

5 THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN.

What a welcome I received off everyone. The dogs went mad barking and jumping all over me. I was glad to be home,

A lot of changes had taken place. An Anderson Air Raid Shelter had been dug and improved on. A toilet and kitchen had been added. All underground. It had electric light, heating and a wireless,

We had new neighbours. Mr & Mrs Smith and their sons William & Dennis they were younger than me, Further down the lane in Golf Cottages were another new family Mr & Mrs Briggs and their son Len and daughter Daphne. Across the road in the Bungalows Mr & Mrs Flanagan had moved out. Mr & Mrs Crouch had moved in with their two daughters and Maureen & Cynthia.

A battery of anti aircraft guns with a search light battery were on Denton Marshes. There were barrage balloons all over the place. Gravesend Air Port had been taken over by the RAF. A squadron of Hurricane fighters was stationed there. The army was out on the marshes training at all times

Good news Three Royal Naval cruisers, HMS Ajax, HMS Exeter, and HMAS Achilles, had sunk the German Pocket Battleship Graf Spee. Also a destroyer HMS Cossack boarded a German supply ship The Altmark in Norwegian waters and released all the British merchant seamen taken prisoner by the Graf Spee All the ships on the river were painted grey and were armed. We had air raid alarms but no bombs were dropped. life carried on as normal, We went to school and I still had my jobs to do. Dad bought some pigs. I helped look after them as pig food got short he fed them on pig swill. to collect it he made a truck and towed it behind his bike.

All the swill had to be cooked so he built a copper in a shed. One of my jobs was to make sure it didn't go out. One day it went out. So I placed paper and wood and threw paraffin oil on the warm ashes. It vaporised. I threw in a lighted match and woosh it was a good job I had a Balaclava helmet on because the weather was so bad. I was lucky I only had my eyebrow singed.

That winter the snow was that deep you couldn't see the tops of the hedgerows. It was so cold that we slept in our clothes to keep warm. There was no school from December until March 1940. the weather was so bad we had to move all the chickens from the orchard up to the land at the rear of the house near the barn we put oil lamps in the sheds to stop the chickens freezing to death.

Food ing was introduced. 4 ounce of sugar, 4 ounce of butter, 4 ounce of tea, 4 ounce margarine, 4 ounce of meat, 2 eggs, 4 ounce of bacon, 2 ounce sweets a week per person. We were lucky to live on a farm and not go hungry. Petrol, oil and even coal was rationed. You were only allowed 5 inches of water to have a bath in.

Life went on. 'Bob do this, Bob do that or I'll tell your father.' 'yes Mum'. Leslie Dalton was given an air rifle for Christmas and I wanted one. Mum and Dad said they couldn't afford it so I saved up Five Shilling and bought one from Harold Page. I ran out of pellets and was firing pieces of potato. If it hit you it made you jump. One day Dad was bending over, what a target. Leslie Dalton and I were hiding behind the barn. He dared me to have a go, so bang bulls eye! he jumped into the air, We crept away and lucky for us he didn't see us.

Peter returned home at Christmas. He was always helping Dad building pig sties or chicken sheds and helped Dad to alter the kitchen they knocked the coal shed, pantry and bathroom walls down, moved the bathroom into space where the pantry had been and extended it under the stairs, They did all the plumbing work and Dad bought a fire that heated the water so we could have a hot bath at last Clever clogs.

Then it was back to school. Still no air raids. Then the war news started getting bad. The German Army had broken through the Allied front line in France and the British army was retreating to a place called Dunkirk. We were at school and we went on to the Prom. The river was full of boats. Pleasure boats, tugs, lighters, London Fireboats, motor launches, you name it they were. all going down river to help in the evacuation of the British Army from Dunkirk, many of them never to return.

We were called back into school, informed of the situation and told that Gordon School was closing. It was to be used as a reception centre to give first aid and rest for the returning soldiers. We would be informed of what schools we would be going to. I didn't return to Gordon School for nearly two years and I didn't attend any other school for over six months and then only for three hours a day.

