CHAPTER V
THE SECOND WORLD WAR : MAN AT WAR

The catastrophe that began as the 'Great War' (as the First World War was initially called) was soon followed by the 'Spanish Civil War'. War by now became a continued experience of twentieth century man. By 1939 the threat of a Second World War was looming large ahead and the Second World War broke out when the Germans invaded Poland before dawn on the 1st September 1939.

No sooner had it begun than it grew out of proportion dragging every human being into it, so that it became impossible to measure in any units the colossal loss of lives; as was the case after the 'Battle of Leningrad' or after the bombing of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan.

'Shipping out' is significantly a phrase belonging to the Second World War not the First War writes Paul Fussell in his book The Great War and Modern Memory. There were the British troops who were exiled by the war at an unbridgeable distance away from home as in the case of the China, Burma, India borders. There were the American troops in Burma. There was the desert warfare in North Africa and the naval warfare namely the pacific and Atlantic wars. To consider the war in its entirety this chapter has been divided into the following sections.
Section 5.1 : A Total War

This section will describe in brief how the Second World War assumed the nature of a total war in every sense of the word.

Section 5.2 : The Home Front

The bombings on London and the civilian life during the Blitz will be brought out in this section.

Section 5.3 : Individual Heroes

An account of individual heroism during the Second World War is described here.

Section 5.4 Life in the Armed Forces

This section is divided into sub-sections as follows:

5.4.1 : The Army

Accounts of army life are included in this section drawn from the novel *The Naked and the Dead* as well as television interviews.

5.4.2 : The Desert

Army life in the desert, conditions in the transit camp, and the feelings of the soldiers are described here.

5.4.3 : The Navy

A brief description of life on naval vessels such as Artic Convoys is given in this section.
5.4.4: The Jungle

This section will describe the experience of soldiers in the jungle terrain and proceed to record the interviews held with civilians in the war zone.

Section 5.5: Technological Progress

A mention of the technological progress during the Second World War is made in this section.

Section 5.6: Sabotage and Espionage

How men who contributed to the war effort by carrying out dangerous operations or carrying secret messages will feature here.

Section 5.7: The Pows

This section brings out the experience of the pows during the Second World War.

Section 5.8: Conclusion

The conclusion will seek to bring out the distinctive features of this war. It will then proceed to show how the treatment of these experiences can be observed in the poetry of this war.

5.1 A Total War

The theatre of the Second World War was unconfined to any geographical dimensions (unlike the Spanish Civil War or even the First World War). It comprised 'battle in the air',
'naval warfare', and 'battle on the land' in alien civilizations. The war witnessed a great technological progress in the invention of tanks, bombers, radar, artificial harbours, and landing grounds and some of the world's most powerful battleships. Thus the war was experienced by all those who lived through it, in occupied territories as well as territories subjected to bombing. The Second World War had become a total war in terms of man and machine power. By 1939 the nations involved in the war had come to realise that they would require all their wealth and productive power to fight the war.

From the pamphlet *The Sinews of War* by Geoffery Crowther a small detail on the economic aspect of war is brought out. In 1914 the theory of man power was that every available man was sent into the army except the disabled and the old. But by 1918 it was found that for every man in the front line more than one man was needed in an ammunition factory to supply him arms. By 1939 the 'theory of manpower' was to put as many men as possible into the ammunitions factory, leaving in the army only as many men as are needed to drive, manipulate and fire the weapons which happens to be the exact opposite of the 1914 theory. In fact manpower and machine power became a pair from which maximum productive utilization was extracted.

From the above discussion it becomes clear how every human being, apart from combatants was drawn to serve either
in the scientific field, or the medical field, or in the production of arms. And though these people were involved in the war indirectly, they were saved the actual misery of the battle front. Also there were men involved in carrying out acts of espionage or sabotage.

This indirect involvement of men in such diverse fields in war reveals areas that were not covered by the poets.

Therefore in this chapter an account is given of incidents that reveal the involvement and attitudes of the non-combatants, those indirectly involved, apart from those of the combatants.

5.2 The Home Front

To begin with the homefront. The German air assault especially on Britain, on London, in the autumn of 1940 was an ordeal for the world's largest city, and one could not measure what the result would be beforehand. For fifty-seven nights the bombing of London was unceasing. Winston Churchill wrote: "Never before was so wide an expanse of houses subjected to such bombardment or so many families required to face its problems and terrors."  

