a.m. or 1.30. The All Clear sounded at 3 o'clock and we piled into bed.

Our shelter should be ready by tonight. It is 7 feet deep, 10 ft. 10 in. long, 4 ft. wide: not too commodious for six persons, but we hope to fit it up with bunks and have an electrical extension for light and heat. If this war is to last until 1943 we shall need as much civilised comfort below ground as we can get. On top of the shelter we are having a coal-house for we need accommodation for reserves of winter coal. No doubt, if an incendiary bomb fell into the coal-house the shelter would not need an electrical heater.

31.8. Sirens sounded last night at about 9.30 and the All Clear was given at 4. We went into the shelter for the first time. It was still damp and reeking and we crumbled the concrete steps as we descended. We had an oil stove and sat uncomfortably on deck chairs. The discomfort for the womenfolk was so great as the hours passed that at about 2 a.m. I led them back to the house, where we had tea and went to bed. The banging - very heavy stuff - went on until about 3, but much of it was remote. It is difficult to judge the location of these explosions.

1.9. A Home Guard told me today that his road had been closed for a week on account of a time bomb.

I hear that our local pools have been drained because they are landmarks that guide the raiders. Also, we now use smoke screens.

3.9. Sirens about 10 last night, an All Clear before 12; then a fresh warning and the final All Clear about 3. There were some spectacular bursts of gunfire which we were able to watch from the shelter steps.

4.9. Two raid alarms between 10.30 and 1 a.m. but I heard no planes: then we went to bed. This was the first time for over a week for me to get into my pyjamas: night after night I have gone to bed half-dressed, ready for a sudden call-up.

6.9. Sirens about 10 p.m. last night. All clear 4 a.m. We all packed down to the shelter where there were bunks for 3. The rest of us sat in chairs. By midnight it was so quiet that those of us on chairs returned to the house and slept on the kitchen floor but as soon as we had settled down the bombing began again. The others were asleep in their bunks and did not hear the All Clear. The shelter certainly is dank and sepulchral.

8.9. A curious state of mind last (Saturday) night: we got no air raid warning until about 11. The odd quietness got on our nerves and it was really with a sense of relief that we heard the shrieking of the sirens at last. Nevertheless the night continued to be unusually quiet – one or two heavy planes but no bombing. All Clear at 4.

9.9. Marvellous to record – no air raid warning last night: the first unmolested night for I know not how long.

11.9. After the usual siren warning and All Clear at 3 a.m. we slept in our beds. A warning a little after noon today.

Churchill's broadcast tonight was grave and momentous. He indicated that the German preparations for invasion were proceeding and that this was the critical week.

The workmen are still at work on our coal-house and shelter.

15.9. Two nights ago – or was it three? for one's mind gets confused – we had a bowing acquaintance with a screaming bomb. J., G., and I were chatting in the drawing-room when a German plane came over. It circled around then came the scream. For an instant I mistook it for a siren (for the warning had not been given) and then recognised it for what it was and shouted "Down!" J. and I were on our stomachs on the carpet at the word, and G., improving on our technique, crawled to the kitchen*. ... Our local Air Raid Warden dropped in to tell us what had happened. One bomb, the screamer, had dropped on a Maney Hill tennis court and another had smashed into the local Co-op. store hard by. There were no casualties and, apart from the store immediately concerned, not even a broken window. It is curious but I didn't even hear the explosions nor feel any concussion, whereas more distant explosions have often been shattering. I had noted the same in the last war. Shells exploding two or three hundred yards away assailed the ears much more violently than shells that burst a few yards off.

Guard duty yesterday (Saturday) from 6 to 9 a.m. Our order sheet was full of instructions about church bells – the signal that calls us all to arms. We are now awaiting it almost hourly for if invasion comes this autumn it must come soon.

* Her mother was in the kitchen and, thanks to the wireless, oblivious of the noise of the bomb.

