



Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945



ARP air raid wardens,
Worthing, c1940, P003397

L'Alouette family
picnicking in gas
masks, Bognor
Regis,
c1939, FLA/P010



1938 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

1939

- 27 April** - Conscription introduced; British armed forces increase in number by more than 1.5 million by end of 1939
- June** – Women's Land Army re-founded
- 28 June** – Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) created
- 1 September** - Hitler invades Poland
- 1 September** - Evacuation of children from cities begins in case of air raids
- 3 Sept** – Britain and France declare war on Germany
- 10 September** – Canada declares war on Germany
- 10 September** – Battle of the Atlantic begins
- October** – Government launch "Dig for Victory" campaign
- 28 September** - Meat rationing introduced
- September to May 1940** - Phoney War; no air raids or invasion

1940

- February** – many evacuees return home due to the "phoney 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

1940

- 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



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Local Timeline

1941

- 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



Firewomen dispatch riders, Bognor Regis, c1939, FLA/P180

1942

- 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

- 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



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

1943

- 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



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Local Timeline

1944

International Timeline

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

King and Queen visit after bombing of London Road, East Grinstead, 12 July 1940. P002659



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



V.E. day tea party, Ringmer Road, Worthing, May 1945, L000863



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

Pilot watches men fill a fuel tank with beer for D-Day troops, Bognor Regis, June 1944, FLA/P176



1945

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

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