


DAY - 75TH ANNIVERSARY


COMMUNITY SPIRIT: Hamish Vernal – the baby being held by his mother at the back left of the group – was only months old when this photograph was taken on VE Day when he lived in Alexandria

to keep her emotions to herself. She knew that my brother and I were scared of the blackouts and we didn't really understand what was going on. She was a rock to us, and we thought the world of her.

"On VE Day she went out and said hello to the neighbours, and we were given flags by one of the neighbours before we all went to church. But I could see she was sad.

"We gave her a hug on the way back home and she looked down at us and gave us both a kiss.

"But once she was indoors she said she had to go and sort a few things out in the bedroom.

"I suppose I was worried about her because she wasn't her normal self, so I walked to the door. But all I could hear was the sound of sobbing for what seemed like a long time, but was probably just a few minutes. And that was it. All was quiet.

"She came out afterwards and took both our hands and asked: 'Will

we go to a party later?' And we did in a park close to our house, where there was a bonfire. Mum was smiling and wishing all the neighbours the best and she even sang Amazing Grace.

"It has always stuck in my mind how she was able to pull herself together.

"I loved her then and, although she died in 1986, I still do."

HAMISH VERNAL Inverurie

"I grew up in King Edward Street in Alexandria and I was only a few months old on VE Day, but my family told me about it later on.

"There's a photograph of my mother holding me as a baby, my father and my seven-year-old sister. Also, there is my granny and one of my uncles.

"They brought out the bunting and flags, but rationing meant we couldn't have a party, although we made up for it at the coronation in 1952.

"All the houses were accessed by a close which led through to washing the greens stretching the whole length of the street, as did the washhouses – there were no automatic washing machines in those days.

"At their back was a huge wall topped by barbed wire and over this was the torpedo factory where my dad worked. We lived at the third bottom close on the left-hand side and I was born there, at home in the winter of 1945.

"They had felt 'at risk' during the hostilities. With the torpedo factory being next door, it was subject to regular bombing.

"My father was in a reserved occupation but was a fire watcher at night.

"The whole close had access to an Anderson shelter dug in at the back of our house.

"They often told me of times when they all had to use it and the shrapnel pattering on the ground outside.

"Rationing went on for some time and there weren't any luxuries. But I grew up in that street and all I can remember of an exceptionally happy childhood was the sense of neighbourliness. I've been glad to see it reappearing in the last few weeks."

GILLIAN MACWATT Brechin

"I asked my mother, Inga Gibb, about her memories of VE Day. She is 91 and originally from Brechin.

"She recalled being a member of the school choir who went to Brechin Castle to sing. After, they had tea and cake served by Lord and Lady Southesk.

"Following this, her friend Chrissie said they should go to Montrose because there was going to be dancing in the square.

"They did this and they both had a tremendous amount of fun. A live band played and they danced the hours away on a raised platform. Everyone in the street danced."

SIGRID BRUHN Charlottenlund, Denmark (now living in Orkney)

"I remember it was a lovely spring evening in our community and a group of children – including me – were out playing, the thrushes and blackbirds were singing and we were all having a good time when, suddenly, one of the adults caught up with us and told us the Germans had capitulated and we were free.

"Well, everybody was very excited and, as you might imagine, it was wonderful news.

"We had been occupied by the German army for five years and they had taken over our schools and other places and, although we were young, we could all see what the news meant to our parents.

"We heard there were many parties and the atmosphere was joyful in Copenhagen, but it didn't change a lot of things overnight. There was still rationing, and the war

continued in other parts of the world, but Denmark was quite prosperous because of its agriculture and the country got back on its feet.

"I travelled a lot after that and I eventually came to Orkney to learn more about my ancestors – and, many years later, I am still living here.

"I am 84 and I can't imagine being anywhere else now. I met (poet and author) George Mackay Brown and (composer) Peter Maxwell Davies and we loved the cultural life in and around Stromness and other parts of Orkney.

"It has been strange in recent weeks because of the Covid-19 outbreak...

"But, even in this situation, you can always go into the garden and be thankful."

ANN SUTHERLAND Caithness

"My late mother, Jessie Mackay (nee Douglas), from Caithness, who passed away aged 91 in

2012, loved to recall her experience on VE Day.

"She was a member of the ATS and billeted in Golders Green, London, when the war ended.

"On VE Day she and her colleagues headed for Trafalgar Square to join the celebrations. In the crowd, she was amazed to meet up with her cousin William Swanson, from Thurso, who was a paratrooper in Arnhem, and whom she hadn't seen for a number of years, among the thousands who thronged the square.

"It was a very poignant moment for her knowing that, even as they celebrated, her brother James Douglas, who was a Seaforth Highlander and captured at St Valery, was still being held prisoner by the Germans.

"Years later, when pictures of the scene would appear in the media, she was proud to know she been part of the celebrations, and loved to recall many wartime memories."