Our sub-section leader told me that his father's house had been bombed twice – the last time a few days ago, when it was knocked askew and rendered what the military reports call untenable. His father is 77 and his mother equally aged and an invalid. Neither of them had taken shelter. The old gentleman took the upset very coolly and a minute later was standing in the midst of the dust and debris giving orders to the servants like a General on the field. The old couple were packed off to their cottage at Aberdovey, but Grandfather, it seems, must needs come back to town two days later to attend to business. He is annoyed, but not perturbed.

A raid alarm was sounded this morning just before I started to Church but the All Clear came soon after. This evening I hoped to get home before the night raids began but Mrs X came to the vestry after evening service... We talked for some time: I missed my train and two buses refused to stop for me. By the time I was able to board one the raiders were over, our bus lights were put out and we went at funeral pace. However we made the journey and I got home to find the family in the shelter.

And now, 2 a.m., the sirens are wailing again and I hear the grunt of the raiders somewhere between us and the stars. It is a lovely night: the moon is riding the sky and flooding us with what is more like silver daylight than moonshine.

17.9. Raiders over us about the usual time last night. Two of them were brought down.

20.9. Last night our sirens were hysterical. No sooner did they shriek an alarm than they corrected it with an All Clear, and no sooner had the All Clear wailed itself through its dismal diminuendo than Nazi planes could be heard overhead and once more the sirens would begin their agitated scream. It was undignified.

22.9. No sirens, no bombs last night. This was the first time for me to sleep in my pyjamas for I know not how long. (Up to now I have slept in my clothes, ready to spring out of bed in case of church bells or a bomb without the delay of dressing.)

24.9. Guard duty last night from 7 p.m. to 7 this morning, away out in the country among the pastures and turnip fields. The night was calm and the first Boche passed over about 11 p.m., flying high; the All Clear went about 5 a.m. As we were below strength we had to turn out for patrol duty three times in the twelve hours and as I had no sleep between times I feel 'the weight of increasing years' this forenoon.

Our post was a shack about ten feet square with an oil lamp and a welcome coal fire. Nine of us were crowded in there, all pipe smokers and, all but one, comparatively a youth, men who had served in the last war. It was pleasant to see these men in khaki sitting in the red glow of the fire, with one or two dozing on the camp beds (only two beds available) their rifles stacked in the corner, and to hear them matching stories of the old days. One was an old Guardsman, another a Scotch Canadian who had won a D.C.M. and bar in the last war, risen to be R.S.M., then got a commission in the Flying Corps; a third was an

artilleryman who had seen service in India, France, Egypt and Mesopotamia; and so on, all of them still looking young and fit, all of them full of banter and good spirits.

2.10. Usual guard duty on Tuesday/Wednesday night. Tried to sleep between whiles on the floor of the railway waiting room which serves as our post but the chatter of some and the snoring of others kept me awake... No hardship in lying on a hard floor; in fact it is not nearly as tiring as the old time feather bed.

17.10. A bad raid here on Tuesday night (15th), beginning about 9 and continuing until 3. One bomb dropped so near that, as it was falling, we thought it must be upon us. It made a crater in the road by the railway bridge [Station road Wylde Green], put our gas fires out of commission and held up the train service next morning. Got to bed at 3 and had to leave by 8.30 en route for Bristol... [Returning that evening] Reached Birmingham in time for the beginning of the evening raids. All lights went out in our local train ... We watched the bombs falling as we crawled out of the station - one fairly close which killed (I learnt this-morning) 17 people and blew one man from his car onto the top of a house. The main signal box was hit. And now, 3.45, an air raid. ... An hour ago I met a shopkeeper who was in his bedroom when the local bombs I mentioned above exploded - one within 30 yards of his house. He was unhurt and, as far as I could judge, unshaken. His (wooden) shop* was slightly damaged, whereas I should have expected it to be blown clean away, for it has no foundations. Workmen were busy filling in the big water-filled crater while I was there. The explosion threw tons of earth from the road and over the railway bridge onto the line - yet this wooden shack stood up to the blast.

