Etiennette Fennell, *Bombs and Butterflies: A Child’s War* (Table One, 2010)

Readers of Etiennette Fennell’s first memoir, *So Far Away*, which tells the story of her family’s migration to Adelaide and the sad story of her father's failure to make a success of life in his new country, will need no encouragement to read her new book, in which that father appears, somewhat distantly, as a hero of the Resistance. But this charming little book deserves a wider readership. The naive and child-eyed viewpoint suits Etienne's style, and gives the reader a vivid sense of France during the occupation. The horrors of war are not omitted, but for the most part they are matter of hearsay, taking place at a distance. The German occupiers are not seen as monsters of inhumanity but as fellow human beings. In the instance from which the book takes its title German officers go to some trouble to warn and rescue the little girl and her brother who were playing (trying to catch butterflies) in a field which was mined. Towards the war’s end, and the book’s, the bombing of a German ship by the RAF is vividly described, and Etiennette’s father was, she believes, largely responsible for the tip-off which resulted in so many deaths and injuries:

On the one hand I suppose I should be proud of him for doing his duty, but, on the other hand, how can one ever justify such horrific deaths? (73)

The French people do not look back on the Second World War with any pride. Their rapid capitulation in 1940 saved the nation from destruction and gave the people a comparatively easy time (as long as they were not Jewish) compared with most Nazi-occupied countries, especially in provincial towns such as Chauvigny, where much of Etienne's war was spent (it was her grandmother's home.) To many children the worst aspect of war was the rationing. To George Orwell, in the First World War, it was margarine. To me, in a safe part of England in the Second, it was lentil soup. To Etiennette it was the constant diet of sweet potatoes. As in the earlier book, her mother, trying to keep the family fed, is the real heroine of this tale. The mothers were indeed the unsung heroes of home life in wartime. It is good to have a reminder of their struggles to keep family life going amid the austerities, and occasional terrors, of wartime.

The book began as tales told literally out of school, and retains the freshness of oral delivery. It is illustrated with lively pictures by Judith Brooks.

Humphrey Tranter

---