

People in this story:

Jenkyn Evans, Winston Morris, Gwen Evans, Brian Smith, Alan Pinnegar, Nellie Thomas, Stanley Evans, Myles Stapleton, William Evans, Mr Palmer, Tom Davies, Ronnie Jefford, Laurie Moreton, Gower Davies, Dilys Ann Evans, Mrs JH Taylor, WE Moreton, Miss Howell, Ernest Clement, Sylvanus Jones, Rev JP Martin, Hon Sec William Rees, Jean Nicholas, Eric Lee, Tony Doherty, A. Pinnegar (Sen), Will Harry, Arthur Harry, Denny Clement

I was the first child to be born in the village of Reynoldston after the declaration of war on Germany and I still retain clear memories of those dark days. I was born at Hayes Farm which was in an area where the local population were under threat of removal because the locality was designated to be used as a training ground. In the end fortune favoured the locals who were allowed to stay despite the fact that the American soldiers were to be camped in their midst when they arrived in 1943. The camp comprised of two tents for officers who set up their station in adjacent corners of two of our fields known respectively as the Well field and the Lower House field whilst the two large tents for the men were erected on a dry part of Frogmoor on the other side of the field hedge. I remember one occasion when my father and myself had walked to a cottage below the farm and as we were returning one of the officers asked whether it was our land that they were on. My father said that it was not but we rented it from the local Penrice Estate. So you are the farmer drawled the Yank in the familiar accent. Once we had agreed to partake of their hospitality we were given some tinned peaches as a present. Those officers had their own waymarker to guide them which was a yellow triangle nailed to the gate-post which stood beside the cowshed. The Yanks loved good food so they sometimes offered to purchase a little milk and a few eggs. Next door to the

farm was Jefford's bakehouse and on one occasion in 1944 two little boys, Jenkyn Evans and Winston Morris toddled up to the bakery to obtain some loaves for two Yanks who had asked us if we could get some bread for them. For that errand we were rewarded with a couple of sticks of chewing gum which held the characteristic American taste. The main training ground for amphibious assault was at Oxwich Bay and occasionally one would see a craft pass the farmhouse as they raced along the road. However, on one occasion I remember a group of Yanks repairing such a craft which had crashed into the small length of free standing wall that afforded the boundary to a field known as the Castle Park. I would suggest that it was an attempt to smash a way through which led to the wall winning that battle. There were slit trenches known as foxholes all over the western tip of Cefn Bryn and we saw them excavating them. I was able to see this because my mother, Mrs. Gwen Evans used to take us on a visit to the Willis family who lived at Hill End Farm. It was beside this route that I saw two American soldiers repairing a jeep which had broken down. To test my memory out we decided to use a metal detector at that spot and sure enough there were split-pin bolts and nuts unearthed and the biggest surprise of all a fifty centime coin 1942 so we must assume that some French coinage had been dished out to the troops before they invaded the French beaches.//////// On one day I remember seeing dozens of American soldiers at practice in full uniform and carrying rifles over the western tip of Cefn Bryn. I do not remember hearing gun fire but there must have been because of the hundreds of empty shell cases from the .303 rifles that they carried. Amongst these that we have discovered there were a few blanks. Amidst this debris of 1943 to 1945 we also discovered a button lost off an American great coat. It is amazing how people these days seem to think that some young children do not know right from wrong well I assure you that the village children were educated to ensure their very survival. We were ordered not to pick up any objects

that we found because we might be 'blown to pieces.' As always there are those young adventurers who forget the rules so after the soldiers had left on their journey south they left a booby trap in the trees at Crawley Wood, Oxwich. An evacuee, Brian Smith had his hand blown off and his mate Alan Pinnegar was fortunate not to lose a leg. At Knelston Primary School we sometimes watched as German prisoners were being paraded to a local field to pick early potatoes, there were no smiles just sullen faces and probably very confused minds as children we were inquisitive but equally unresponsive before being ushered away from the roadside wall by Miss Nellie Thomas. She was the one who took the infant classes, it was to her that some of us who had spent many an autumnal hour picking rose hips took our collection. We were thrilled to think that after partaking of the extra source of vitamin C our pilots would be 'able to see better in the dark.' Of course the fruit was used to make rose hip syrup for babies, but what we had been told certainly motivated the imaginative world that young children love toward the belief that we were playing a big part in winning the war. Stanley Evans, our father, was needed for the essential production of food because his parents were sixty two and fifty nine respectively. His mother's health was fast failing and one night when the oil installations at Llanelli were being bombed she was seen sitting on the stairs in a distressed state even though no bombs were ever dropped on Reynoldston, she subsequently died in September 1942. Father was always keen to support voluntary efforts so he joined the many locals who formed the local Homeguard. I understood that patrols in the Oxwich Bay area amounted to half a dozen men with a rifle each, a few rounds of ammunition and a couple of grenades no wonder the so called, 'Dad's Army,' has been the centre of much amusement, yet, the lads were serious and fully committed to the cause carrying out rifle practice at a place on Cefn Bryn called Moormills, there are numerous bullets to be found in the area of the sinkhole in which the

