**“Don’t tell Mother”**

Written by Alfie James for the “Hope and Glory Heritage Project”

**MR PORTER:**

My name is Porter. Peter Porter. I'm one of the local Air Raid Warden's. I signed up at the beginning of the War because I couldn't enlist you see. I have a gammy knee and terrible Arthritis in my elbow. Oh, and I didn't pass the medical because of my eyes. I have a lazy eye, you see. Nothing too serious. I wanted to enlist. I was going to go with my friend Reggie from number 49. But I'm happy at being an Air Raid Warden. I like it. And Mother likes to have me around. Gives her a sense of purpose with me Father not being here. God rest his soul. She likes to look after me. Not that I need looking after at my tender age. I'm 39 years young. Big forty on Valentine’s Day!

Being an Air Raid Warden is an important job. It's up to me to patrol the streets at night with my Bert and Ernie...that's what I call my helmet and trusty torch. I also have a Gas mask, a ceiling pike, a gas rattle, first aid kit and a set of report forms. Ooo, and I used to wear me warden's overalls. They were made of heavy cotton and they had lots of pockets which I liked. I don't mind telling you that I looked quite smart in my uniform and helmet. I think even Marvis who lives above the Bakers likes to see me in them. She always gives me a wave and blushes. Occasionally she even says hello. I like Marvis. Anyway, I'm digressing, It's up to me to make sure that everyone is abiding by the Blackout regulations. We all had to put dark sheets or material over our windows to black out the lights at night. That way, it would make it more difficult for old Mr Hitler's bomber planes to know where to drop their bombs because they wouldn't be able to see us. Some people ask me what it's like walking around the streets with not a light to be seen anywhere. To tell you the truth, I was a bit scared to begin with, but it's not so bad now. If I do get a bit lonely on a quieter night, I just whistle a quiet tune to myself. I like a bit of George Formby myself.

Most people don't need to be reminded about the Black outs, but you do get the odd one. I always have to remind Mrs Shepherd, but bless her. She does have a lot on her plate. Then there's old Mr Wilson. He's a law to himself. A right grumpy old fool. You should hear some of profanities that come out of his mouth! But they know that I'm got a job to do. Especially during the Blitz. And I'm not to take no for an answer. They'll be no casualties on my watch!

That's what they called the heavy and frequent bombing attacks. Night after night German bombers would attack London and other cities. Can you believe they dropped some 5300 tonnes of bombs onto London? Thankfully, I never got hurt. Mind you, I had a few near misses. Never told Mother that though. She wouldn't have let me out again! Those bombs took out some of the biggest buildings in Redbridge during the Second World War. The Super Cinema, the clock tower and the Hippodrome were just a few. Hundreds of residents were killed and wounded. There was the Doodlebugs (V1s) and the deadlier V2's which were more silent.

It's my job to help make sure everyone is safely tucked up in a shelter when the sound of the siren is heard. It’s a loud noise that echoes through the air and grabs your attention immediately. A lot of people built shelters in their gardens. Anderson Shelters were common ones. Other people hid in their basements or cupboards under their stairs. The Underground stations were also used. That's where I often directed people too. The Underground stations. All the shelters were quite cramped, but it was better than the alternative, I can tell you.

Worst part of my job was when I had to rush to a house which has been hit. Worst one was when the Shelby’s at number 108 were hit. I was the first on the scene. I had to act pretty fast. Smoke and debris everywhere and there was fire still pouring out of part of it. Soon as I got there, I knew it was bad. Me ticker near missed a beat, it did. That is when I heard them. Goodness knows how. Mother says that I've got a good set of ear drums on me to make up for the dodgy eye. I heard whimpering, crying and then voices. Only faint, mind you. I knew that I was supposed to wait till the old Bill and Fire Brigade arrived, but there wasn't much time. I figured that they were trapped in what was the basement, so I quickly scrabbled over to the back end of the house. I had to use the bill hook on the end of my ceiling pike to help move some of the fallen debris. The smoke was really clogging up my lungs and I wasn't too keen on what was left of the unfallen ceiling too so I tried to move away the debris as quickly as I could. I screamed for help as their voices suddenly started becoming louder and louder. Closer and closer. I was coughing and just then at that moment another part of the ceiling collapsed covering me in dust. But I carried on, mind you. I had to; you see. Mr and Mrs Shelby were trapped and maybe exhausted for air. Just then I saw a gap and then a hand. I had them. That was a strange night, that night. *(Pause)* Some people say that I was a hero. But I don't think so. Real heroes were out there fighting like my mate Reggie from number 49. I didn't tell Mother that story, so you best keep it to yourself if you don't mind. But I will tell you one thing. After hearing what I'd done Marvis even came over and spoke to me proper like. *(Giggles)* I'm taking her out on Saturday.