

# Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

## D-DAY

### Remembering D-Day preparations in Crawley

From *You Must Remember This*, By Rex Williams (Rural Rides Publications, 1992)

Sometime in the spring of 1944 we lads thought Christmas had arrived early. The army appeared and closed off half the Bypass, all the southern side, from the Tushmore roundabout to the bottom of Pease Pottage Hill, where Radio Mercury is now sited. Not only did they put up sentry boxes and a pole barrier at each roundabout access but they also built workshops for the REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers). Some of the concrete bases are still to be seen to this day. The reason for this activity became apparent when dozens of tanks and armoured vehicles arrived to be double and treble parked on the road, cycle track and path, and grass verge. There was still not enough room so the fields were used also. The fields opposite my home, now called 'The Dingle', were totally filled. It did not take us long to realise one young sentry could hardly supervise several hundred tanks.

When we climbed in through the hatch and lowered ourselves inside we were in a wonderland. The first thing to do was to adjust the periscope to keep an eye on the sentry. I believe we just looked about us without touching anything. The live shells were there for the gun. The cartridges all in place for the machine guns. A Colt revolver in a real leather holster. A Verey pistol and flares.

I was in a 'Churchill' one day and started the turret turning to the left.....It was fascinating. I found the control and reversed it trying to peer through the periscope at the same time. As it slowly turned back, there he was, the sentry, racing straight towards me faster than 'The Great Wilson'. I could have shot him I suppose, but decided instead to run for it. No doubt I left faster than if a member of the Wehrmacht had slipped a grenade through the driver's hatch, but it still took time. He caught up with me as I was about to climb over the fence into John Garman's garden; but do you know what? He hasn't thought of anything to say.

### D-DAY

I believe it was about seven fortyfive a.m. on sixth June 1944. What on earth was that noise? I ran into my parents' room and looked out. Every single one of the tanks and other vehicles parked on the Bypass and in the fields had gone. I certainly hadn't heard them go. I quickly ran down into the garden and looked up. There, flying south, was a magnificent sight. I seem to remember Halifax bombers towing two troop-carrying gliders each; Dakotas towing gliders.....wave after wave of them. Each aircraft had markings not seen by us before, broad white stripes under the wings and around the fuselage so that all could see they were on our side.

The 'Longest Day' had begun and many people who woke up that day would not see the sun set.

© Rural Rides Publications, Balcombe, 1992 E300129491