

Memories of Growing up in the War Torn Years 1939-1945 cont.

There was one very frightening moment for the village when one lone German bomber flew over Partridge Green. I remember hearing it while I was pumping up my bike tyres and looked up to see the Iron Cross markings on the wings; it was directly overhead and as it went away from me I watched as the bomb doors opened and two small bombs were falling. He tried to hit Betley Bridge to damage the strategic "Puffing Billy" Railway link between Partridge Green and Henfield. He missed the bridge and he missed the line. The Village should be eternally grateful to that German airman because just before I saw it the plane had flown low along the High Street where there were lots of children on their way home from school. He could have strafed the street of children or dropped his bombs but thankfully he chose not to. This sort of air raid was a "sneak raid" where they flew in low over the Channel to avoid the radar. They would drop their bombs anywhere and no doubt return to claim destruction of a large military arms dump or some such thing. One came over Steyning when we were in class one day and destroyed a pair of old cottages killing some old people, in Church Road just opposite "Saxon Cottage", the picturesque thatched cottage not far from the Church.

The mass highflying air raids were largely over and these sneak raids were little more than a nuisance to the war effort. Next came Hitler's charming V1 doodlebugs. These were robot planes, flying on kerosene and carrying a bomb load. They were launched from underground emplacements along the French coast and were directed at London. They didn't all fly that straight and they became a regular feature of the 1943 scenario. These things fell when the fuel gave out so we could watch them with bated breath and breathed a sigh of relief when they popped along past us. One did fall in the Village one night in the field opposite the Church just to the south of Jolesfield House. It caused some slight structural damage to that house and also to the bungalows on Church Hill. Just another ¼ mile and Jolesfield House would have been in ruins. Everybody lived with that sort of thought but there was no point in dwelling on it; there was a war to be won and everyone went about their daily lives as though nothing had happened.

By now the tide was turning. We had followed the war maps in North Africa and in Russia. The names of the Russian cities became all too familiar: Rostov on Don Stalingrad etc. The Russians were stemming the advance so we gave another few pence to the "Aid to Russia Fund" to help finance the convoys that braved the North Atlantic with constant U Boat attacks round the top of Norway to the Russian ports. In Africa, General Montgomery (Monty) was a national hero. The build up of troops and the number of exercises in and around Partridge Green was very noticeable and finally came D Day. We were now able to study maps of the area just across the Channel and it all became very exciting. In the first few days after the Normandy landings there were quite a number of ambulances driving through probably running between Shoreham Harbour and Horsham where Forest Hospital in Kings Road and another hospital along the Forest Road towards Colgate nursed a great number of casualties.

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