

Wendy Williams pays tribute to both her mother Freda Jenkins and her father Ray Tanner



Mum's War

In 1939 my mother Freda Jenkins was 20 years old. She lived in Dulwich, South East London, with her parents and younger brother, Stan. Once war broke out her fiancé Ray Tanner joined the Royal Navy and her brother the RAF. Her father became a fire warden at the gasworks.

Mum worked as a shorthand typist at an insurance company with offices at Hyde Park Corner, just behind Buckingham Palace.

She travelled to work by bus daily and once the Blitz started was often diverted to avoid bombed out areas, damaged roads and gas leaks.

At home her father had dug an Anderson Shelter, but she and her mother preferred sheltering under the kitchen table as it was warmer and more comfortable!

Dad got a weekend leave in November 1941 for their wedding but had to call the day before as no-one had told him the time of the ceremony.

Mum continued to live at home with her parents and any time off Dad had he joined her there, apart from a brief spell in Yorkshire staying in a converted tram.

The lack of information was always a problem. One day someone in the office announce that an aircraft carrier had been sunk, but it was several hours before any news could be found to know that (for now) Dad was safe.

The constant bombing took its toll. The Blitz was bad enough but once the V1 and V2 bombs (doodlebugs) started they were more terrifying. The fact that they arrived in daylight, and the silence once their engines cut out then all you could do was wait for the bang! Mum and my Nan often went to the coast to have a quieter time.

Eventually both her husband and brother returned home safely, and she and Ray could start their married life for real.



DAD'S WAR



My father, Ray Tanner, had started training in the 1930's to be a merchant seaman but decided that it wasn't for him and started working in the City of London.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 he volunteered for the Navy and somehow ended up in the Fleet Air Arm.

He was trained as a rear gunner which involved sitting in the back of an open cockpit of a Fairey Swordfish ('the Stringbag') aiming a machine gun at the enemy. Not an occupation that had a long life



expectancy especially as they were taking off and landing on a floating runway!

He married my Mother, Freda, in November 1941 and by the end of 1942 was on the aircraft carrier, HMS Illustrious, in the Indian Ocean where they had a fairly uneventful time, and sadly lost more men on training flights than actual combat. One of my Dad's abiding memory was of them sailing out of Durban to the strains of an operatic aria being sung on the dock.

Back in Britain he spent time in Yorkshire where he and Mum stayed in a converted tram; he would fly overhead and wave over the side of the plane to say he would be home soon.



By the time he was demobbed he was serving as a Petty Officer Gunnery Trainer in Portsmouth. Much to Mum's amusement he was very popular with the Wrens who had to attend the courses.



Although his whole life he loved anything to do with Naval history and loved films on the subject he rarely talked about his service except for small stories about the idiosyncrasies of wartime.

There was his hatred of tight clothes ever since wearing sailor's tunics and his dislike of close quarter living have stepped out of his bunk into the breakfast marmalade!

It also took over 30 years to get him on to an aeroplane again!

Ray Tanner's medals



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