George D. Knott was 9 years old when war started in September 1939 and 15 when it finished. Looking back as an older man he made a record of everything that he experienced during the war. You can scroll down to read the whole story of his story or click on a date in the Timeline to see what happened to him at a particular time.

*Timeline*

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**Winter 1945**: Shortages again

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*1939: Pupil at Franciscan Road School, Tooting.*

At the outbreak of war in September 1939 I was almost 10 years old and had just returned from holiday in Ramsgate where my mother and I had experienced our first trial blackout. We returned to London on Saturday 2nd of September, and within 24 hours war had been declared. My home was in Tooting in South West London, where I attended Franciscan Road Infants School.

*September 1939: First evacuation to Chichester*

My parents had registered me with the authorities as a potential evacuee, but as I had been on holiday I had missed my draft and had to follow on with some other latecomers several days later We were sent to Chichester in Sussex, although I cannot remember any details of the journey, where I was billeted with a nice family at number 8 (I think) Washington Street. The family, whose name I have forgotten, consisted of a mother, a son and daughter. The son, who was called Boy, though whether this was his real name or just an affectionate term I never found out, was awaiting his call-up for the army.

*Winter 1939: Life as an evacuee in Chichester*

Boy used to take me to Pagham, a small, local seaside resort, occasionally as it was so close, where we could enjoy ourselves on the beach, there being no defences built in those days.

I attended a local school, which involved a daily journey that included a section of the original Roman wall, a local slaughterhouse and Shipphams meat and fish paste factory. We attended the slaughterhouse daily for about a week, at the end of which we could not face the sights any longer, if I had been older and knew about such things, I would have become a vegetarian there and then. The Shipphams factory was much nicer where we could peer through the open windows at street level savouring the aroma of the various pastes and watching jars on their journey through the machinery.

*March 1940: First return to London*

I returned to London after six months, as things remained quiet during the "phoney war" period. Schooling in London was a bit erratic at that time due to the shortage of teachers and pupils.

*June 1940: Second evacuation to Barnstaple, Devon*

In June 1940 with the fall of France I was evacuated again, this time to Barnstaple in North Devon, a bit further afield. I remember the journey seemed endless but we finally arrived about teatime where myself and a number of others were taken to Oakleigh Road School.

Here we were paraded for selection where another lad, Frank Munns, a neighbour of mine from Tooting, and I were chosen by a local lady, a Mrs Gammon, who took us to her nice home, a modern semi-detached house, number 11 Ashleigh Crescent.

*Autumn 1940: Living with foster parents*

Mr and Mrs Gammon had one son, Ronald, who was 10 years old, a year older than us. Both we evacuees got along with him fairly well, though we did have disagreements with him which annoyed his mother. Mrs Gammon suffered a physical disability, which made her easily irritated, though I imagine we did not help at times, her husband George was a lot more even tempered and consequently more understanding with us. He was also a keen member of the newly formed Home Guard.

I think our foster mother found us a bit hard to understand with our more worldly ways, I am grateful to her for taking us in as it could not have been easy to handle two lively young

*December 1940: George's mother joins him*

My mother came down from London to stay in Barnstaple about six months after my arrival and found a room in another house in the crescent, number 33, and I left the Gammon's and joined her, a much more satisfactory arrangement.

Our new landlady had a husband away in the army and a young daughter of pre-school age, so she was glad of my mother’s company and the two of them got along very well together.

I was happy there making a number of friends among fellow evacuees, namely Alan Poole and John Creighton, neither from London, and we had a good relationship together, I was also accepted by quite a few local lads with no problems I remember.

*1941: School and life as an evacuee in Barnstaple*

My schooling there was rather disjointed as I moved schools four times. I imagine this was due to the numbers they had to accommodate, my first part time lessons being in an art college before being moved to an older stone built junior school where the hours were full time.

My sister joined us, from Mitcham in Surrey, as her husband was in the army in another part of the country. She shared a bungalow with another service wife in the local village of Braddiford, working in Barnstaple's main post office as a counter clerk.

Life for me in Barnstaple was fairly uneventful, the war did not touch us much, and German aircraft did pass over on their way to and from Swansea.

*1941: News from London*

What was happening in London however was brought home to us by the visit of an elder brother, who was a member of a light rescue unit of the Civil Defence, when he came to Devon for a short break, his tales of the Blitz and his general nerviness made us realise what was happening outside our little world.

