

Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

INVASION

Invasion defences in Worthing

Extracts from *Despatches from the Home Front, The War Diaries of Joan Strange 1939-1945* (Monarch Publications, 1989)

1940

May 28th King Leopold of Belgium has capitulated. Things go badly for us still but we can stick it. All the bathing huts have been trundled off the beach, filled with stones and put to block roads leading up to the sea! All boats have been removed from the beach and no bathing is allowed.

May 30th The British Expeditionary Force and the French are in desperate straits in Flanders and evacuation is essential....The front of Worthing is being cut up for 'pill-boxes', there is a look-out on top of County Café and people are leaving the coast hotels very rapidly and some residents with small children are going too.

June 18th The new immediate horror is invasion and air raids of great intensity. I went to Windlesham School in the afternoon. It is being evacuated to Glastonbury next Friday. They have cut their hay and stacked it bang in the middle of their cricket field as is being requested by the government.

June 28th From today onwards all cars must be rendered incapable of being driven away, i.e. when I stopped at each patient this morning and afternoon I had to remove ignition keys and lock doors. At night I must still continue to remove rotary gadget as well!

July 2nd Will Hitler invade us tonight? The roads are well infested with anti-tank devices. Spent the evening with Bache and from her flat window watched the gun practice going on. No one is allowed to bathe at all now.

July 3rd No invasion yet – but we live on tenter-hooks. People are still leaving Worthing. I listened to Beethoven's seventh this evening – I believe from Germany. Very well played. I wondered if Hitler were listening too!

July 6th Driving along Worthing front this morning I noticed how rapidly it had been converted into a battle front – machine guns hidden under shingle and sand-bags, ammunition dumps disguised as beach chalets and so on. The papers say we are now a 'defence area' which means no one can come here except with official permission. Worthing looks quite empty with no visitors and so many inhabitants moving inland.

September 13th Everyone is a little apprehensive of an invasion attempt. We hear all coast towns in the south-east round to Seaford are pretty well evacuated. While I write at 11.30pm I hear the drone of the Nazi bombers booming en route for poor London. Buckingham Palace was deliberately bombed again today.

September 16th Today is what is known as Invasion Day! Will it come? The weather seems to have broken and the Channel is very choppy for their barges, but...who knows? Our bombers are working hard against the invasion bases.

1941

October 15th. Dora and I had a good hour's tennis in the Denton Gardens. The courts are near the sea and are surrounded by barbed wire and notices saying 'Danger Mines'.