

DIRECT HIT!!!!!!!

A short story written by Derek Filbey of Bexhill recounting events during the blitz in London during 1941. A poignant and moving personal memory of a sad event in his early life. Sadly, he died in 2014 aged 73.

For the first years of the War 1939-1941, the Filbey's, that is myself and my parents, lived at 94 Blandford Road, Beckenham, Kent, with my grandparents, the 'Popjoys' (unusual name). It was early evening of the 16th April, 1941, that our brush with death happened. Darkness had fallen and with the black-out in place an eerie silence existed, but not for long. The wailing sound of an air raid siren was soon to be heard, ominous of events to come.

Soon the characteristic throbbing drone of the 'Luftwaffe's Heinkel- HE111H' engines could be heard, accompanied by our intense 'AA' (Anti- Aircraft) fire, as once again the nightly ordeal of the Blitz had begun, meaning another cold, damp night in our 'Anderson Shelter'. No sooner had Dad rushed Mum and I into the shelter, there was a swish and a thud like a 'giant's boot' stomping the ground, accompanied by what sounded like lots of broken glass and mixed with the noise was a woman's terrified scream.

The Anderson Shelter rocked and shook in the ground; yes the house had received a "Direct Hit", probably by an 'SC50 Bomb'. The memory of the terror of that moment is as clear today as it was seventy years ago. Shaking with fear I prayed "Please God, please God, don't let me die". Our shelter had a door, which Dad had cleverly made! (Doors on Andersons' were not standard supply). The door proved all it's worth, because it protected us not only from the effects of the blast, but also the choking dust of the two terraced houses that had just been blown to pieces.

As soon as the dust settled, the three of us scrambled out of the shelter to be confronted by a pile of rubble, and a black void where our home used to be. There was a small fire burning in the debris and my granddad was calling for help. He never used the shelter and was shaving at the kitchen sink at the time of the 'hit'. My grandmother had taken cover under the stairs, as this was considered to be the safest part of the house, however she was killed instantly. Granddad was buried in the rubble with one ear partly severed, but he survived.

Having left the security of our shelter we made our way through adjoining gardens until we found a house where we could go through to the road, but not without first being given a cup of tea by the occupants (tea being the English cure for all situations). The raid continued into the early hours of the 17th April when at last dawn broke and the siren sounded the 'All Clear', with the Luftwaffe returning to Germany to re-arm, ready to return the next night.

When all was quiet, I can remember walking back up the road to the pile of rubble, which was once our house, and on the way seeing two neatly laid out stretchers covered with blankets masking two bodies. I realise now, that must have been my grandmother and the other the victim of the scream. (I thanked God for my survival).

I returned later that day to see what, if any, of my belongings had survived. My Raleigh bike for instance, (which was advertised as an 'All Steel Frame' bicycle). Mine was a 24" wheel job, which Mum and Dad had purchased second-hand the day before. It was a proud machine painted in black, picked out with a red line and had chrome plated handle bars and a shiny bell, which completed my 'pride and joy'! I found it in the back garden with the paint work scratched, saddle missing and wheels buckled, but with the bell intact and still working".