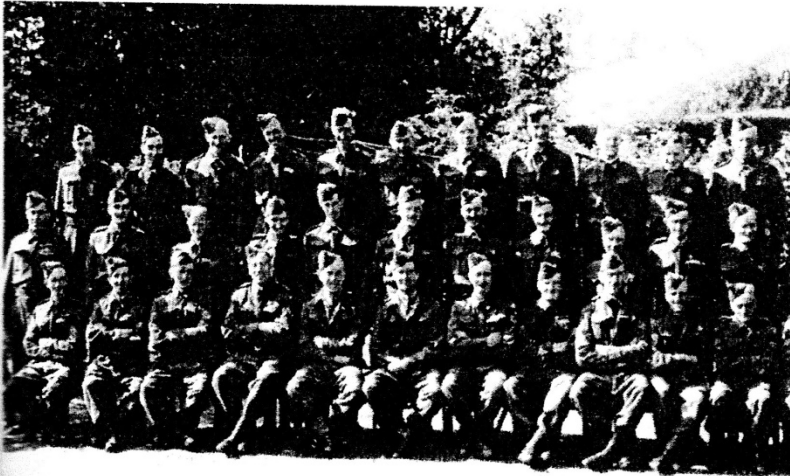


CHAPTER 24

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

With the declaration of war strict blackout conditions again applied, not only to houses and street lights but also to vehicles, leading to two road fatalities in the last months of 1939. The first victim, a Boxgrove resident, was walking back home from Eastergate late at night and following the white line in the centre of the road at Fontwell when he was hit by a car. This was driven by an RAF Officer from Tangmere who had simply not seen him. The second took place at Woodgate a few weeks later when a Mr. Saunders, of 10, Council Cottages, was walking back from the Robin Hood with his friend, a Mr. Hampton described as 'partially deaf' and who was pushing his bicycle. The two were chatting when Mr. Saunders heard a car approaching from behind them and stepped further into the kerbside. Mr. Hampton had not heard this and, although grabbed by his companion, it was too late as the car hit him. The occupants, two airmen from RAF Tangmere, stopped the car a little way up the road and ran off as fast as they could. When the emergency services arrived Mr. Hampton was confirmed dead and the police apprehended the airmen in Nyton Road. The Standard car had been stolen from outside the Conservative Club in Bognor Regis by the two airmen who had been drinking heavily. The case went to Court and the two were fined a total of £40 with £6 costs, having been found guilty of driving without a licence, permission or insurance - no mention of drink driving! The blackout was to cause further road accidents leading to the deaths of several residents and a postman who was killed when his van hit a tree at Crockerhill.

Aldingbourne Home Guard



*Back row: (?), Percy Slaughter, Norman Chinner, (?), Harry Slaughter, Nelson Lester, Den Murphy, Mr. Robinson, Charles Noakes, Les Cooper, (?).
Middle row: Wilf Toop, Jack Beacher, Arthur White, (?), (?), Mr. Billeness, Jack Norman, Billy Lucas, (?), Dickie Wingham, Mr. Short.
Front row: (?), Jim White, (?), (?), Algenon Lester, Mr. Draycott CO, Bill Coles, (?), George Sandridge, Bill Slaughter, Mr. Hoare. (picture Stephanie Horsman)*

from 'Around Aldingbourne' by Cliff Mervett & Vivienne Salmon 2006

Not long into the war the Aldingbourne Platoon of the Home Guard was formed out of the earlier Local Defence Volunteers. To give them their official title they were called 7 Platoon, 'D' Company, 1st Battalion, the Sussex Home Guard based at the Labour in Vain public house. Initially there was a shortage of arms and the men paraded using their personal shotguns and pitchforks, eventually being issued with rifles. Part of their job was to patrol Westergate Street at regular intervals during the night often calling in at the bakery at 4am when the bread was being baked to have a warm up. Throughout the war the Home Guard performed its duties in and around the parish often exercising with the regular troops, including Canadians, stationed here. With RAF Tangmere on its western boundary the Aldingbourne Home Guard had a great deal of responsibility.

