

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2022**

## **2210 Terror in the Hull Skies**

**by Lesley New**

## Terror in the Hull Skies

We may gaze into our loved ones' eyes, in search of clues from the past. In their glints, we hope to find stories, memories, traits that make us, allowing us to understand. Often, paths lead to those who proudly served in wars, easily we forget the impact on those left behind.<sup>1</sup> My journey was no different. Between 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 1941, Hull faced the most air-raids of WW2.<sup>2</sup> How could I understand? Memories of my treasured weekly visits to Nanna, the sights, sounds and aromas would help me discover. In my Nanna's honour, I remember...

The dark eerie passageway led to a flickering flame in the room beyond. "*Sing something simple*" harmonised from the radio. Mary sat, keeping warm close to the open fire. Deep in her thoughts, longingly waiting for her weekly visit. The room was filled with the aroma of burnt newspaper, the scorched remnants on the hearth beside the crimping irons. Mary loved to crimp her hair, creating her distinctive wave. As usual, she had left them far too long heating in the cinders of the open fire. The newspaper catching fire, as she tested them before grabbing a lock of her hair. She smiled as she knew her grandchildren would laugh, "*Nanna have you been curling your hair again?*" Laurie will shake his head in dismay, knowing full well his Mum liked to look her best for her family.

The past week had seemed never ending. Mary longed more than usual to see her son and two grandchildren. Soon, she would hear excited children's chatter with their adventurous enquiries of, "*Nanna why do you sit in the dark? And tell us again Nanna about...*" Her grandchildren's faces would light up and their gazes fix upon her lips, with enchantment. She never tired of their questions.<sup>3</sup> Forever thankful. Mary glanced impatiently towards the front door, her thoughts wandered, sending an icy chill up her spine. It was so long ago, yet the terror she felt remained, as clear as if it were yesterday...

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives, '*The Home Front*', <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/home-front/>, Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Hull History Centre, '*The Hull Blitz*', <https://www.hullhistorycentre.org.uk/research/research-guides/Hull-Blitz.aspx>, Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022; Mike Covell, 'Hull Blitz: Five tragedies from the city's Second World War bombing', *Hull Daily Mail*, <https://www.hulldailymail.co.uk/news/history/five-tragedies-hull-blitz-ww2-78134>, Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Oral History Record, digital recording, original in author's possession.

*Darkness falls on May 8<sup>th</sup> 1941, the sky lights up with floodlights chasing attacking planes. The air is filled with the whirling noise as the siren sounds for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time this week.<sup>4</sup> People scramble to shelters in the dark. Feeling for familiar things. Some stumble. Nothing seems the same, since the house railings have been taken for the war effort.<sup>5</sup> Shouts to take cover ring out from everywhere.*

*Some shelters had taken direct hits last week; so Mary preferred to take her chances and stay put.<sup>6</sup> “Where’s Dad? He’s late home. Do you think he will be hiding too, Mam?” cried Laurie, as he and his sister are frantically pushed into the small cupboard under the stairs. Each of them grabbing their gasmask boxes, from hooks inside the cupboard; before coming to rest on old mattresses on the floor. The windows rattle, as the engine roar comes closer. The monster descends into its attack, lining up the power-station tower once again, into its sights. Innocence hide from the danger ascending from the skies.*

*Ears covered and eyes closed, whilst being held in the arms of their protectors. Some pray. The hidden are in the tight grasp of each other. The bullets fly, ricocheting along the walls before the whistling starts. Suddenly an explosion! “That one was close,” Mary murmurs, as the ground trembles with aftershocks. Mary whispers to her cowering children, they listen with baited breathe. That is it from the Luftwaffe for now, she thought with sighing relief. It is over, for tonight but where will the smouldering rubble be this time? She despairs.<sup>7</sup>*

*A few minutes pass, when the family’s fear is disturbed by someone staggering in the front door. Muffled voices are heard from their cupboard of safety. Could this be Horace being helped home, again? A few too many drinks in the pub after work.*