In a broadcast on September 11, 1940 Churchill warns of further German assaults and cautions people. In this broadcast he says: 

"Therefore we must regard the next week or so as a very important period in our history. It ranks with the days when the Spanish Armada was approaching the Channel, and Drake was finishing his game of bowls; or when Nelson stood between us and Napoleon's Grand army at Boulogne. We have read all about this in the history books; but what is happening now is on a far greater scale and of far more consequence to the life and future of the world and its civilization than those brave old days."

And sure enough the tone and the words of Churchill's speeches boosted the morale of the Londoners who displayed such splendid virtues and proved to the world the strength of a community that had also believed and lived in freedom.

Ben Robertson, a veteran American newspaperman was in England during the most violent phases of the blitz in the autumn of 1940. In his book *I Saw England* he has described everyday human incidents through which he conveys something magnificent in human values, and the physical heroism almost routinely displayed by ordinary civilians of Britain. Some of these incidents have been mentioned below.

London during the author's visit was suffering severe bombings and air-raids. The author expected to find everyone 'in a frenzy' instead he found them all very calm. He writes: "I found soldiers stretching barbed wire along the streets, barricading buildings, digging trenches in the parks; and on the roof tops and in courtyards boys and old men were driving - the Homeguard of England was forming.

Resistance was in the air - on the streets, in the papers, everywhere and in everything. From my window I could
see on the sign of a grocer's shop: Winston Churchill's "Come then, let us to the task, to the battle, and to the toil each to our place."³

That might while the author was having dinner the head waiter said to him: "If we must die, we must die - we know why we will be dying."⁴ And the author writes that never after that day did he doubt that England would fight to the end.

The author observed how the British continued to be themselves - how they cared for the flowers, and some one called 'Nature Lover' wrote observations on bird life to the 'London Times'. Even the soap box orators went on with their speeches at Hyde Park through the war.

These instances reveal the matter of fact way in which people organized their lives during the bombing, not going in for heroics, not allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by the agony. They could continue to write nature notes or carry on oratory at Hyde Park with equal enthusiasm.

The author makes special mention of the Londoners after the worst bombing during the week of 7th to 14th September 1940. He tells us about a maid who was buried for three hours in the basement, yet she got to work next morning as usual. He deserved that the sewage was still functioning, buses and tubes were still running, food was abundant and good flowers were blooming in the parks and there was enough water to bathe and drink.
At nights the author often visited the public shelters which he says made him realize the toughness of the British character. He writes: "Londoners placed pieces of paper with their names on them in certain spaces in subway stations, and the public respected those slips of paper as shelter rights."  

All these incidents observed by the author reveal the fact that normality was maintained by the civilians, and there are thousands of anecdotes that show how millions of inhabitants of London accustomed themselves to such a curious existence during the Blitz. Such incidents that show how a normal way of life continued in the midst of the Blitz are seldom covered by the poets.  

Also if one compares the account of various incidents by a reporter with that of Churchill's speeches quoted earlier it reveals how the tone of the war leader keeping up the morale of the people has to be different from the matter-of-fact reporting by the journalist.  

Another point that can be made here is that while relating an incident whether the author is a combatant, a journalist or a writer there is a certain selection made by the person as to the incident related; as also the angle from which that particular incident is projected, that is the qualities on which the person wishes to focus or to which he wishes to draw attention.
To illustrate how the same kind of experience may appear quite different according to the slant which the author wishes to give we may look at Anthony Thorne's piece titled *Potatoes have hips of their own.*

It is an account of an air-raid shelter during the Blitz. He describes how a whole lot of sailors were sent to an underground shelter. Here a sailor named Pincher Martin meets a South African sailor lying 60 feet underground on a sack of potatoes. So many of these sailors are huddled in such a small space that Pincher sees them as potatoes in sacks. He feels they were being shoved in like the potatoes. Things were shoved at your mind in the same way and soon one had to get used to hardness. Yet at the end Pincher feels its nobody's fault. This last bit is revealing as though he had almost come to accepting things that were being shoved on them.

The quiet courage, the respect for other's needs that was displayed in air-raid shelters was noted by the American journalist Ben Robertson. The same scene is viewed quite differently here; human beings are shown as reduced in dignity.

