

Mum's Letter

Below is a transcript of a letter that was written by my mum, Amy Miller, to my dad, William Miller in August 1942. During WW2 my parents lived in Central Buildings, West Street, Emsworth.

Dad was a policeman in the Hants Constabulary and at the time of the letter he was away on a two week course in Winchester, hence Mum's letter. At the time she was eight weeks pregnant with yours truly.

I think the letter's content may capture a typical 1942 day in war-time Emsworth and confirms the wartime spirit. Despite all that was going on around them, people just got on with their lives.

Here is the letter (verbatim) followed by some explanatory notes.

*Wednesday
5 o'clock
19/8/42*

*3 Flat
Central Building*

To my Darling Husband,

I have just got back after a hectic half hour or so, mum and myself went up to Mrs Reuts¹ (she has gone to London). Halfpast three the siren blows, about four o'clock mum says 'has the all clear gone'? no sooner had she said it, the machine gunning started (all clear just gone 5.10). We had to go round the shelter next door, the AA guns were terrible, I was thinking about Rufus² but dad was home and Aunt Alice took Rufus to the shelter. Thorney's sirens blew and I am sure I heard bombs drop.

What about us landing at Dieppe³ (I wouldn't have known how to spell that word had I not looked in the paper)

You know Mr Tillet⁴ works at Haslar, well he phoned up to say he wouldn't be home for his half day because they were bringing the wounded back this afternoon. All this afternoon there has been Canadians going through towards Havant with YMCA vans and all sorts of things. I shall have to leave off here for a minute or two the sirens have just gone again and they may come back, we've had to go to the shelter again so I brought it down here with me to write. I expect they are after the boats coming back from over there.

When we went out this afternoon we went down West Street and Cocky⁵ was in the office window in his cage, and I spoke to him and said 'Hello Cocky'! and he walked up and down his cage shouting out. He made such a noise the Sergeant thought it was someone at the door so he came out. He asked me if I had heard from you and I told him 'yes'. He then said he hoped you got full marks for everything and he knew that you would try hard. He said he'd like to see Mr Ha-- and Mr Pla--⁶ have to go down there he feels sure they would get full marks for everything they did.

I took Rufus out this morning at 7.30 for a walk and then again at dinner time, it is a good job I did because it has been pouring with rain since 3 o'clock and it doesn't look as though we will be able to go out tonight.

I am glad I can say I feel better now, you should have seen the dinner I ate today. 3 slices of bacon pudding, potatoes and beans, and then a big plate of milk pudding. I am glad that your food is all right because that is the main thing. I shall be so glad when this fortnight is over so that you can come back home again. Rufus and I miss you so much. I say to him sometimes 'where's your master' he cocks his old head to one side and looks up as much as to say 'Where has he gone'. I think if I speak to him sometimes about you he won't miss you so much. (The guns are firing again so they are about still)

Mrs Mayo⁷ came in the shop this morning and she told me that this Friday coming Sam Mayo is going to speak to her from Cairo, you know the way the children do to their mothers from South Africa. It is coming over on the Forces Program I think it is about 6.30, I am not sure.

Rufus is getting tired of being in the shelter, he is trying to get out, I expect he wants his supper. The guns are ever so heavy again, the clouds are so low so it is better to keep under cover. You know those tanks I told you about they were 25 tons each so you can tell how big they were.

Sunday will be your worst day when there's nothing much to do, but still you can rest. Thorney's siren has just gone again so there is something on again. (I had to stop again here). It is now 7.30 and the siren still on I had to stop writing I couldn't see to write anymore. The sirens have been on since halfpast three with ten minutes all clear in between the two. Well the guns have been terrific again so I had better bring this letter to a close, as I am writing now the all clear is going (it is now 8 o'clock).

So I will say goodbye for now with all my love and Rufus's.

From your loving Wife Amy

XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX

From Rufus

xxxxx xxxxx xxxxx

ps Edie has just told me the time of that broadcast it is 10 o'clock too late for you to hear.

I am just going to take Rufus for a little run it is still pouring with rain. xxxxx

pss I have been 3 hours writing this letter it is all about guns and sirens, they have brought one plane down⁸. (over Woodmancote I think)

- 1 Even allowing for spelling mistakes I have not been able to identify who Mrs Ruets may have been.
- 2 Rufus was Mum and Dad's Red Setter dog. He was purchased for 3 guineas in 1938 from a person named A. Cooke who lived at 66 North Street.
- 3 The news of the Dieppe landings, 'Operation Jubilee', must have reached home very quickly. Apparently the raid started at 5.00am on the morning of the 19th August 1942, the date of Mum's letter. The full story probably took a little longer to materialise, however, and the whole operation appears to have gone horribly wrong!

Reports say that by 10.50am on the same day, the Allied troops were in retreat having suffered heavy losses.

Deaths were estimated as high as 60% for the 6100 strong landing force.

In addition, the Navy lost a Destroyer and 33 Landing Craft and the RAF lost 106 aircraft.

Every one of the 27 tanks that were landed on the beaches by Landing Craft (for the first time) were destroyed.

It was thought that the experience gained from this exercise served as a valuable lesson for the D-Day Landings.

Lord Mountbatten is attributed with saying, 'For every soldier who died at Dieppe, ten were saved on D-Day'.

Mr Tillet, whose parents ran the Town Brewery Pub for a number of years, lived with his family next door to Mum and Dad in Central Buildings. It appears that in 1942 he was working at Haslar Hospital in some capacity.

- 5 Cocky appears to be a Parrot, Parakeet or similar that was owned by someone in an 'office' in West Street?
- 6 As there were Police Cottages in West Street during the WW2, It is possible that the Sergeant referred to is a Police Sergeant. The reference to Mr Ha- and Mr Pla- is probably Mum's way of being discreet and not mentioning the person's full names.
- 7 There was a Mayo family living in St. James Road in the late 1930's, presumably the 'Mrs Mayo' referred to in the letter is from the same family (W.C.H Mayo lived at No 6 St. James Road – Ref. Havant and District Directory 1937)

Sam Mayo, who was obviously a relative who appears to have been lined up for broadcast on the BBC's Forces Programme?

- 8 I can find no confirmation that a plane was actually brought down in the Emsworth area on this day.

Stephen Miller