Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

International Timeline

16 May – Women’s Voluntary Service for Civil Defence started
September – Civilian volunteers called to join air raid precaution, fire brigades, territorial units and other defence work
9 September – Auxiliary Territorial Service for women created
26 September – Gas mask distribution in all areas
26 September – Anti-aircraft units and coastal defence units of territorial army mobilised
27 September – Air Raid Precautions handbook issued as guidance
30 September – Munich Agreement; PM Neville Chamberlain tries to negotiate peace with Hitler

Local Timeline

Summer – people fill sandbags from the beach in preparation for war
9 August – large civil defence exercise in Chichester
September – 42,000 evacuees arrive in West Sussex
7 December – voluntary war workers reception at County Hall, Chichester

February – many evacuees return home due to the “phony war”
14 May – Local men start to join Local Defence Volunteers (later Home Guard) with 26 battalions being formed in Sussex with Worthing as the most responsive town in Britain
26 May – Sussex fishermen and boat owners help with Dunkirk evacuation
29 May – first high explosive bomb falls on the County at Cowfold
Summer – Coastal gun batteries installed at Bognor, Angmering, Littlehampton, Worthing and Shoreham
2 July – General Montgomery meets Winston Churchill for first time, at Lancing College
16 August – Tangmere Airfield attacked, leaving 13 dead
18 August – Fleet Air Arm at Ford and area attacked, killing 39
September – Germany plans Operation Sealion, with the flat coastline of West Sussex as a likely invasion point
September – Canadian troops begin to arrive in West Sussex
8 October – Air raid on Worthing kills 5 and injures 12
21 October – Shoreham bombing kills 5
12 November – Worthing air raid leaves 5 dead and 5 injured
29 November – 6 killed and 15 injured in Horsham air raid

8 January – Basic food items rationing introduced
10 May – Winston Churchill replaces Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain
10 May – German ‘Blitzkrieg’ begins leading to invasion of Belgium, Holland and France
14 May – Local Defence Volunteers formed (later known as Home Guard)
26 May – Dunkirk Evacuation of British Expeditionary Forces begins
11 June – Italy enters war on the side of the Axis powers
22 June – France signs armistice with Germany
16 July – Hitler orders preparations for Operation Sealion (invasion of Britain)
10 July to 31 October – Battle of Britain; German air force (Luftwaffe) begin mass bombing of Britain
7 September to 16 May 1941 – The Blitz on London and other British cities by Luftwaffe
17 September – British victory in Battle of Britain forces Hitler to postpone Operation Sealion
22 September – Mutual alliance pact signed by Germany, Italy and Japan
Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

Local Timeline

19 January – Heinkel 111 crash in Steyning; the funeral, with military honours for the 5 German aircrew, by people of Steyning causes national controversy

From March - Evacuation of some West Sussex children due to threat of invasion (Worthing children to Newark; Shoreham and Southwick children to Wakefield and Doncaster)

May – Chichester City and Rural District people raise £621,000 for War Weapons Week

9 August – Wing Commander Douglas Bader is taken Prisoner of War in France having been on operation from Tangmere

1 November – Air raid on Worthing kills 7 and injures 26

December – 277 Squadron Air Sea Rescue set up at Shoreham

International Timeline

June - Clothes rationing starts; Government launches “Make do and Mend” campaign

22 June - Hitler begins Operation Barbarossa, invasion of Russia

7 Dec - Japan attacks U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbour

8 December – U.S. declares war on Japan and joins war on Allied side

18 December – National Service Act is passed, conscripting unmarried women between ages of 20 and 30 to help with war work

January - Mass murder of Jews begins at Auschwitz extermination camp.

15 February - Singapore falls to Japanese in February with around 25,000 prisoners taken; considered to be Britain’s worst defeat of the war

23 April to 3 May and 31 May to 6 June 1942 – Germans launch “Baedeker” Raids on England destroying 50,000 buildings in five historic towns

30 May, 1 June and 25 June 1942 – Britain launches Thousand-bomber raids on Germany destroying German factories and homes, particularly in Cologne

1 - 4 July - Allies stop German and Italian troops from taking Egypt; first battle of El Alamein grinds to a halt until October.