5.3 Individual Heroes

Stories of remarkable resilience and individual heroism figure frequently in accounts of the war. One such story is that of Douglas Bader, a fighter pilot belonging to
the R.A.F. At a tender age of twenty one, in December 1931, while demonstrating aerobatics to his friends, he met with an accident. He lost his right leg above the knee and left leg six inches below the knee. He was refused a flying job but in 1940 when the war started he was taken back with his former rank and seniority. He fought in the Battle of Britain as commanding officer of 242 squadron.

In his book *Reach for the sky* Paul Brickhall describes the brave efforts of Douglas Bader, a legless pilot, who finds a place again in the R.A.F. He describes how Bader was insensitive to fear. Outwardly he exuded great confidence where his pilots were young and frightened. The author writes: "Every time Bader's Squadrons took off, the masterful voice started firing commands over the radio, which by design or accident took the nervous sting out of the business ahead." 7

Bader broached new ideas to his Air Vice Marshall Leigh Mallory that were okayed and his ideas paid rich dividends.

Bader lived totally in the little world of the squadron, the battle, the tactics, so that he was unaware of his own fame or popularity for his courage and bravery even among the enemy.

In August 1941 he was taken prisoner when his fighter plane was brought down over occupied France. The German
air men knew him as one of Britain's top aces, and most
gifted fighter leader in the R.A.F. Bader was a constant
trial to the Germans. He was liberated in April 1945 by the
Advancing American First Army.

The author dwells on Bader's excitement while he was
flying his fighter plane, his patriotic zeal, enthusiasm,
and the encouragement offered to the younger pilots and a
sense of bravado after the final success of a campaign.

Bader's story reveals qualities of courage, self-
command, a capacity for leadership, all together amounting to
heroism. Such personalities undoubtedly existed but poetry does
not focus on such virtues. One is aware that poetry does not
celebrate heroism and hence the poet does not deal with such
a personality. And even if he does deal with a theme like
say courage the poet handles it in an entirely different way.

In the case of the story of Bader one is aware that
the author apart from other specific virtues or qualities
wishes to draw attention to Bader's heroism.

5.4 Life in the Armed Forces

This section is divided into sub-sections that will
describe the life in the army, the desert, the navy and the
alien civilizations.

5.4.1 The Army

Accounts of the army life however do not always
project an image of heroism. The routine sordidness, the
never ending strain and tedium, isolation in a crowd, exposure to harsh climates is the stuff of which the army life consists. Men from poor and rich families were drawn to the war by various kinds of war propaganda. They felt they would serve the army as a good non-com or help in some field where they had interest. But they soon realized that whatever was the nature of your work before joining the army, and whatever might be the condition of your health the army made you into a rifleman. Even if you were intelligent they sent you to do manual work; and even if you were sick they sent you out to haul machinery and tanks.

"All the army wanted you for was cannon fodder", comments a soldier in the novel The Naked and the Dead. This novel by Norman Mailer gives a picture of army life, the experiences of the soldiers, of their daily routine, their unhygienic life styles, their comaraderie.

Though the novel is American it has been discussed here bearing in mind how the experiences were similar to those of the British who were involved in the war in the pacific.

Apart from the comaraderie there existed numerous bitter quarrels among the soldiers. At times they were haunted by memories of their homes and loved ones. When they lost hope of news from home they brooded over scenes of their girls in the arms of other lovers and usually used
bad language and labelled them as whores or bitches.

They often ridiculed their officers, indulged in cheap talk, and made slanderous comments about them. The soldiers often felt that they were wholly involved in the war unlike the generals who only planned their campaigns or strategies.

Regarding such ridicule, the jokes clean or indecent, a war veteran today says that such humour directed against the living or the dead was necessary to keep life going.

In a T.V. serial titled Soldiers an American war veteran who was interviewed remembers one such ghastly incident. He recalls a body that was buried with one arm left out without being buried. This in itself is indicative of a hasty, careless indifferent attitude to burying the dead. Everyday soldiers passing by would shake that hand say good morning and proceed.

Another joke is conveyed through a photograph that shows a totally destroyed burnt out house and the soldiers have put up a signboard that reads 'House for Sale' in front of the house.

Such jokes offered moments of distraction to the soldiers and kept up their spirits.

