

An excerpt from Violet Eyles life story who was evacuated to East Knoyle at aged 31 with her two younger sisters, Edith and Eleanor, daughter June aged 6 and niece aged 11.

1940 the air raids were more frequent and as Edie had been ill, her Guide Captain Gwendoline Wilkinson suggested to mother that Edie went away to her Estate at East Knoyle. There was a large cottage vacant "Laundry cottage", in the village, also they required a postman, and Edie could do that, so away she went, but it wasn't long before she got lonely, and sent for me to keep her company. So taking June and my niece Anita, I also went to East Knoyle. We settled in the children going to the village school, and me doing the housework. One day Edie came home with a big parcel and said 'do you want a laugh', 'just wait a while' she went out and soon came back all dressed up in her postman uniform. It consisted of a long very wide skirt made of thick heavy material like felt, it looked like a tent, a jacket of the same, they were so thick they could have stood up on their own, and all this crowned with a big felt hat like an Australian army hat. She was very reluctant to wear it, but we had a good laugh every time she put it on. On her post round she got a few odd jobs, like gardening for the old people, and would be given vegetable from time to time. One she arrived home early with a rabbit in her postbag. Someone had just caught it and gave it to her, and she had slipped it in her post bag. When she tipped her postbag out what a mess, the rabbit hadn't been paunched (cleaned), so the blood had seeped over the letters, so I had the job of washing the blood stains of the letters and bag, and drying them before she could finish delivering them. When Edie had finished her round, she came home and cleaned and skinned it. As there was only a small stove and very little fuel Sir Herbert, (Guide Captain's father) gave us permission to go to the pine woods and thin out the dead trees. These we pulled up and dragged them home to the cottage, where we were kept busy chopping them up, before burning. When the big house had a delivery of coal Sir Henry sent us over a few sacks. When the army evacuated Dunkirk a lot of them came to East Knoyle to be billitted at Cloud House, 'Captain' as we used to call Gwendoline Wilkinson, obtained some cigarettes, and we helped her distribute them to the soldiers as they marched through the village to Cloud House, they looked very tired and weary. As we occupied Laundry cottage, we were asked if we would do the Soldier's washing. The first batch were very muddy and the socks were full of holes, there were large wooden sinks, with draining boards, a large walk in airing cupboard, plus hanging facilities in the garden. We also darned their socks it took us hours, and June gave us a hand and got very good at it. The soldiers had picked up a little stray puppy on their way, I think he contributed to a lot of the holes in the socks, they asked us if we would like it, so he joined us at the cottage. We were asked to do the washing regularly for them, we were paid 9d. for privates and 1/3d for officer's clothes, they had pyjamas in their

bundles. A couple of soldiers used to come to the cottage early Monday mornings bringing their own fuel and light the copper for us, so we were kept very busy. Then Eleanor came down away from the bombing, and Captain took us to the big house and found another bed, it was one that shut into a cupboard. It was then suggested we help to organise dances in the village hall. But the floor was in bad state, so we went to Salisbury and bought french chalk and wax and got the soldiers on cleaning and waxing the hall floor. Edie and Eleanor used to go dancing Saturday nights and got friendly with the soldiers, and when they were off duty they would pop in to see us at the cottage. They were always welcomed, but as we would say "You can have a cup of tea but no cuddle.

Eleanor's friend, Cissie, also came for a holiday, she arrived looking very smart with a nice straw hat on, she'd spent her clothing coupons on it and was very proud of it. The following morning coming down to breakfast, we discovered the puppy enjoying himself with the straw hat, he looked so comical with the brim round his neck, chewing the crown, poor Cissie, she had to laugh. The three girls would go off to all the dances available, when they were in other villages they would cadge a lift in either the Butchers or Bakers van, once even on the Coal Cart. One day Sir Herbert gave us four pigeons he'd shot, and Edie said she would pluck and clean them. We decided we would bake them, but they were tough, so then we cut them up and fried them, but still couldn't get our teeth in them, and an army cook suggested we boil them and make some bread sauce to go over them, they were eatable, just, but they helped eke out the rations, the soldiers did manage a little tea and sugar to help the cuppas flow. Unfortunately June developed German Measles, that year there had been an epidemic in the village, and so of course poor June developed it, and we had to get the Doctor from Mere for treatment, but that didn't stop her from hallucinating, and walking around in her fever. My sister-in-law Nell came for a holiday away from the bombing and brought her son Dennis and baby daughter Judy. When they went back home, we managed to persuade mother to come away from the Air Raids for a break, it was getting very bad in London. It seemed we always had someone staying with us recuperating. Near Christmas it was decided to have a fancy dress dance. So we all dressed up in anything we could think of pyjamas, or any improvised garment. One of the soldiers borrowed June's little kilt, it just about covered his bare essentials. One of the women in the village made herself a fairy dress out of white crepe paper, by the time the dance had ended there was very little of her dress left. The soldiers would tear a piece off her dress everytime they danced past her, so there was plenty of leg showing.

After this mother went back to London, we couldn't get to stay away, she said "Hitler is not going to chase me away from my home", my sisters followed first Eleanor than Edie, I think they knew mother was having a job paying her way. As she only had her 10 shilling pension and of course there was very little call

for theatrical wigs, as nearly all the west end shows were closed. So I was left alone with June and Anita, I missed my sister and I was lonely in the evenings so decided to go back home as well. I wanted to try and make my home liveable. I got back to Walthamstow to find that our house had been bombed.

Note- It was at East Knoyle that my Aunt Eleanor met her future husband that was the driver of the 'tank' that knocked down the fence/wall mentioned in another Archive memoir.