19 August - Dieppe Raid by Allies

23 October - Germany suffers defeat in Second Battle at El Alamein

February – Petworth’s Warships Week raises £70,000 for a Motor Torpedo Boat

18 July – Air raid in Littlehampton kills 8 and injures 16

14 August – Bognor Regis air raid causes 9 deaths, 13 injuries and damage to 250 properties

19 August – Dieppe Raid; many Canadian troops involved were stationed in West Sussex

29 September – Petworth Boys’ School bombing kills 32 (28 boys)

16 December – German Dornier 217 crashes into Bognor Gas Works scattering unexploded bombs and killing 2 civilians

Aftermath of Chichester bombing, February 1943, West Sussex Record Office, PH7463

8 February – Raid on Worthing kills 9 and injures 43

10 February – Chichester bombing kills 18 and injures 37

8 March – Raid on Worthing kills 9

May – Chichester and District raise £1/2 million for Wings for Victory Week

9 May – Women’s Land Army awards by Lady Denman at Arundel Castle

9 July – East Grinstead bombing (including Whitehall Cinema) results in 108 deaths and 235 injured; the heaviest loss of life in Sussex

2 February - Surrender at Stalingrad marks Germany’s first major defeat

April - Turning point in Battle of the Atlantic is reached, thanks to improved convoy systems and breaking of German secret codes

13 May - Allied victory in North Africa enables invasion of Italy to be launched

16/17 May - Dambusters Raid breaches two major dams supplying water and power to the Ruhr valley – first use of ‘bouncing bomb’

8 September – Italy surrenders

18 November to 24 March 1944 – Berlin Air Offensive by Allies
January to June – 30 Commando Assault Unit (Royal Marines), billeted in Littlehampton, included men who inspired Commander Ian Fleming to write his James Bond novels

April - General Dwight D. Eisenhower inspects airfields in Chichester area and is guest-of-honour at formal dinner at RAF Tangmere

May to June – Mulberry Harbours are assembled off Pagham and Selsey in preparation for D-Day

June – Horsham, Crawley and district raise £430,000 during Salute the Soldier week

6 June – D-Day; Shoreham used as embarkation port and Littlehampton as ammunition supply port

13 June – One of the first flying bombs (V1 or doodlebug) to hit Britain lands at Cuckfield

10 July – Air raid on Crawley kills 7 and injures 44

12 July – King and Queen inspect bomb damage at East Grinstead caused by V1 flying bomb which killed 3, injured 38 and damaged over 400 properties

14 July – King and Queen visit RAF Tangmere for field investiture

February – Lady Denman of Balcombe resigns as honorary director of the Women’s Land Army because of their exclusion from war service grants scheme

8 May – Parties take place across the county to celebrate Victory in Europe Day

15 August – End of the war is celebrated on Victory in Japan Day

6 June - D-Day landings launch Operation Overlord, Allies’ invasion of North West Europe

13 June 1944 – First V1 (flying bombs) launched by Germans on Britain.

4 August - Anne Frank and family are arrested by the Gestapo in Amsterdam and sent to Auschwitz

25 August – Liberation of Paris

8 September – First V2 rockets launched by Germans on Britain

15 to 25 September – Operation Market-Garden launched, preparing for Allied advance into Germany

11 November – Home Guard is disbanded

26 January - Auschwitz liberated by Soviet troops

13 to 15 February – Allies launch devastating air attack on Dresden

15 April – Liberation of Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp by British troops

28 April – Mussolini captured and executed

30 April – Hitler commits suicide

7 May – Germany officially surrenders to Allies

8 May – Victory in Europe Day

13 May – National Day of Thanksgiving

6 and 9 August – Atomic bomb dropped on Japan at Hiroshima and Nagasaki

14 August – Japan surrenders bringing the war in the Pacific to an end

15 August – Victory in Japan Day - end of World War 2

24 October – United Nations is born

20 November – Nuremberg war crimes trials begin

www.westsussexpast.org.uk.