

Hero or idiot

The Power Station where my father worked during World War 2 had a constant continuous fire watch and my father was one of the watchers. One day he came off duty, having handed over to another watcher. As he walked home the local air raid sirens sounded and he hurried home because he knew my mother, an Air Raid Warden, would have reported to her Air Raid Post and would have left his midday meal in the oven. He had no sooner sat down than he heard an agitated banging on the wall which separated our neighbour's house from ours, followed by a loud shout of 'Ernie, are you there? It's Joe next door and I can't get out of my front door. There's something pressing against it'.

My father, always on good terms with neighbours, went to investigate and found an unexploded bomb leaning against Joe Woolley's front door. Being a pretty fit very strong man he picked up the bomb, cradled it in his arms and carried it some 50 yards down the road to a derelict patch where a bomb had demolished a house or two during the 1940 blitz. He put the bomb down and hurried back to eat his dinner before it became too cold. He would tell Joe about it later.

This was just as well because my mother soon afterwards came home and became the only other person besides my father who knew about the bomb. She told my father what an idiot he was and returned to her Air Raid Post to tell the Chief Warden that a man had told her there was an unexploded bomb on the derelict patch in Lonsdale Avenue (our road). The Head Warden went to investigate the report, spotted the bomb, returned to his headquarters, reported the 'find' to the police, who sent a Sergeant to confirm the 'find'. He called in Bomb Disposal who came and cleared several nearby houses of residents, pets, etc. while they detonated the bomb when they had put sandbags around it.

My mother meanwhile told my father not to say a word to anyone about his involvement in the incident. She thought it would confirm in people's minds that he was an idiot. When told about the incident in my mother's weekly letter to me in India, I of course thought he was a hero. The bravest men in my experience were those who acted instinctively when faced with an emergency, particularly if friends were in danger.