The soldiers' attitude toward the dead, especially if the deadman was an enemy is worth studying. In The Naked and the Dead the author describes how the soldiers go on an
'archaeological expedition' over the bodies of the dead. They go to collect souvenirs and among other things find family photographs that take their memories back to their own homes. The initial light-hearted mood is transformed into a mood of depression. They return from such trips mentally ill brooding over thoughts of home, and over the fate their own bodies will meet on death. It makes them bitter. Seeing the charred, decayed stinking bodies, lying in a crumpled fashion while maggots feed on the open flesh.

William Chappell writes in his article *The sky makes me hate it* that: "army death is sad; a heap of mutilated bodies, littering the scattered earth in ugly anonymity."

Death in the battlefield, the reaction towards a dead enemy, the ignominious death are all dealt with by poets and their handling such themes will be discussed in the next chapter.

5.4.2 The Desert

The soldiers now were deadened to any physical pain. K.B. Poole served with the Eighth Army during the war. In his article titled *Dear Time's Waste* he writes how the life in the desert had made the soldier lose his identity. He recalls on his way hitchhiking to a transit camp what had happened to him:
I was unconscious of any emotion any feeling any passion; was cloaked only with a dumb unreasoning apathy. I had been leading this existence so long now, had banged my way in trucks across thousands of miles. Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Cyrenaica, Libya, Africa, an endless reel of silent film that had no beginning, no sequence, no end. They had been experiences forced upon me by army life, controlled by orders from remote authority; and because I had sought none of them they had no meaning, no interest, no emotion.

At such times a poet would have given shape and form to his feelings. Here K.B. Poole's train of thoughts takes him back to his childhood. He writes:

I remembered as a child poring over maps and being thrilled by the names of towns and coloured countries making up my mind that one day I should see them. Well, I had and it had meant nothing at all. There had been the animal like existence on the troopship; the revolting proximity of flesh and uniform; the blasphemy and foulness; the endless talk of sex, the obscene, mirthless songs sung without feelings; the sullen attitude towards the authority of young and inexperienced officers who lived in splendid isolation and comfort while twelve thousand men lived like pigs below the water-line.

The soldiers lived like pigs wearing the same dirty clothes, sleeping in them for days together; those clothes that the army provided them, those clothes that came only in two sizes, either too large or too small.

K.B. Poole also recounts the day an entertainment was provided to the soldiers. He writes:

Once a mobile cinema had been announced and all available trucks packed with standing soldiers had gone off on the forty-mile run. The title of the film had not been announced,
and there was much conjecture from men who had not seen a film for months, careless if it were old, if it had music and dancing and women. 10

And when the music began the whole screen was obscured by the fireflies and a great canopy of smoke from those thousands of cigarettes. When the music broke down there were whistles and catcalls shrilled out from those huddled wanting men who had been through two thousand miles of hell from El-Alawein to Tunis.

One can visualise the release of humanity from those uniforms and sweating bodies taking the form of action and disconnected talk.

Conditions in the transit camp in the midst of the desert where a soldier had to walk a mile to the cook-house, wait in the endless queue of men for his meal and sit in the burning sand to eat it, were sufficient to make one lose one's identity. K.R. Poole writes:

It was as if thousand of men were marooned on one lonely desert island, waiting for ships that never came. 11

5.4.3 The Navy

But what about those men in ships such as Artic convoys who were confined to those limited spaces for unknown periods of time. What did they feel while they lived at sea, awaiting attack or during an attack.
Humphrey Knight's article *Now I Know* \(^{12}\) answers such questions. The author is unable to answer when the psychiatrist questions him on the dive bombers, subs, the Artic cold, and the long convoys to Russia. He answers to himself:

> It is not a question of forgetting but a matter of knowing. You cannot know peace unless you have known war; that is the limitation of our minds. \(^{12}\)

The anticipation during that endless period of time had nagged their nerves too long and when they were attacked the author says:

> ... there is no earth, here is liquid emerald twenty degrees below zero.
> The feet press into the deck seeing resilience. Seeking that which is known to you. No earth here, no earth ... \(^{13}\)

Here is a marked contrast between those men who waited in the deserts for ships to come and rescue them while those at sea craved for earth; some place where they could bury their faces, the mother-earth whom they wished to cling to as a child would to its mother.

