

Civic Pride article for the Abingdon Herald – by Monica Lovatt

This year we commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day with the May Day Bank Holiday being moved to Friday 8th May. Abingdon has a long history of close involvement with the armed forces, which continues to this day and is a source of pride for the town.

VE Day was when peace in Europe was declared on 8th May 1945, at one minute past midnight, after six years of war. Those years were tough when men and women went away, sometimes for years to far off places and fought for their country. Those at home had to put up with the anxiety about their loved ones and dreaded a telegram or knock on the door bringing bad news.

During WW2 RAF Abingdon was used as a Bomber Command Operational Training Unit with 11,394 personnel in 1944. MG cars ceased car production cleared the premises and made Crusader tanks and parts for weapons. There was a fear that this would make us a target for bombers, but fortunately, only a couple of bombs fell on the town doing little damage.

Railings in the town and those in Albert Park were used for munitions. Water bowsers were on the Market Place in the event of fire.

Abingdon had the usual deprivations of the war with blackouts, rationing and people growing their own vegetables. Women played a great part to keep the nation going on the land and in factories. Children were evacuated from London, attending Carswell School.

After all this worry and effort and the prospect of the Armed Forces returning home, it can be imagined that the announcement of VE Day was a cause of great relief and low key celebration as war continued in Japan until August.

There were street parties, a United Service of Thanksgiving in the Market Place with dancing and music provided by the Salvation Army Band. There was even a Grannies Race at the 'West End' of Abingdon.

There were greater celebrations after VJ Day and in 1946 a Bun Throwing took place with the Mayor, Freeman and Councillors, as is traditional, throwing buns from the top of the County Hall Museum to the cheering crowds below.

SSAFA – The Armed Forces Charity is leading on the VE Day commemorations and sadly the planned national and local commemorations will not take place this year because of Covid-19, but we can still remember the hardships and heartaches people had to endure and resolve never to have to go through them again. We can also take pride in the soldiers and their families who currently have Abingdon as their home.

May 2020