I got to appreciate the beauty of the Devon countryside, seeing it with a lot of it with visits to Lynton and Lynmouth, Ilfracombe, Bideford, Westward Ho! And Exeter, but I did miss home and London, and when my mother announced we were returning I was happy to hear the news.

*January 1942: Second return to London*

In January 1942 we left Barnstaple, and after a dismal, cold and crowded train journey at night, we arrived home to re-join my father who had stayed there through all the heavy raids working as a tram conductor out of Telford Avenue, Streatham depot. He was a First World War veteran, serving on the Western Front, so I suppose this experience helped him handle the Blitz.

Enemy air activity over London had virtually ceased at the time, which I imagine played a part in the decision by my parents to return, and I was able to join a local school without any delay, Hillbrook Road Elementary, Upper Tooting.

1*942: Going to school in wartime London*

During 1942 life in my suburb of London was quite ordered with regular schooling, which was not interrupted by the light air raids that took place. My school was of the same LCC design as one that was hit in Lewisham, during a daylight low-level attack, where a number of children died. There had been no warning of the enemy aircraft's approach so the children were still in their classrooms when the bombs hit. It caused the authorities to issue urgent warnings and so whenever a warning sounded we had to troop to the ground floor. These classrooms had been converted into shelters by bricking up the windows and supporting the ceilings with extra-large joists and pillars, there were also desks and chairs so that lessons could continue. We all thought of it as an exciting break from the routine, speculating upon which lurid events might occur whilst we sheltered.

*1942: Family life in wartime London*

My mother carried on being a housewife which with three of us, my father, brother and myself to look after was a job in itself, she was also a cleaner at a local hospital, so was kept quite busy.

We saw my other brother, a soldier, at fairly regular intervals because he was stationed at Watford, within easy reach of home. My sister had also returned from Devon, living back at her maisonette at Mitcham and working for Mullards, a division of Phillips Radio, at Hackbridge in Surrey. Her husband was still in Britain and took part in the Dieppe raid, though at the time she did not know, and only found out much later.

*Christmas 1942: The effect of rationing*

Christmas 1942 came and went, but I cannot remember anything notable about it, in fact none of the wartime Christmases stick in my mind, with the shortage of most things, including toys and games they were a bit muted.

During 1943 shortages got worse though as youngsters this never seemed to worry us, though I realise now what a job it must have been for my mother, and all the other womenfolk, trying to prepare a varied diet with the small rations and lack of choice.

*1943: Shopping in the Blackout*

One small thing sticks in my mind concerning the blackout, during the winter months when it got dark early and the shops were still open, they did not appear to be open, not a glimmer of light showing, except for very small signs, usually by the door, and illuminated from within saying, OPEN, one then went through the blacked-out door and shut it behind one, a thick material inner curtain could then be pushed aside, again shutting it behind, finally arriving in the lighted shop, the rules had to be obeyed, so officialdom said.

*Dig for Victory*

Air raids continued sporadically throughout the year, but were only small-scale affairs, and at night mostly, my brother in the Civil Defence was busy at those times if the incidents were in his area. A lot of time he spent helping to run the group piggery, which they had been allowed to build on a very small part of Tooting Bec Common, regulations having been relaxed. It was a modest affair, but brick built, and the pigs were fed mainly on kitchen scraps, which the members of the group had to collect, upon which the animals appeared to thrive. All of the pigs went into the official swim but some pork was returned and shared out amongst members, which was welcome at times like Christmas.

*1943: The Air Training Corps (ATC)*

I was busy before and after school with a morning and evening paper round and I also delivered groceries for a local shop on Saturdays. At school I formed a close friendship with a boy in my class that has lasted for 53 years, as he only lives about 35 miles away I see him quite often.

An added interest came into our lives when we joined the ATC, 34F Squadron (Balham and Tooting). A whole range of interests became open to us; flying most weekends, gliding, annual fortnightly camps at airfields all over the country, as well as more mundane lessons at our H.Q. on aviation subjects, and last but not least, I played the trumpet and drums in the Squadron band.

*1943: Brother comes home on leave*

During the year my brother came home on a memorable leave after a series of voyages on the SS Aquitania, he had been to the Middle East, via Cape Town, the ship sailing alone and at top speed, making it virtually U-Boat proof. In Suez they had unloaded and then taken aboard German P.O.W.'s for transport to the USA, so after another fast voyage via the Cape they arrived in Boston.