6.4.4 *The Jungle*

This brings us to the jungle terrain. Exposure to the China-Burma-India region was a wholly new experience to the British troops. Details of these soldiers' experiences have been gathered from books like *China-Burma-India* a Time Life book.
The soldiers experienced the worst fears that often led to a mental breakdown. They had to face the maximum natural obstacles. They had to face the tropical heat, combined with heavy monsoons, the jungles, the rivers, the rugged almost impenetrable mountains where progress was very slow, not to forget the hordes of insects that infested the jungles so that the soldiers perennially lived in an unexplainable anxiety and an unknown fear.

Conditions at the hospitals were almost as bad as those at the front. To describe one such camp:

The convalescent camp at Margherita in Assam was described as 'a pest hole'. The bamboo buildings were collapsing from the ravages of termites; wards were overcrowded and had dirt floors. In the wet months from May to October it poured most of the time; when the rains stopped it was so hot that in the words of Ogburn, 'it was like the inside of a tea kettle.'

Worse still was the condition created by the sick themselves. Those who were evacuated from Myitkyina in Burma were suffering from acute nervous strain, a condition that got worsened because of the fear that they might be sent back to the front. It is said that unless they had high fever they were not sent to the hospitals. These sick soldiers got themselves drunk, ransacked their officers' quarters, demolished their own canteen and terrified the Red Cross girls. These troops that came from as far as America or England were ill trained or unprepared to face these conditions. They soon became mental cases; they
avoided their mepacrine tablets in order to get malaria, or deliberately wounded themselves shooting off toes to escape combat.

The monsoon was a horror to these fighting men; it provided nightmarish problems, for those soldiers lived and fought in mud and water alone. They came down with trench foot, jungle rat and an ailment called Nagasores, painful ulcers that sometimes ate through to the bone. Apart from these there was typhus, malaria and dysentery. A veteran recalls later that when it rained it rained so hard that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. The initial monsoons brought some relief to the soldiers who would remove their clothes and let the cool water fall on their bodies and on their sores but after the heavy monsoons stopped it was worse. The humidity increased, fungi and bacteria multiplied so that it sometimes even difficult to breathe. Sleep was almost impossible under these conditions and the soldiers lived in continual agony in these jungles.

The jungles in Burma were most perilous; they were full of bamboo thickets, the elephant grass growing as tall as a man so that one never knew when one would be hit by a sniper's bullet.

The monsoon horrors do not end here. The floods caused by such monsoons sometimes destroyed the existing
bridges. Replacements had to be made and the Allied engineers had to build hundreds of teak-log barges to carry equipment thus adding to their workload.

Poetry does deal with the jungle terrain, describing the tropical climate, the alien civilization but what the poet makes of them will be studied in the next chapter.

Whether it was the Japanese bombing or the American and British defending, the lives of all civilians, in Burma were totally shattered.

As Airports and railway stations of big cities like Rangoon and Mandalay were bombed; families had no chance of leaving Burma and had to move to any nearby villages, forests or jungles and live in bamboo huts or trenches.

What follows now is an account of experience of an Indian civilian family stranded in Burma with the father away engaged in war time administration.

The mother recollects a scene at the early stages of bombing when a farmer was working in his field. All of a sudden the bombers dropped the bombs and coconut tree came down to the ground completely burying the farmer underground. She remembers the continual running from one village to another when they would get the news that a particular area was going to be bombed; how the family tried their best to stay together till death (for they preferred that they all should die together when the bombs fell), so
that no member of the family including grandparents and uncles was allowed even to go to fetch water or collect some food supplies.

The little daughter, then five years old, still vividly remembers how once when the bombers were arriving her grandfather took a sudden decision that they should vacate the bamboo shack they were staying in and they left the place. They had only covered a short distance when they turned back and saw their bamboo shack was ablaze. For a moment they all stood motionless and today she wonders what was the intuition that had made them move from there. At that particular instant they only thanked God! Even though they had decided that they would die together the instinct to protect oneself, defend oneself, a sense of survival, a hope that things would end soon was always alive in them.

Another incident the little girls still recollects where fate was on their side was when they were staying in a bamboo house that had bamboo flooring as well. Suddenly there was some rumbling noise from under the floor and as was the usual practice all the family huddled together near the grandmother. When the noise had stopped a courageous uncle went out only to find that the cause of the noise was two large snakes. The snakes were camouflaged against the bamboo flooring protecting themselves from the humans. But
what had protected the family and saved them from such hazards was just the willpower to survive and remain calm in the face of all danger. Today they do not regret what they underwent for they feel those dehumanising sights that they witnessed made them more human and more resistant to such dangers.

