

## Christmas 1944

This was the last wartime Christmas for the British people. 1944 had been the year in which the Allied invasion of Europe started. Also the war had turned against the Japanese, halting their continued advance. The mood at home therefore became more optimistic, some even hoping that the war might be over by Christmas.

This was not to be the case. The Allied liberation of Europe was stalled when early in December 1944 the Germans opened up a major offensive 'The Battle of the Bulge', with 200,000 soldiers aiming to split the Allied forces in two. This battle raged on until final Allied victory on December 27th 1944. Yet at home the threat from conventional enemy aircraft had virtually disappeared, with only the occasional attack from a V1 Flying bomb. This meant that the blackout could be relaxed. Over the Christmas period churches were allowed to light up their interiors, to highlight their stained glass windows as a morale booster.

The Ministry of Food announced extra rations in time for Christmas, notably an extra one and a half pounds of sugar, eight pence (8d) worth of meat, and eight ounces of sweets per person. However alcohol was the scarcest it had ever been, and virtually all presents had to be home-made, often by recycling worn out or discarded items within the home.

There was some light relief however for some children, who were lucky enough to receive toys sent over from America, or for those civilians who were fortunate enough to live near one of the newly established American air bases. These might be invited to parties on the bases, where food was more plentiful, or if they were accommodating US servicemen in their homes might receive and share items, such as oranges and chocolate, which had not been seen since the start of the war.

Paradoxically though for most UK civilians Christmas 1944 turned out to be the gloomiest of all wartime Christmases, as a war-weary people celebrated yet another festive season (generally) without their men, still at the battle fronts, and with the continued deprivations at home.