26.10. (Saturday, midnight) Another troubled, noisy night, guns banging and bombs roaring and a red, tell tale glow in the sky over the city. Last night it was the same. On guard duty one has nothing to do but listen to the drone of enemy planes and the spurts of vicious A.A. fire followed by the crackling of the shell bursts, up, as it seemed, among the stars. One gets to recognise the sounds of the different guns, the sharp crack of some, the bellow and thunder of others, the quick, plangent bark of yet others (which always fire three or four rounds in rapid succession). The skyline is lit up as the front used to be in the 1914 war, with a sort of artificial dawn, tremulous and shimmering. This light can be seen playing fitfully in complete silence that is, long before the roar of the guns reaches the ear, and sometimes the sheen of it is quite blinding. As I write this line the All Clear is sounding (12.25 a.m.), but this conveys no assurance. Last night one batch of sirens was chorusing the All Clear while another was wailing the Alert; and the Alerts had it.

*The shop is still there to-day. Voce's.

7.11. A succession of bombs shook us up last night, about 11 p.m. They seemed to be in our road. I went out to try to locate them and found general excitement – soldiers on motorbikes, wardens, special police, motorists, citizens in pyjamas and dressing-gowns, all inquiring where the bombs fell. Actually they came down in an open field some 400 or 500 yards behind our house* I give the German airmen credit for either deliberately selecting an open spot for jettisoning their cargo or trying to knock out some nearby A.A. guns a legitimate objective. If they had wanted make a target of the built-up area of private houses they could hardly have missed. It is odd that the noise and blast from these bombs were much worse than those of bombs which fell nearer, though the craters do not suggest that last night's bombs were particularly heavy.

Received a Colt six-shooter from G. [his American brother-in-law] a gift for Home Guard duties At the moment the night is noisy with A.A. fire and German planes are droning overhead.

2.12. Spent the evening by the fire discussing Philosophy with G. in preparation for her classes at the University... The odd thing was that during the whole of our little session the guns outside were putting up a tornado of shellfire and the enemy planes were busy – audibly and unpleasantly so, I fear over Aston. The All Clear has just now sounded, 10.40 p.m. G. stuck to the discussion like a – philosopher.

Our shelter is still water-logged and useless. The builders tinker with it about every other week and effect nothing: simply bale out the water and smear the leak-holes with cement.

23.12. There is a growing expectation of another attempt at invasion and a feeling that this time no horrors will be spared us. Meanwhile our nights are made hideous by the incessant droning of Nazi planes on their way north to bomb Liverpool and Manchester. They drop a few samples on the Midlands on their way.

25.12. All peaceful and quiet overhead: a Christmas truce observed tacitly by both sides. It makes the war seem unreal. We have just slipped back into goodwill and happiness.

20.1.1941. It was disturbing to find that we have not, even now, rifles enough in the armoury to arm two-thirds of our local men in case of a 'call up' nor have we had adequate or appropriate training. Still, most of our lot would give a good account of themselves.

31.1. Builder's men came to repair the leaks in our water-logged shelter, mended one leak, left the other three un-plugged and went away.

14.2. Bayonet drill this evening ...

* i.e. within the square formed by Goldieslie, Highbridge, Lichfield and Jockey Roads.

28.2. I have now been "promoted" to the Record Office of the H.G. and spend my time card-indexing the muster-rolls.

14.3. (Friday) Last Tuesday night an air raid with a local squall of incendiaries: the sky was lit up like a June morning. Working at the H.G. office until 10.30 last night, getting out emergency instructions for Sunday.

16.3. At 9 a.m. a Home Guard runner called with the order to report at once to Company H.Q. I got into my uniform and down to H.Q. in time to be detailed for office work for a large-scale tryout. It was interesting enough. The company commander and his staff were there and runners came in with despatches - casualties here, prisoners there, reinforcements urgently wanted yonder, etc. This together with phone messages kept us all fairly interested and later we had "prisoners" for interrogation. It gave me a hint of what staff work was like, even though this was a minor and local affair. There were errors, too. Battalion H.Q. ordered us to send up reinforcements that were far beyond the limit of our reserves, and, an hour after this had been made clear by runner, sent in another order for a second draft of non-existent troops.