Jungle warfare left an indelible stamp on the civilians and the soldiers who survived. The soldiers after returning to their old lives found themselves ill at ease among their own family and friends, among crowds and bright lights, as they had grown more accustomed to dark jungles and fear of the unknown. As for the civilians, apart from losing members of their families, some had members whom the war left handicapped. An aunt of the family whose experience has just been narrated lost her hearing due to the bombings and a baby of the family died having had no milk, no clothing, no proper medical care and undergone all the vicissitudes that the rest of the family underwent.

5.5 Technological Progress

An aspect of the war that does not usually draw attention is the field of technological progress.

Churchill in his history of the Second World War dedicates a chapter to praising the work of the scientists. He felt that the Battle of Britain was mainly won because of the invention of radar. Such technical work of scientists
are not treated by the poets. Even though sometimes a poet may pen a few verses regarding the new machinery that he handles one observes a negative attitude to such weaponry.

5.6 Sabotage and Espionage

Also the poet does not mention those men who carried out dangerous sabotage operations, or risked their lives carrying secret messages even though these men contributed equally to the war effort like the men in the army, airforce or navy.

These dangerous tasks or operations were often code-named and they were planned technically that is in terms of equipment and design, down to the smallest detail. Their strategies were preplanned by the commander of the forces months earlier, and many led to such inventions as 'synthetic artificial harbours' that were temporary and 'artificial landing grounds' that would float on sea.

One such operation was code-named 'Gunnerside' and this sabotage was carried out on February 27th 1943.

The Allies Churchill and Roosevelt wanted to cut off German's lead in nuclear research and the only way it could be done was by cutting off the heavy water supply at its source - the Norsk hydro Plant in Vemork (Norway).

Thomas Gallagher in his book *Assault in Norway* gives a gripping account of survival, sabotage, and escape
by a team of nine members who ended the German heavy water production in Norway, which became the main factor in Germany's failure to achieve a self-sustaining reactor before the war ended.

It was the most daring raid ever planned because their target, the heavy water plant, was heavily guarded in occupied Norway; it was like a mediaeval fortress on a cliff edge. It seemed practically impregnable. The entire area had been mined by the Germans; booby traps with trip wires had been installed, machine-gun batteries were in place. The saboteurs were updated with information regarding the complete design of the plant; its exact location in the yard of the German barracks etc. The saboteurs carried out the destruction, miraculously without having to fire a shot. Later the Germans managed to repair the heavy water installation, they also decided to ship all Vemorks heavy water to the safety of the German Reich but here again their plan was aborted.

On the 19th February 1944 fifty drums of heavy water were moved abroad the ferry 'Hydro' for shipment to Germany. A time-bomb placed by one of the 'Gunnerside' team exploded sinking the ferry and the drums of irreplaceable heavy water.

Thus German hopes of beating the Allies to the atomic bomb were totally crushed and it is said that the secrecy surrounding the atomic bomb was so great that even those
brave men did not realize what they had accomplished until the war was over.

Equally gripping is the story of Eddie Rickenbacher's 24 days on a raft from his book An Autobiography by Eddie Rickenbaker.

Eddie Rickenbaker was carrying a super secret unwritten message. Enroute their plane ran out of fuel, it had to be ditched and the eight men divided themselves in three rafts that were released.

These men spent twentyfour days on a raft in total anguish. They suffered the weather conditions, the pangs of hunger and thirst with a spirit of survival even in the face of death. They moved closer to God, they were upheld by their patriotic zeal to fulfil their mission and passed their test of endurance.

They were rescued by planes after twenty four days. The incident has been cited here not merely to illustrate an act of endurance but to illustrate how in the light of this experience technological innovation was carried out and effective changes were brought in to steer the course of war. In this case improvements were made on life rafts, and on the first aid and other food supplies that went with them.

5.7 The Pows

Finally the experience of Prisoners of War (Pows) remains to be described. Veterans interviewed in the T.V.
serial titled *Soldiers* recollect how the British POWs in Japanese camps in the far east found support and solace in their closeness to each other. If they were ill and dying they preferred to die in the arms of another British POW. However one is not aware as to how the Japanese treated their prisoners, while a veteran recalling the German camps mentions that the Germans always considered their POWs as lower forms of living beings.