targets were obviously placed. One of father's oft quoted stories was of a large man Myles Stapleton who was about to hurl a hand grenade whilst his companions were safely ensconced in a gravel pit. Unfortunately, Myles had been rather nervous and he accidentally dropped the bomb once he had extracted the pin. In sheer terror he fell and scrambled into the gravel pit where his colleagues were finding the whole affair rather amusing. Though Myles was a member of the Homeguard his activities were under surveillance because of the family connections with Germany. This has led to the rumour that he was a so called spy in Reynoldston. I can assure you that the story is but a rumour and held no substance in fact. All in all it is no wonder that Myles left soon after the war to farm tobacco in Southern Rhodesia. Tobacco was a much sought after commodity during the war and grandfather, Mr. William Evans ensured that all his friends had access to tobacco and cigarettes. It was another scarce commodity that led to the supply of the other for in wartime and up to 1948 farmhouse butter was looked upon as if it was gold. In a street in Swansea, I believe it was Oxford Street, there was a hairdresser named Mr. Palmer. The liaison between the two meant that there were many satisfied people. Upon the table in the parlour at Hayes Farm there used to be stacked thousands of Craven A, Players, Goldflake, Capstan, Woodbine, Senior Service and Parkdrive cigarettes as well as St. Bruno tobacco once the stocks had been replenished. Every window had the familiar 'blackouts' and one had to ensure that no light from the oil lamps could be seen from the outside. By the back door the .22 rifle was always at the ready beside the army great coat which hung on the wall. The Yanks did have heavier armoury as exemplified with shell cases left behind after the war. Practice with the more powerful weapons took place in the area east of King Arthur's Stone which is a familiar landmark from the much earlier times. From the evidence left behind it would appear as if the soldiers were quite unprepared for the

forthcoming invasions of D. Day. Little did I know when I heard those lorries passing the farmhouse that so many lives were likely to be lost. We know that at least one of the survivors returned to Frogmoor because a quarter dollar of 1983 had been buried about four inches deep. Often the German bombers were flying at great heights as they droned overhead on their way to attack more distant targets as Belfast but there is a vivid memory I have of father holding me in his arms outside the porch door. When mother arrived at the door he said something like, "Look over Castle Park Gwen, poor old Swansea is copping it." There in the distance the sky was coloured by the blazing city. Sometimes there was great excitement when the news broke that a German U-boat had been sunk at some distance off Oxwich Point and that the gunners situated on Rhossili Downs had downed a German aircraft which ditched in Port Eynon Bay. At the end of the war there was great excitement that men were returning: there was Tom Davies who had fought in Burma, Ronnie Jefford of the Royal Engineers who had been in the North Africa campaign and who had chased 'jerry' up through Italy. Some of course had lost their lives such as Laurie Moreton whose photograph occupies a place in our family album. He was unfortunately killed in 1944. With luck and the fact that the area around the village of Reynoldston was a farming area the majority of the youth of that generation survived. To show how far flung the Reynoldston Boys were there was Gower Davies who had had to have a plate inserted in his skull after being blown up on the beaches at Dunkirk and my friend Winston Morris' brother of the same name who had been drowned at sea. For such a village community to suffer relatively few losses then it had to be by the grace of God. Finally, in honour of those Americans who travelled so far from home into an uncertain future on behalf of other people, I include my poem.

Soldiers of My Memory What missing, buried secrets

lie beneath this burning moor? Where G I's played at war games some fifty years ago. Low ranks camped upon the hill and officers in our field, With a yellow triangle on the post, their foxholes for a shield.