26.3. Yesterday I was motored by a large Army car to a large R.A.F. camp ... where I was to address the forces on Italian Fascism. The camp, a large one, was so well camouflaged that it was not observable until we were held up by barbed wire defences. I was asked for my pass but had none, then for my identity card but had left it at home: so I was taken into the office and questioned: had I any letter or papers to show my identity? No, I had none. The sergeant in charge contemplated me with the eye of an undertaker measuring me for my coffin and said, "We shall have to shoot you". I had a rather joyous time; the officers, many of them wearing decorations, were exceedingly fine fellows and there was a general air of cheerfulness and good clean fun.

10.4. A hell of a night. The raiders came over in great force soon after 9 and remained over Birmingham until about 2 o'clock. They dropped a fairly new type of bomb - possibly a 'terror' bomb - which gave out an apocalyptic red glare. Our A.A. fire was reserved for occasional intensive bursts - very severe while they lasted. I think our fighter planes were up. It was a clear, moonlit night. The incessant roar and throb of the planes seemed to fill the sky and was very impressive. ... Three bombs were dropped near the Army Signals behind our house but there were no casualties. They shook the house to the foundations but we heard little of the explosions; in fact I thought they were duds or time-bombs.

Good Friday. Another riotous night, the raiders coming over in strength about 10 and continuing until about 3. I joined the wardens standing on the railway bridge: some eight or nine middle-aged men in civilian overcoats, mufflers and black tin hats, all silhouetted against the moonlit sky. Their talk was level and good humoured; now and again a bomb swished and whistled uncomfortably near; not one of them ducked. The invariable question after the thud or bang was,

"Where did that one go?" which usually started a series of speculative answers. ... A little before midnight I met a solitary fire-watcher on the road - a brisk old boy of about 70. A bomber was making circles overhead at the time and roaring unconscionably. He said to me cheerily, "Well, I think they've all gone home now!" meaning the raiders. I said: "There is one right over us". He cupped his ear and made me shout this piece of information three times; then he said: "What? Do you hear it?" I shouted: "I can hardly hear anything else". He said, "I'd give five hundred pounds to hear it", and walked on. We had a snack about 1 o'clock and went to bed but before 2 the bombing had become so heavy again that I had to get the family down into the shelter.

Question: shall we be raided again to-night? This is back of the mind of everybody; with some in super-capitals, some in italics, some in ordinary type or as a parenthesis. I personally become aware of a certain tension as the usual raid hour approaches, a sort of subconscious alertness. Only when the final All Clear is sounded at the end of the war will the strain of these days be measurable, and there is a long, long way to go before then. But historians who write it all up afterwards will never be able to enter this egg which is now slowly hatching - this fateful egg in which we are enclosed - we who know nothing except the day-to-day incubation heats and tremors - we who are blindly pecking at the inside of the shell.

14.4. Easter Sunday. The "Sunday Chronicle" .. announces "Invasion in May, say Astrologers" and cites a certain Brighton star-teller ... for this: "An 'almanack' sent to the Astrological Convention at Harrogate yesterday predicted that the blitzkrieg will break out in all its fury as never before between May 9 and May 11, to fall on the British Isles without respite for at least a week dawn troops might be looked for about May 11 By May 18 Goering should clearly see that ultimate defeat has begun" The war will end, says this authority, on Jan. 31, 1942. It would be interesting to know how much these astrologers are paid by our Sunday journals. One thing they understand - that errors are quickly forgotten or forgiven; lucky hits are remembered.

Thus if, as is not unlikely, we do actually get a 'blitz' in May, thousands will be saying, "You know, the astrologers foretold it"; if we don't, no one will hold it against them.

