

Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Air battles over Bognor Regis

Bognor Observer, August 24th 1940

WEEK'S AIR BATTLES ON SOUTH E. COAST

Glorious work of the R.A.F.

In widespread raids by the Germans over this country during the past week, the R.A.F. achieved brilliant successes. Various reports of eye-witnesses who saw some of these occurrences are described in the messages given below.

A THRILLING EXPERIENCE

A correspondent who was out in the country during last Friday's biggest raid, sends the following account of his experiences:-

Last Friday lunch-time I was given the biggest job and the biggest thrill of my life, when on the way home, with thousands of thoughts of a tasty lunch uppermost in my mind. Instead of getting indigestion after lunch, I believe it arrived in advance as, peacefully viewing the local countryside, with corn-stacks and cows in the fields giving one a sense of peaceful restfulness after a weary morning, I suddenly realised that I was in the midst of war, within a matter of seconds.

Out of the blue came hurtling tons of sudden death, whistling and whining in a rising crescendo. What a feeling it is to be in the country with no air raid shelter to dive down at a minute's notice. The first feeling of the helplessness is a little disconcerting until one's sense of self-preservation is asserted.

I only had that feeling once before, I believe, when proceeding up the line during the Great War, and got my baptism of fire. I was taught then to duck, and this time, duck I did, in a split second. Safely ensconced in a nearby Bren gun post, nicely camouflaged and sandbagged, and about six feet deep. I sat back and looked up, hoping there was nothing for me from the Avion Boche with my initials on it.

In the space of five minutes, I saw the most terrific battle for supremacy taking place above me, the like of which I never experienced during the Great War. I saw a Hurricane and a Spitfire dive and half-roll on to a Junkers 88 and literally blow

him out of the air. The terrific fire-power of our fighters has to be seen to be understood. There is nothing that could possibly live in such a burst of fire. I have a piece of the unfortunate Junker and a good Duralumin it is too.

My thought is that Lord Beaverbrook was premature in his appeal of a few weeks ago for pots and pans. There now seems to be a good supply coming through from overseas that will outdo all the pot-collecting. However, back to the gun-post and the fight. I think the latter part of the dog-fight was the most thrilling, but very terrible nevertheless. To see the enemy making futile attempts to break away from the bed of Hornets with such terrible stings was extraordinary to watch. The enemy was absolutely outpiloted at every turn, and he had to take it, and did, in the tail.

The new enemy technique of Messes at their most utmost ceiling decoying away our fighters was just asking for trouble, and to my mind this manoeuvre whilst letting in the Junkers bombers to the arena, was just like throwing scraps to the lions. The only snag attached to flying up to the enemy seems to me to give him a chance to unload on the target, but, like the Mounties, you get your man just the same. I am sure I do not want to go through another ten minutes like my Friday experience, but, if I do, I am equally sure that the resuscitation of my Great War technique of 'getting down to it' at once will be my war aim for the future... and confound the Bosche and his murderous crew of wrinkled-necked pig-eaters.

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STUCK IN THE MUD

The way in which everybody showed willingness to lend a hand had been described to us by residents near a coastal place where an enemy fighter was brought down on Sunday afternoon. Quite near a well-known quay, the coast round which is more celebrated for its mud than its sands, stands the 'Crown and Anchor' hostelry, a favourite place of visit on fine Sundays. The air conflict suddenly developed right overhead, and the hostess (Mrs R. Evans), whose husband is away on Naval duty, gave all the shelter she could to women and children this not being an area where one would expect to find public shelters.

Things did not look so rosy when the falling enemy plane looked all like hitting the house. Instead, it nose-dived into the mud a few hundred yards away, where, with its tail stuck up in the air, it soon became the centre of excited interest. Everybody had kept calm and brave during the fight, and there were afterwards plenty who were eager to go to the aid of an injured German who had made a bad parachute landing in the mud. His parachute had failed to function properly. Messrs A.H. & D.H. Wood, both well known in the locality, were prominent among the rescuers.

The former was first to reach the injured man, and made use of his own 'tin hat' as a bowl, in order to bathe the fallen airman's battered head. The boats of sailing club members and the members too, were brought into use everybody being ready to help in the work of rescue. In the midst of excitement, a girl of 14 got knocked off the quay, and Mr. A. H. Wood effected her rescue in addition to his other activities. Mrs. Gates was another helper in giving first aid to the German parachutist, while Miss. D. Madgwick did useful work in rowing troops out to the wrecked plane against wind and tide. It was quite an historic occasion for this usually quiet bit of coast.

Meanwhile, not far away, another German airman who had safely baled out, was giving himself up as a prisoner. A tall man of fine physique, apparently an officer, he seems to have had some difficulty in retaining anything which could be grabbed by souvenir hunters. He is reported to have said, with an eloquent gesture, 'Your – Spitfires are too good'.

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