

# Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

## AIR RAIDS

### Air raids on West Wittering

From the *West Wittering Women's Institute Village Scrapbook*.

By Dorothy Thomson

#### CIVIL DEFENCE IN WEST WITTERING,

Air Raid Precautions were a very real part of life in our village. Geographically our proximity to Portsmouth, many aerodromes, the Isle of Wight and being on the edge of our "ditch", oldest and most famous defence against all enemies - gave us some importance.

All through the war on the alert our wardens were on duty - the ambulance manned - the first aid station in readiness and, later on, our very representative and efficient fire guard were doing their part in guarding our homes.

On the first day of the war, when the sirens sounded their fortunately mistaken note of warning, our wardens, attired in full gas kit, reported to the post for the first time, - little guessing how often they would be doing so in the years to come.

Then came a lull until the day when our first bomb dropped, in the garden of the platoon commander of the Home Guard, several others fell in an adjacent field, but that first one had a special significance! One of our wardens achieved a record by being on the spot one minute after the incident and all our chiefs came down to examine the craters.

These bombs were dropped in daylight, by a plane that had been hit and eventually crashed.

After this, hardly a day went by without our seeing vast formations of Germans attacking Portsmouth. Their technique was to cross the coast at Selsey, wheel around over us for the attack and very often to retreat over us, dropping bombs as they went.

We saw many dog fights during the Battle of Britain, and on the

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famous day when our pilots brought down nearly 300 of the enemy,- our skies seemed full of falling planes. After our victory by day, we settled down to nightly alerts and to listening to enormous formations of enemy craft flying over us on their way to attack Bristol - Wales - the Midlands - and London.

On numerous nights, bombs were dropped in our fields, our village street was machine gunned in daylight, we had an incendiary raid on Rookwood which turned the night into a good imitation of a firework display.

One of the first oil bombs of the war was dropped here. An American Liberator crashed in our fields and our canteen workers had several exciting escapes. One large bomb dropped within a few yards of the returning workers and a subaltern on guard was thrown to the ground by the blast. In the morning an outline of his prone figure was found, formed by earth and stones thrown up by the explosion. He escaped unscathed.

A night of great excitement was caused by a ruse to protect Portsmouth Docks - this deceived the Germans so well that they attacked us and we had 24 parachutes mines in our small peninsular.

Once more the greatest good fortune protected us and although craters of in those days, almost unbelievable proportions were made and houses and buildings damaged,- no lives were lost.

Gradually our skies became our own again and almost nightly we heard the dron of thousands of our planes, flying to bring home the war to Germany. By day we saw great formations collecting over Thorney, escorted by fighters, - a truly magnificent spectacle.

Our last bombs were dropped on April 16th 1944 that was an exciting night in Wittering. Nunnington Farm had several enormous bombs within yards of the house, 3 of them unexploded. But again, thanks to our good Sussex

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earth, no damage to human life resulted.

D Day and the critical days following, passed so calmly that one could hardly believe it true, all had been prepared for a very different situation.

The " Doodle Bug " menaced us next, one passed over Wittering in daylight, the first we had seen. Our battery of field guns opened fire and nearly accounted for it, but possibly fortunately for the village, - not quite.

For several after this the sky was constantly rent by the noise of these sinister weapons with their tails of fire.

Such is a brief account of some of the incidents that occurred, it would take too much space to mention them all. Dreadful and anxious days they were, yet redeemed from much of their horror by the good comradeship and helpfulness shown by everyone.

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B.E.M.

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