

# Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

## BATTLE OF BRITAIN

### Plane shot down in Chichester area

#### **West Sussex Gazette August 29<sup>th</sup> 1940** **RAID EXPERIENCE: "A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY"**

Mid-August was here, and in a remote corner of rural England the air of the afternoon was sultry. There were lowering clouds overhead and every prospect of a thunderstorm before the evening had passed. Standing on the terrace in front of the house, one looked northwest to the rolling wooded hills wrapped in a dark blue haze. In the near distance could be heard the sound of reapers busy in the fields and still nearer sheep were grazing. Closer still cows were dozing. Over all was the quiet of a late summer day.

Away in the distance could be heard the hum of aeroplanes growing ever nearer and nearer...The droning grew louder and louder until the rising crescendo of sound seemed to make the very ground shake and tremble. Suddenly there was a burst of machine-gun fire and through the angry clouds hurtled a 'plane, diving almost vertically to earth, twisting and turning like something alive, with flames and smoke pouring from its engines and wings, the transparent nose of the fuselage one brilliant flash of red flame.

We made a run for the house, shouting to those within to lie down and away from the windows. A dull crash was heard and after a few minutes the dreaded "crump-crump-crump" of bombs exploding, and then the machine gun ammunition crackled away for some time – and above that the crackle of the burning plane, with an ever increasing cloud of black smoke rising above the trees. We wondered if any of the crew had got out alive, and the three of us started our way through the woods to where the crash had occurred. Ten minutes walking, and we came to the edge of the woods to discover the plane practically intact, but the nose burning furiously. We mounted a fence into the field, and were about seventy-five yards from the machine when the whole thing blew up with a blinding flash and a terrific explosion. We all threw ourselves flat on the ground – whether we were partly blown down or not I cannot say – but I, for one, have never measured my length quicker. As I went down I could see the plane going up in thousands of pieces, and as I put my hands and arms over my head I felt something hot

sear the flesh of my finger tips.

Lying there, with my ears deafened and my head ringing, I wondered what would hit me next, hoping and praying that it would not hurt too much! After a little while – which seemed like eternity – I raised my head to see my two companions crawling on hands and knees for the shelter of a ditch. I followed, and after settling down gazed upward.

A few minutes later two Spitfires circled overhead to make sure that their work had been well and truly accomplished. We gave them a wave, and with an answering salute they disappeared into the haze in pursuit of other raiders. Oak trees and hedges had been blasted and were burning, and there were small fires in many parts of the fields and woods around. Within a few minutes a warden and a member of the Home Guard were on the spot, with a few farm hands. It was discovered that one of the crew had baled out, but that his parachute had failed to open. Of the rest of the crew, it need only be said that the explosion had carried out its grim task in an only too thorough manner.

After the raid there seemed to be a fresher atmosphere, the birds began to sing again, and a slight breeze sprang up and seemed to lighten our sense of depression. In the house windows had been broken and a little superficial damage had been done to the structure by the blast of the last explosion, but none of the inmates had received injury. Points that can be stressed from this experience of ours – although they are being stressed over and over again on the wireless and in the newspapers – are, When danger is near *lie down and stay down*, and give a German plane which has been brought down a very wide berth until it is considered safe by the police or military authorities to go near it. I know there is the desire to try to get a souvenir, as in this case I have the piece that struck me; but it will be a long time before I go anywhere near another crash within the first 24 hours of the plane coming down. "Frightened?" do you say, you may think so, but I prefer to think that a little experience of this sort goes along way.

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