The IPM closed as all the wood they used for making paper came from Norway which the Germans had invaded and taken over. Dad was out of work but not for long. he had to become a full time Air Raid Warden. The Warden Post was at the Lion Garage. It was called 'Jitter Bugs Retreat'. There had to be outside every front door a bucket of water, and a bucket of dirt, or a sand bag and a shovel for putting out incendiary bombs. About every twentieth house there would be a stirrup pump everyone had to know how to use them .

The news was bad. France had been defeated. Britain stood alone against Germany and Italy, We had a new Prime Minister Mr Winston Churchill. He made a speech. We all stood round the wireless and listened, "The Battle of France is over. The Battle of Britain is about to begin". I have nothing to offer but blood, sweat and tears. We will fight them in the air, on the landing grounds, on the beaches, in the streets, and in the fields,

WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER.

Everyone was quiet. We didn't know what to expect we just got on with it. Leaflets came through the door 'what to do in an air raid', 'how to put out an incendiary bomb', a book on First Aid, and a book called 'What To Do if The Invader Comes'. It told you how to tell the difference between our troops and the Germans. I was scared to death.

They called for volunteers to form The Local Defence Volunteers. Anyone over 16 who wasn't in the ARP, Police or Civil Defence could volunteer, but they had no weapons, All they had were shot guns and broomsticks with carving knives fixed to them. They made an appeal for guns of any sort. Dad handed in the Turkish rifle, bayonets and pistols, but he kept a pistol. They renamed the LDV the Home Guard; you had to join it.

All sign posts with the name and direction of places had been taken down. All names of places removed even the names and addresses on the side of vehicles were painted out. Everyone had to carry their identity card at all times. If you were challenged by the Army or Home Guard and didn't stop they would shoot you. Posts and iron poles were erected on the marshes and in all the fields to stop German gliders full of troops landing. Trenches were dug and Pill Boxes were built. Chalk was getting ready to defy the invader.

Suddenly they bombed the oil tanks across at Shell Haven. The AA guns were firing, the oil tanks were on fire. We went into the shelter. They started to attack the Airfield and bomb the docks. There were fires all over the place.

The Battle had started!

The air raids lasted all day. They attacked the docks and Airfield. We would count how many German planes. There were hundreds all stacked up waiting their turn to attack, Then the RAF would attack them and there would be dog fights all over the place. Planes on fire crashing, crews bailing out' coming down by parachute. Sometimes the parachute didn't open and they came straight down there wasn't a lot left to bury.

It was very exciting at first. Cheering when a German plane was shot down, dashing off to see the crashed plane, collecting a piece as a souvenir. One evening we went to see a shot down German Dornier bomber. Soldiers were guarding the plane and we decided to have a game of football with them but there was no goal post. There were a lot of up turned bucket and tin cans all over the place so we thought we would use these for goal post. When I moved the bucket it was covering part of a hand and arm! The buckets and tin cans were covering parts of the crew of the plane.

The first house to destroy in Chalk was my friend Derek (Jake) Thomas house in Thong Lane near the Airfield, He was alright. his brother Roy was buried under the bricks and had to be dug out he had injured his arm and back. their mother was out at the time they had to be rehoused,

The Germans dived bombed and shot up the Airfield, Tilbury Dock and the ships on the river day in and day out. We lived in the air raid shelter day and night. we had bunk beds, We only went out to feed the chickens and the pigs. But life carried on. One day Mum told us that she had a something to tell to us. She was going to have a baby. I didn't know what to think. I wouldn't be the baby of the family much longer.

We were in the orchard picking apples one morning and we heard the air raid warning sound. Mum told Peter and me to go home to the shelter and she would follow on. We went home to the shelter and waited, It was a bad raid after an hour had past and still no sign of Mum we were getting worried as anything could have happened, We were just about to go and look for her when she turned up, What had happened was as she was about to come home there was a dog fight above the orchard, She went into the shed where we stored the fruit, got under the bench and pulled the dogs on top of her.