Here the passage illustrates the experience of an Italian POW in Siberia. The experience is mentioned only to focus on the bonds that could be built up between POWs and their captors when the area was far from the theatre of war, hence the populace had not suffered directly and the prisoners were not heavily indoctrinated as German prisoners would have been.

In an extract from his book *Back from Siberia* (published in Readers Digest in December 1983) former POW Carlo Silva recaptures the pain, the sufferings in the black Siberian winter of 1942, the despair and finally the miraculous survival of a handful of legless and armless Italian POWs.

These were the mutilated survivors of Mussolini’s shattered expeditionary force on the eastern front. They not only survived but even managed to find a place in the affections of the people who had every reason to hate them.
The author tries to search for a bond that linked these Italians and the Russians.

He writes how surprised they were when they were received by a Russian who was a political commissar in the Russian army and who informed them that "Russians don't kill prisoners. They respect the wounded with no legs and arms." He assured them that they wouldn't die.

In May 1944 the Italians were transferred to another camp. There they learnt that their commandant was addicted to theatre and soon the Italians were staging plays. They even celebrated the Christmas of 1944.

In July 1945 there were the rumour that the Italians were going to be sent back. Though they knew that the war was over those thirty-one months of captivity had made them cynics. The author recalls that when they were told that they had to go back they got ready 'without enthusiasm'.

The author remembers the last scene as the POWS boarded the train back to Italy. The POWS shouted calling their political commissar by his name. And when he turned to ask them "What is it" - the author says they had nothing to say, they simply couldn't speak though they wanted to speak and cry at the same time!

The Italians and the Russians were both unaware of a strange bond that had grown between them and waited to burst forth like a dormant volcano. While the Italians
carried home their memories of Russia, the Russians themselves had memories of the Italian warmth and their plays.

Every episode highlights in some way the human quality of endurance on the part of a combatant or a non-combatant apart from glorifying other virtues like patriotic zeal, a sense of task, and comradery.

5.8 Conclusion

At the end of this chapter one can observe the following distinctive features of this war.

It was for the first time that such massive civilian bombings were witnessed by the civilian population who were also drawn into the war. Hence any account of the Second World War must include a mention of the 'Blitz'.

Various experiences describing the army life in the desert also in the jungles, and the exile at sea, bring out the epic proportion the Second World War had acquired.

From this chapter one is aware of the various technological innovations that were carried out during the war and the effective changes that were brought in following such operations. This leads us to focus our attention on those individuals who displayed immense courage, self-command, a capacity for leadership while carrying out dangerous operations such as espionage or sabotage.
A soldier's attitude to the enemy, whether he is dead or alive is a distinctive feature of this war. The enemy on the whole exists only as the 'enemy' and not a potential friend. Perhaps this was because they were not at such close quarters as in the case of the trench-warfare or may be because of the brutal killings of the civilians. The airforce fighter or bomber pilot who distanced himself from everything only reminding himself of his task ahead is one such example. Another reason could be their awareness of the Nazi and Japanese atrocities and also the knowledge of the fact how the Nazis were indoctrinated into Nazi principles and style of thinking.

There are the experiences of POWS in German camps or Japanese camps in the east. These bring out a different kind of experience of a soldier at the front, during the war, but not involved in action.

It will be observed in the next chapter how a poet deals with themes of civilian bombings, experiences at the front, alien civilizations and the enemy, while there is not much poetry on the technological progress and the POWS. It will also be observed that poetry does not celebrate individual heroism whereas there undoubtedly existed men with quiet resolution and courage whose stories have been brought out in this chapter.
And lastly we come to the incidents on espionage and sabotage. These incidents may have been covered by some poet but may not have possessed a quality to ensure itself a place in any poetry anthology of the Second World War. Also it may have been published in some newspapers during that period to which the researcher may not have had access. Hence to consider those incidents in this chapter has been found necessary.

Thus apart from bringing out the distinctive features of the Second World War, this chapter also gives an insight into those aspects that one does not find frequently in the poetry of the Second World War.

End Notes:

2. ibid, p.11.
4. ibid, p.9.
5. ibid, p.17.


10. ibid, p.185.

11. ibid, p.190.


13. ibid, p.50.


15. Personal Interview of the researcher's own family. Persons interviewed are researcher's own mother and sister (1989).

16. Thomas Gallagher, 'Assault in Norway' Sparks, op.cit.