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<sup>4</sup> Historic England, ‘Hull: A Northern Coastal Town’, <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/features/blitz-stories/hull-a-northern-coastal-town/>, Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>5</sup> My Learning, ‘The War Effort’, <https://www.mylearning.org/stories/leeds-in-world-war-2/145> Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>6</sup> World War 2 Today, ‘Heavy Casualties in raid on Hull’, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2021, <https://www.ww2today.com>, Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Sheila, Betty, ‘A Child’s War: In Hull’, WW2 People’s War, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2003, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/14/a2073214.shtml>, Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022; Pritti, Mistry, ‘Hull blitz children commemorate WWII 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary’, BBC News, Hull, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-humber-13202859>, Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

*People need to understand everyone is doing their bit, even the men left behind. Horace had served courageously in WW1, she hoped he would never have to witness such evil again.<sup>8</sup> Content to be welcomed back into the family's embrace on his return.<sup>9</sup> Both wished for a simple married life ahead; however things didn't turn out that way. The guilt and the demons followed, even into her husband's dreams. Mary knew of his torment but did others? What was it all for? The enemy were back. Bombing the towns and the innocent.<sup>10</sup> Mary tried to help Horace, somehow nothing helped except his visits to the pub. It was happening all too often. She sighs deeply, as he stumbles to his bed.<sup>11</sup>*

*Oh wait, the front door is still open! The Warden's bellows are heard.*

*"Light! Put that light out, now!"<sup>12</sup>*

With a jolt, Mary startled from her fearful memories, *"it's that familiar front door noise again,"* she thought surprisingly. Only this time it wasn't Horace being carried home from the pub, with the sirens sounding in the distance. She squints to see Laurie's tall figure brushing past the thick velvet hallway curtain. It had hung there for as long as anyone could remember, to block the light in either direction. As it wafted in the draught, the lingering smell of stale tobacco with a faint, fusty-odour, filled the air.<sup>13</sup> The dark figure held his children's hands, to guide them towards the fire glow.<sup>14</sup> Mary's gaze caught a sudden shudder from the image. She gasped, as she watched her son pause at the cupboard under the stairs. He too, has memories of those fearful times still. The sunshine days of the country's triumphs had moved into years. Not even the brightness of peacetimes were able to erase the memories of the terror from the skies.

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<sup>8</sup> Ancestry, UK, WW1 Service Medal and Awards Rolls, 1914-1920, Horace Dyke, The National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; WW1 Service Medal and Award Rolls; Class: WO329; Piece Number: 1239, Ancestry.com, Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2022; Ancestry, 1939 Register of England and Wales', Horace W Dyke, Ryde Street, Kingston Upon Hull, England, Page 3, The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1939 Register; Reference: RG 101/31571, Ancestry.com, Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Ancestry, 1939 Register of England and Wales', Horace W Dyke, Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Len Markham, *Homefront Yorkshire, 1939-194'*, Pen & Sword Military Books Ltd, 2007, page 7 & 8, ebook, Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Oral History Record, in author's possession.

<sup>12</sup> Careless Black-out Breakers, *Hull Daily Mail*, East Riding of Yorkshire, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1940, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/hull-daily-mail>, Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2014; Sheila, Betty, *'A Child's War: In Hull'*.

<sup>13</sup> Oral History Record, in author's possession.

<sup>14</sup> Dyke Family History Group Sheet, in author's possession.

No wonder my Nanna's weary eyes show courage and pride. Her need to protect her own, at all costs, even outspoken for what is right. I am honoured, to be known as a lass from Yorkshire!<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>John, Malam, '*Yorkshire, A Very Peculiar History*', The Salariya Book Company Ltd, 2002, page 5-14, ebook, Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022; The Yorkshire Regiment-History, '*Regimental Day-Yorkshire Day*', [https://www.army.mod.uk/yorkshire\\_regiment/history/battle\\_honours/honours/yorkshire\\_day.htm](https://www.army.mod.uk/yorkshire_regiment/history/battle_honours/honours/yorkshire_day.htm), Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

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