Soldiers of my memory, I'll ask your spirits now, Did you race across the Bryn and wipe your sweated brow? Was it to you we brought fresh bread from the bakery, Who gave us sticks of yanky gum for our friends to see?

Remember! Long-gone energies expended on the hill, Those sheep paths and the hollows: where you lay so still; The amphibious craft upon the beach, behind the well worn dunes, Prior to you leaving as you whistled farewell tunes?

Spent, twenty mil' cases and three o threes lie here too, Made in Denver, Colorado and fired round by you. Who owned this greatcoat button and the fifty centime coin? Before migrating southward and your channel fellows join.

Did you ever see the peaceful fields of country life, once more, Or perish in some shell burst upon the foreign shore? How many friends survived you? Did you live to tell? Of blasting German bunkers along Death's road to hell.

I thank you for the memories of your selfless sacrifice; Pictured now in friendly peace time, not tainted by a vice. I'll gather the many artefacts that you have left behind And clean the war time treasures that will keep you all in mind.

I trust that you have enjoyed my account of my early memories and understand that war is an alien thing which

belittles those who instigate it for they are of no importance. Let only those who continually fight for justice be remembered.

I am delighted to hear that my account has given pleasure to many people. This has motivated me towards examining other information that I have of the wartime period at Reynoldston. Of course none of this will involve the occupations of the inhabitants. At this time of crisis the sense of community was intense and everyone helped one another, I expect that the population of the village would have been no more than two hundred and fifty which involves all those who were part of the Reynoldston address and who lived beyond the immediate boundary. Back at Hayes Farm Stanley and Gwen were delighted at the birth of their baby daughter, Dilys Ann Evans on the 10th June 1943. I remember our mother pushing the pram out to the village chapel so that Dilys could be weighed at intervals in the ante-room. Our father was a driving force behind the charity known as the Army Boys Fund. The first two evening of Whist Drives were held at Pound House in January 1941. They were later held at The Bryn, Brynfield House and at The Rectory so that by the 31st March 1941 the fund stood at £39. In 1939 men working on farms of forestry were receiving £2 per week of sixty hours if they were over the age of twenty-one years. Mrs. J.H. Taylor was the treasurer and W.E Moreton verified the accounts, reference to an excess from the Soldiers Christmas Fund suggests that the charity had begun before 1941. A dance was held on 14th June 1941 for which two hundred and sixty three tickets were sold and after paying the band five pounds, Miss Howell for tuning the piano as well as Ernest Clement and Sylvanus Jones for their services there was a sum of £14 for the fund. I have possession of our mother and father's identity cards which they received on the 21st May 1943 together with a recording book for the homeguard's operations at Moormills which states that there was a practice held

there in clear conditions on 31st July 1943. There was also a Hospital Contributory Scheme in operation with the Reverend J.P. Martin as Honourable Secretary and William Rees of St. George's Terrace as treasurer; it was to him members had to go to purchase the stamps. Our family's annual fees from 1942 to 1945 were twelve shillings inflated to seventeen shillings in 1945. Doctors who attended the sick were of course paid separately. On the 27th March 1945 Jean Nicholas of the Council House and Eric Lee of Brynfield Cottage gained entry to the Gowerton Grammar Schools and in August 1945 Tony Doherty returned home from West Africa together with A. Pinnegar (Senior), Will Harry, Arthur Harry and Denny Clement. By September 1945 village life was beginning to return to 'normal' and the first Sunday School outing for five years took place on the 5th September when the mums and children went once again to the fairground at Porthcawl. Finally, the shell cases detected have much information on them, nearly all the 20 mm cases are dated 1941 B.B.C. which stands for the Bridgport Brass Company. One smaller case is labelled L.C. 42 which means that it was a blank with a cordite filling manufactured in 1942. Smaller shell cases are almost all 1940, 1942 or 1943 vintage. Many have DEN on them which refers to the Denver Ordnance Plant. The American shell cases are rimless but have a groove to assist the extraction of the case. Many of the cases that are dug up are very fragile because of the combined effects of heathland fires and underground weathering, for the worst cases I have constructed two ornaments one in the shape of a cross and the other resembles the outline of a Westminster Clock. This should ensure that material which most would have flung away is now preserved as valuable historical evidence of the period when war affected the lives of all the souls of Reynoldston.

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