Shortly after 'D' Day, with the invasion threat to the United Kingdom finally over, the Government announced that the Home Guard was to be disbanded. The orders to cease active duty were issued in September 1944 and in a fitting tribute the Chichester Observer stated 'that in reality the Home Guard would only fade away'. After the last parade and march past in Chichester, 7 Platoon was disbanded, a few days later holding a farewell dinner at the Aldingbourne Village Hall provided by the ladies of the Womens Institute. Complementary speeches were made outlining the sterling work the Platoon had performed with the final toast being proposed by a senior Royal Air Force Officer from RAF Tangmere. The Platoon, having some funds to dispose of, purchased a cine projector for the local school and community use, the balance of £5 being donated to the Womens Institute. Many of the men went on to join the Home Guard Old Comrades Association meeting regularly at Chichester for some years before it too eventually faded away. Even today the full extent of all the activities of the Home Guard are not known but it is certain that if an invasion had taken place the Aldingbourne Platoon would have performed their duties to a man.

A local Brigade of the Auxiliary Fire Service was also formed with their Fire Service Station sited at the rear of Wendovers in a Nissan hut. (picture Vera Staker)



*Back row: William Staker, (?), Bill Boxall, (?), Bill Goble, Tiny Collins, (?), Charlie Russell, Bill Hilsden, (?).
Front row: Ron Cooper, (?), Gilbert Thorns, Mr. Porter, Algenon Matthews, (?), William Bevis, Cedric Russell, Laurie Boxall, Tony Porter.*

The close proximity of RAF Tangmere inevitably meant the skies above Aldingbourne were busy from the outset of war. Mothballed after the First World War it was reactivated in 1925. Despite the war the Southdown bus continued to travel through the airfield on its way to Chichester. An Air Force guard would get on the bus and pull all the blinds down so that nobody could see any military activity. Having crossed the airfield the blinds were raised, the guard alighted and the bus continued its journey. The devastating raids on the airfield during 1940 would have been witnessed by many locals, and one house close to the church had a miraculous escape when a German bomb landed behind it and bounced over the top to explode harmlessly in the field opposite. Further bombs were dropped in the Nyton Road area in 1941 by planes returning to Germany, blasting out doors and windows but thankfully no casualties were reported in an area where many servicemen from RAF Tangmere were lodging. Many properties were also requisitioned including Step Aside, Hazelbank and Little Westergate House. It is surprising to discover that 1,057 bombs, including incendiaries, were dropped in the parish.

The village hall was extensively used by the forces for social activities, particularly the Canadians. Their heavy boots caused so much damage to the floor that, when peace broke out and they returned home, a consignment of maple wood was sent over for repairs. The village hall was also used by the Civil Defence as a First Aid Post and as a post for Wardens & Special Constables, the Chief Air Raid Warden being Mr. A Campbell of School House. Westergate Street was in a very poor state of repair during the war years because of the constant movement of huge lorries.

As the tide of war turned in our favour many types of aircraft would have been a familiar sight. The occupiers of Norton Lodge had particular reason to remember a wet misty day in March 1944 when their house came within feet of being demolished by the Royal Air Force. A new Hawker Typhoon 1B serial number JR 199 flown by Flt. Lt. Peter Sewell, an experienced Battle of Britain pilot, was being delivered from Scotland to Tangmere when it developed a complete engine failure on its final landing approach. Losing height rapidly the pilot managed to avoid a large Oak tree, probably saving his life. He hit a stone garden wall before demolishing the larder and kitchen of the house. The aircraft was badly damaged and the pilot sustained chest injuries and two broken legs. It is believed that the cause of the accident was some 'dirty' fuel picked up at a refuelling stop in Yorkshire. After ten months medical treatment Peter returned to active duties.