15.4. M. and I went for a walk after tea and came upon a fine house - in a lovely group of houses - smashed by a bomb during the raid last Thursday. Only one or two of the lower rooms were left standing and the clutter of laths and beams was like wicker work. We inquired of a gentleman who lived in the road ... if there had been many casualties. "There nearly was one", he said: "the canary. The cage was smashed in but the bird survived." "Then the family were in their shelter?" "No, just sitting together in the house." ... To look at the havoc made it difficult to believe that anyone could have escaped.

16.4. Another raucous night, beginning about 10. I had come back from Home Guard and had settled to some writing but as it was my turn

for fire watch on our road I had to turn out and didn't get in again until 3; the All Clear went about 4. More searchlights last night than I had seen at any time, and their technique at catching and holding a plane in a 'cross-fire' of beams was rather spectacular. There was occasionally rather intense gunfire, the shell-fragments falling on our roofs and gardens like hail.

25.4. I have been at the Home Guard every night for the last week and note the tone of serious apprehension even among our incorrigible optimists.

1.5. Attended a lecture by one of our H.G. officers last night - some 50 volunteers present. ... We were enlisted to do a job of work, and this job of work was Home Defence. The lecturer confessed that cold shivers ran down his spine when he heard the High Command talking about the responsibility and efficiency of the Home Guard, for he feared, from what he knew, that we were nothing like as well prepared as we should be. However the superiority complex was all-important. The Germans possessed it to a high degree and we must see to it that we possessed it ourselves. ... It was certain that there would be an attempted invasion. Our business was defence. That was our job of work. Defence meant sometimes attack; but we were to attack only when there was a 100% chance of success. The calculation was that any one Volunteer was equal to five Germans. ... We might not be as well-equipped as we wanted to be - more guns, including tommy-guns, were certainly needed, but we must not grouse over lack of equipment. The W.O. and the H.C. and Mr Churchill knew all about this and we must let them carry on with their own job of work.After this preamble the lecturer said that he would get down to his lecture proper but I had to depart to a job of work.

18.5. (Sunday) A bad raid here last Friday. It was as usual my night for fire-watching and it kept us out from midnight til 3 a.m. One or two of the bombs that screamed over us and put us on our faces like devout Moslems were different from anything I had heard before. One was so long and loud in its descent that I thought I had mistaken it for a slow train on the nearby railway line. When it burst the whole countryside was lit up with a green light which leapt up the sky like a dawn - in Hell.

4.6. Turned into Redacre Road to-day and was surprised to see two houses shattered by bombs. Then on to Jockey Road where I knew there had been devastation. The surrounding houses were almost unscathed and in one of them a very large and handsome doll had been put in the window with its head turned to look archly at the damage. And now the sirens once again.

5.6. The family had to leave bed for the shelter last night and remained there until 3 a.m. Heavier bombs than any I had heard previously. Our barrage was also particularly fierce while it lasted. From our daily help's account of last night's doings:

"J. (her daughter) coughed all night till the sirens went and then the guns started, and when they were all quiet J. began again, so I haven't had no sleep at all. When the bad noise began I calls to me husband: 'Get up and come down, the bombs is dropping' and he says, 'Well, what of it? I can't stop 'em, can I?' so I says, 'Don't argue. Be quick and come down' and he says 'Shurrip and go down yourself. You make more noise nor the bombs'.

It seems now that the extra heavy bombs I thought I heard were the new extra-heavy AA guns. They were certainly shattering explosions like nothing we have had before. But I thought I knew the difference between bombs and gunfire by now.

At about one o'clock last night, during the raid, three or four of us walked down the length of our road. When we reached the end of it there was a lull in the noise overhead and suddenly, from some nearby tree, a bird burst into song - not a chirrup but deliberate, full-throated song.

16.7. I spend some 20 hours a week in the Record Office of our local Home Guard company, keeping the Nominal Roll, sending out Weekly Returns and acting generally as office boy and stamp-licker.

18.7. I have been made a sergeant in the Home Guard. I think I should be gratified if it had meant that I had qualified to lead a platoon; as it is it means no more than an orderly room accommodation.

The diaries appear to end at this date, 18.7.41.