

# Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

## BATTLE OF BRITAIN

### Battle of Britain over West Wittering

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

From an account written in 1946 of West Wittering Women's Voluntary Service, by L. F. Ramsey.

### 1940

The following day, I saw the first air battle over West Wittering...The Battle of Britain was on...The first bomb that fell here was at Cloverfield, where the gardener was at work. He refused to go indoors till the bomb actually fell a few yards away from him, uprooting three trees, but he was unhurt.

Two days later, many bombs fell, but most of them fell in the mud of the harbour. One plane came down low and the gunner machine-gunned a fisherman who was just coming in. He threw himself down in the mud and escaped injury...

The soldiers had been with us only a fortnight when a plane flew low over the men at Cattlegate, machine-gunning them as they sat at breakfast...

One of our pilots came down by parachute at Cloverfield and Mrs. Fremantle drove him to hospital.

By August, we had a thousand men billeted on the front, men of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. On the 18th, we had a terrific raid, dive bombers presumably attempting to attack Thorney. It was Sunday and I had to go to the police station to get passes for workers at the canteen....I examined a wallet taken from the body of a German airman. It was full of notes, English, German and French. 140 planes were shot down that day...

The D.C.L.I. were in high spirits, especially a corporal who had captured a German officer. We had lifeboatmen stationed off the shore to pick up bodies from the sea. On the 24th, 800 planes came over and there were some fierce battles. One of our Spitfires shot down a Heinkel. First one wing came off, then another and finally the plane crashed into the sea in flames and a great geyser spouted up as the bombs exploded. The lifeboat went out but nobody was picked up alive.

On August 26th, I saw a battle overhead and a bomber crashed by the old Barn...On the 27th, we heard our first screaming bomb. On August 30th, a time bomb exploded in the car park...One of the worst nights of the war was August 31st. Bombs kept dropping all night till 3.30 a.m. when we got our first sleep.

For the next three nights there was fog so we got some peace. But not for long. At the end of the first week of September, air battles went on all day and often at night as well.

On All Saints Day, we had seven air raid alarms and a German plane was brought down. On the 3rd of November we heard the biggest explosion so far. It was caused by a bomb falling on a land mine and blew windows out of the soldiers' billets and slates off their roofs. Ten windows at Jordans were blown in. The Queens had replaced the D.C.L.I.'s then.

On November 19th a Junkers 88 crashed and burnt for two hours. Two of the men got away. One gave himself up at Cattlegate. The other was caught at Birdham.

The night of December 5th was never to be forgotten. The fires at Portsmouth were appalling to watch. During the next weeks, the homeless were coming here to find somewhere to live.