

## **Jack True**

### **This is my story.**

I was in High School when the war broke out, having been born in Collie on 27 February 1926, the son of a Welsh coal miner, Gwyn Arthur True. My mother, Annie, called me Jack; “after her side of the family”; as she had done with my older brother, Robert.

The declaration of war seemed to bring relief to the ravages of the great Depression, which saw many miners out of full-time work, making it difficult to put sufficient food on the table.

As soon as I turned 14 – in 1940 – I left school to work at the local Co-op store; where I had already worked, “after-school” for a year or so, as required. I had also delivered milk from billycans to homes near where I lived, before and after school.

I was a founder member of the Air Cadets in 1941 and joined the Civil Defence Force (“Home Guard”) as I was a skilled marksman – my step-grandfather, Jimmy, gave me my first air rifle at age 12 and taught me to shoot rats in the grain shed on his farm.

My father taught me to use explosives and I helped him, on weekends, in his capacity as “Officer-in-charge of Demolition”... which meant that vital bridges across the Collie River leading to the coal mines would have to be destroyed in the event of an invasion.

Coal was now vital to the war effort as W.A. had no oil or gas to provide electricity, heating etc. All locomotives and many ships were still coal-fired. The coal mines were working 24-hour days, 7 days a week and all workers were manpowered and unable to join the armed services. I was able to join the navy at age 17 and saw 3 years active in the war against the Japanese and reconstruction after cessation of hostilities.

Before I went away to the war, Collie staged a mock air-raid and invasion by Japanese forces on a Sunday morning. Explosive charges were set off – in safe areas – around the town to simulate bombs being dropped and all civilians were ordered into public shelters (slit-trenches mainly) or their own back yard concrete bunkers, as the air-raid siren wailed its warning.

My father and I laid charges along the river bank to simulate the blowing up of the bridges, just as a Christian family (the Shaws) was crossing the town bridge in a horse-drawn sulky... The horse bolted and proceeded at full gallop to their farm situated several miles out of town!

The army, now stationed at Wellington Dam West of Collie, then took over guarding the coal mines and power station. Open-cut mining was also in full swing to boost the out-put of the precious mineral.

I enlisted because most of my mates – all older than me as I “stayed with my older brother”, as ordered by my mother – had already enlisted. Some had already been killed in action and of the group of 16 young men whom I called my mates, I was the only one to return to Collie. My older brother was man-powered. My younger brother, too young to enlist.

After only 13 weeks’ training at Flinders Naval Depot in Victoria I was posted to a corvette and served in action, minesweeping, escort duties, submarine detection, bombardment etc. After the war I was engaged in interception of pirates, smugglers and illegal people traffickers.

My experiences, including physical and sexual abuse during initiation (bastardisation) ceremonies, had a profound effect on my life after war. I found that I was unable to adjust/return to normal life back in Collie. Although welcomed home by my mother, I felt resentment from other members of my family and the families of my mates who did not return. I was unable to “talk about my experiences”, nor join any ex-service associations, until about 3 years ago, (2001) when I sought counselling and have since began to experience the freedom for which I fought all those long years ago.