

We lived beside the main coastal road on the Firth of Clyde and there was very little traffic. Occasionally we would see tanks and we would throw handfuls of gravel at them. We also saw occasional RN lorries and convoys of army lorries but we did not throw gravel at them because they would have seen us. My sister caught scarlet fever and was, for some reason, taken to hospital in an army ambulance which seemed enormous compared with an ordinary ambulance.

A mine was washed up on the beach a few hundred yards from the house and that also seemed enormous. Surprisingly it appeared to be unguarded. It must have been disarmed as we never heard an explosion and it eventually disappeared.

There were no other children living near us so we were very pleased when our mother told us that two boys my age were staying with their granny nearby and they were coming to play. Our mother warned us that the boys had no mother. I was really shocked at this news but they seemed, if anything, nicer than most children and quite normal. We never saw them again but 65 years later I saw a two part BBC drama about the loss of the troopship Laconia off the coast of West Africa. One of the characters, who was shown dying of dehydration in a lifeboat, was the mother of the two boys. The incident was not publicised at the time because it resulted in the second biggest loss of life from a British ship during the whole war. A number of U-Boats saved hundreds of lives. Many more could have been saved by the Royal Navy if they had arrived on the scene. The Americans tried to bomb one of the U-Boats while it was towing four lifeboats

In 1943 a black labrador came to stay for a few months because her owner, Horace Gandy, was at sea. She was a lovely dog and we were sorry to see her go. Gandy, as he was known, appeared in uniform on a motorbike and rode away with the dog sitting on the petrol tank. A sight that was not easily forgotten. He was on his way to the Normandy beaches. The internet tells us that he fought at Jutland in 1916 and commanded a Motor Torpedo Boat flotilla which was in action when Hong Kong fell to the Japanese. He then led a large party of RN personnel and Chinese through Japanese occupied China to Rangoon.

In early March 1944 we went to the railway station about a mile away to meet my father who had been away for at least two years. Normally we would have walked to the station but on this occasion we went by car. I had no memory of my father but I was disappointed to see that he was not in uniform.

This was because his LST (Landing Ship Tank) had been torpedoed west of Cape Finisterre. Obviously he was in uniform when he dived into the sea and then spent eight hours on a Carley Raft. The ship was carrying tanks and water bowsers from North Africa as they would be needed in Normandy. Because there was a heavy sea running and she sank in the dark there was considerable loss of life amongst the army drivers who would have been asleep and expecting to be at home on leave within a couple of days. My father said very little about it. One thing he did say was that as soon as some of the crew realised that the ship was sinking they forced open the liquor locker. While he was on leave he made a bow and arrow and shot a rabbit. I was very impressed although rabbit meat was not a novelty.

In 1945 we spent most of the summer in Sunderland where a new LST was being built in the expectation that Royal Navy would have to help the Americans invade Japan.

We went to Sunderland High School where the natives were generally hostile. They thought we were very peculiar because we did not have Maker or Geordie accents. I remember one rather nice girl and some unpleasant boys. On one occasion my sister was being bullied and I smashed a small flowerpot over the boy's head. I told the teacher why I had done it and she didn't bat an eyelid.

My last memory was that the new LST sailed up to the Clyde. She was anchored offshore and we went out to her in one of her motor cutters. Because she was unladen she was riding high in the water and we had to climb a Jacobs Ladder to reach the main deck, which must have been nearly thirty feet up. I have to admit that I was pretty scared. The ship was armed with 20mm Oerlikons which we were allowed to elevate and traverse by turning the handles. Even more fun than a bow and arrow.



*Showing some of the 460 stretcher cases from Juno beach on the tank deck of an LST bound for a Channel port in June 1944. Needless to say it did not look like that when I went on board.*

I enjoyed the war because we were living in the country. A year after VE day we moved to a suburb of Glasgow which seemed to have very little to recommend it.