

# Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

## CANADIANS

### Canadians remember West Sussex-1

From *Memories from a town that disappeared, Horsham during World War II* (Horsham Museum, 1989)

By Peter Allbright, Niagra, Ontario

I arrived in Britain in March of 1942 at the impressionable age of 18 – they were still the dark days of the war, and I could not see how we could possibly win.

The British forces had retreated from Dunkirk, and were now waging see-saw battles in North Africa and were on the defensive in the far East war with Japan. The American fleet had been virtually destroyed at Pearl Harbour. The call came out in Canada for volunteers for the 'Defense of Britain' and I was one of those volunteers. We arrived to experience the Blackout, severe rationing, Air raid sirens and shelters, and scenes of destruction.

As a 'lorry' driver, I covered most of the South of England and came to know it well, even with all the sign and directions removed from the roads during war-time – and learning to drive on the left hand side of the road.

I learned to have deep respect and sympathy for the people of Britain during those days. We learned to hate mutton stew, herrings in tomato sauce AND there was no coffee, but we came to enjoy tea – even weak NAAFI tea, and their cake that looked and tasted like sawdust. We hadn't heard of margarine, or kippers for breakfast, but enjoyed fish and chips in a newspaper.

Of course, we learned to enjoy the British pubs, we had nothing like this at home, the pints of mild and bitter, half and half, or black and tan, singing around the piano and the friendly English girls.

I had the pleasure of being stationed in Horsham for a short time during the winter of 1944 – it was one of the worst winters ever, with heavy snow and cold weather. Road and rail lines were clogged, and we did some food and supply deliveries with our four wheeled drive lorries.....

A short distance down the road from us was the closest pub, and we spent many evenings there, having a pint and playing darts. The couple that operated the pub were very friendly and showed a great interest in us boys, so far away from home. They kept a large list of names on sheets of paper hanging from the wall, and requested each soldier to write his name and address if he wished. I recall looking for names of anyone I might know.

Some of our reinforcements came to us straight from Canada and were new to the customs, etc. Us old hands had to show them a few of the ropes before they went to the front lines. I became friendly with two such fellows and they expressed a wish to go into Horsham to look around.....I took them through the town and all its sights, and the beautiful Sussex downs, with sheep here and there grazing on the hillside.

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We ended up at a large pub, not far from the railway station, for a couple of pints. One of my friends bought the first round of drinks and he was looking over the unfamiliar large British coins he got in change. I asked if that was all he had got back from a pound and he said that he didn't know whether he had given the barman a pound or a ten-shilling note. I went up with a pound note for the next round and the bartender gave me change for ten shillings. I immediately brought this to his attention, and he stuttered a bit and said 'Blimey, I must be drunk' I said 'Well, you'd better not make a habit of it', loud enough that several civilians took note.

We left after that, and never returned. Shortly after that I was reposted to the Dover area. This was my only bad experience in the lovely city of Horsham.

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