The final leg of the voyage was a very slow convoy and docking at Liverpool. He came to us laden with various treasures that we had not seen for ages, oranges and grapefruits, cigarettes and chocolate and chewing gum, a real treasure trove.

*March 1944: Collecting Shrapnel*

1944 started quietly, but in March a series of heavy raids occurred, which caused some more excitement for us youngsters. We collected Shrapnel as usual, but also metal foil strips and rocket nose cones of the missiles fired from the 'Z' batteries on Tooting Bec Common manned by the Home Guard. These articles made good swaps for other items, and a lot of bartering took place on the day after each raid.

My father and I would stand in our porch, scorning the shelter, whilst the raids took place watching and listening to all the activity going on. The drone of the aircraft, bursting AA shells, rocket salvoes being fired and the glare of searchlights and occasional flares, which

*June 1944: V1 Attacks*

Despite the raids over the years my home remained undamaged until the V1 attacks but even then only received minor damage, I was very thankful that was all we suffered and I now realise what a huge target London was to try and destroy.

In June the V1 flying bomb campaign started. After a week of constantly interrupted lessons, we were all tired having had little sleep with the constant barrage, before the AA guns left London for the coast. We schoolchildren were sent home indefinitely. My friend and I enjoyed this time immensely despite the danger, there were always flying bombs to watch, incidents to visit, bits of bomb to collect and no school.

I continued my paper rounds twice a day, the only difference now being while the round remained the same the number of papers got fewer as people moved out of London and cancelled their papers. I was still paid the same fortunately.

*June 1944: Living in an Anderson shelter*

There were street shelters that I could duck into if a V1 appeared, or if there were not; people would sometimes invite me to share their Morrison shelter until the danger had passed.

My family and I spent every night in our Anderson shelter in the back garden where we managed to get a reasonable night's sleep despite the rather cramped conditions. The shelter was quite dry and as it was summertime, not cold. There were four bunks, consisting of two stout lengths of timber with one crosspiece at each end, with hessian to lie on. They were uncomfortable but after a while one slept on them as if they were the finest feather mattresses, I always felt very secure in that small shelter.

*July 1944: Third evacuation to South Wales*

In July 1944 I was sent by my parents to stay with my Aunt and Uncle in South Wales for a few weeks, so I suppose you could call it my third evacuation, though unofficial this time, as I think they may have noticed some signs of nervousness in me, though I cannot remember feeling that way at all.

During my stay with my Aunt and Uncle I saw a lot of my cousins' husband-to-be, Tom, a sergeant in the US army and whom she married in 1945, he came from Florida, and she sailed to join him in 1946. He used to bring all sorts of goodies to the house, and by being there I of course came in for a share, the chewing gum being the most popular.

*September 1944: Third return to (jumpy) London*

Returning to London once more I found the V1's still coming over but at a much reduced rate, I took up where I left off except school had restarted. I benefited from my stay in the peace and quiet of Glamorgan, I realised that perhaps the V1 attacks had taken more out of me than I had thought, most adults seemed to be jumpy and constantly listening for bombs. It was hard at times to tell the difference, between a V1, car or motorcycle, and London seemed empty, so many had left.

In October I left school at the age of 14 and went to work at a process engraving firm in the City to which I travelled every day, by rail, with my brother who was now no longer a member of the Civil Defence organisation.

*September 1944: V2 attacks*

The V2 rockets had started arriving in September and were a daily occurrence, but I think most people became fatalistic about them as they arrived without any warning; they were much less harrowing than the doodlebugs. As we used to say, ‘if you hear it coming the dangers over’, referring of course to the fact that the missile travelled faster than sound. In March 1945 a V2 fell on Smithfield Market, about 11 o'clock, a busy time for the area, consequently the casualties were heavy.

The building I worked in was in Farringdon Road only a short distance from this incident which was quite a startling experience, first the terrific explosion followed by the sound of the rockets descent, fortunately our building was of modern construction and so only shook, the windows had all been bricked up at the beginning of the war so there was no flying glass either.

*Winter 1945: Shortages again*

It was a cold, bleak winter with shortages of fuel, everywhere looked tired and rundown and the war seemed to be dragging on long after we expected it to be finished, each day the sound of explosions as rockets continued to fall, a depressing time.

*May 1945: VE day celebrations*

Finally the war ended with the celebrations of VE-Day taking place, I with my family did not really join in, we found it all a bit of an anti-climax, so taking it quietly and pleased it was all over, in Europe anyway, we slipped into peace.