

Transcript of Roy Bartlett Audio Clip

After the Blitz gradually died away, we had a reasonable period of peacefulness and – until the – what they called the, Little Blitz, developed in the spring of 1944 which gave us another different type of experience. Although I was only young with my dad being a warden and mum in the WVS and the – the lectures on home defence and all that were held at the school so it was natural really, I guess, I went along with mum and dad to all these lectures and became something of an expert on aircraft recognition and certainly fire fighting with a stirrup pump. It was always great concern with mum and dad, because being a hardware shop in a little glass-top outhouse, they had two-fifty gallon paraffin oil tanks. Not a terribly consoling thought if a fire developed in that area.

During that period, I'm sure it was a Friday night, by an association of ideas, Friday night treat was scrambled egg on toast, not real egg, powdered egg, which I quite liked, and I know that's what I was eating down the shelter. Mum said something like, 'You take it down shelter cos the sirens have gone. I'm just finishing off dad's sandwiches. I'll be down shortly'. I'm down the cellar chatting, the anti-aircraft guns are going, planes are overhead. All the usual noises going on and suddenly mum's very excited voice from upstairs, yelling and bawling about something or another, obviously wasn't dad's sandwiches. I went up the stairs. It was an incendiary bomb that had landed in the back garden. Mum was heard it and then heard the fizzing and she was yelling and shouting for me to come up. Something I trained for, yet, I guess, secretly worried about, I had to be the man because dad was missing.

Everybody was missing that night and there weren't too many down the shelter and nearly all women and mum had already grabbed the tin hat and the stirrup pump, got a bucket ready and the big concern, as I say, was the – don't let it be near the paraffin oil tanks. Ease open the back door and thankfully the glare was away to our left in the garden. And I'd got a dustbin lid in hand so peeping around that cos the glare from the incendiary bomb is quite intense, white magnesium glare. But peeping round the dustbin lid, I could see that it was fairly harmless in the vegetable patch but the problem was the fence – dividing fence was already alight and it's not a good idea to have things burning on the ground. It can be quite an attraction to those above and I sort of adopted the training approach with the stirrup pump hose.

I was the hose man, mum was pumping away and you tend to forget what you'd been taught, initially I directed a jet on to the fence and it wouldn't go out. It's magnesium globules which died under a gush of water and flare again cos the intense heat. And you're thinking all sorts of wild things. 'I'll change to fine spray, obliterate the air supply. That's what they told us' and it worked. You hold it steady and it works. Having got the fence under control mum was yelling, 'Get down lower, get down lower', I couldn't get any lower, I'd be underground [laughs] crawling on hands and knees. Put the spray directly over the bomb and, yes, it did seem to suppress it which didn't quite – and then, of course we ran out of water, a bucketful doesn't last very long.

In the mean time, a lady had come up from the shelter and she was filling up the kitchen bowl from the scullery tap but by the time she tried to fill our bucket in the dark, she trips over and chucked the water everywhere, it was complete chaos. But eventually we got the thing under control and then grabbed a load of sandbag which was kept handy and she managed to throw it over the thing and it was on its last legs, though we hosed everything in sight. At some time during that episode I must have yelled out, 'Water, water, we want more bloody water', and afterwards mum said, 'You better get out of those wet things, we'll have a cup of tea'. About an hour later she pulled me to one side, she said, 'I rather you didn't use that word, you know, it's not very nice'. Even under those circumstances mum's sense of propriety did not falter [laughs].