The animals were terrified of all the noise and explosions they would go mad, They would run round and round in circles until they dropped or they would run into the ditches and drown We would go and pull them out of the ditches and get all dirty. One Sunday we were all dressed to go out on a date, As we were walking past the Landway one of the girls told us there were a lot of sheep in the ditches,

When we arrived there must have been dozens of sheep trapped in the ditches. We took our clothes off and pulled them all out, We were covered in mud from head to toe. Then who should come along but Mr Terry, his son John and his shepherd. There were four of us and he gave us Five Shillings between us It wasn't enough to pay for our clothes to be cleaned and when we told him he said that was all he was giving us. A few weeks later there was another bad raid. All the animals had gone mad again. There were sheep and cows in the ditches. There were dozens of them. The shepherd sent round for help. We went to watch but no one would help. Mr Terry and his son had to get dirty. He asked us to help but we refused. When we told him why, he offered us sixpence a sheep. We said no. We wanted Seven Shillings. He said he couldn't afford it so we all walked away. The police came but what could they do? We were all under 13 and we had committed no crime. In the end he said he would give a shilling for everyone we saved and he would pay for all our clothes to be cleaned.

One night they dropped incendiary bombs on the marsh. As they could do no damage they were left to burn themselves out. But all the cows and horses went mad and got out on to the roadway. We had to get them off the road back on to the marshes. Talk about the wild west stampede, it was lucky no one was killed. The guns were firing, bombs were falling, shrapnel all over the place. Everyone helping to get the cattle back onto the marshes. What a night that was.

They came collecting all the aluminium pots and pans kettles to make Spitfires. They also wanted all scrap iron to make tanks and shells to fight the enemy with. Everything was salvaged towards the war effort. Everyone helped each other. There was a war to be won. The milkman delivered the milk, the butcher the meat, the baker the bread and of course the postman delivered the letters, The paper boy delivered the papers and the window cleaner called , Every Sunday. a man called with a motorcycle and sidecar selling sweets and chocolate biscuits everyone trying to make a living.

All the RAF fighter pilots would go to the White Hart for a drink and to have a party of an evening after a day's fighting. With all the air raids taking place the landlord turned the cellar into a club for them. They called it Daniel's Den. The highest scoring pilot of the Battle of Britain used to go there, Sgt Pilot Ginger Lacey. They had some wild parties.

The Germans were losing 40 to 70 planes a day. The RAF losses weren't too bad but they were short of fighter pilots. There were shot down planes all over the place. A Messerschmitt on the Golf course at Singlewell Road, one in Cobham Woods, on the marshes, in the Thames and near Cooling Castle near Hoo. One evening we were standing watching the air battle taking place above our heads when this German plane was hit. It came straight towards us. We thought it was going to hit the house but it managed to get over. It was on fire and we felt the heat as it went over. It carried on for about two miles before it crashed on the marshes and blew up. All the crew were killed.

Every time we went on the marshes we found fresh bomb craters we would find holes where unexploded bombs or shells had fallen. We would report them to the police and the army would come and have a look. If it was well away from the road and buildings it would be left alone (they are still there today). We would find dead and injured sheep and cows. They would be reported to the owner. A Vet would come and shoot the injured animals and cut off the ears. Attached to the ears was a metal tag with details of the animal on it. He would hand the ears in and get paid for the dead animals. Many a household would have an extra ration of meat or a leg of lamb for the week end.

September arrived. The war had been on a year a lot had happened in twelve months, The bombing got heavy and the Germans started dropping anti personnel bombs some looked like pens or pencils, butterfly

bombs etc. When you picked them up or touched them they exploded taking your arm off or killing you, One of my friends dad lost his hand picking up a cannon shell, If you found or saw anything you didn't understand you sent for the experts. One day out on our bikes we found some bombs we sent for the police. When we showed them to them, they said they had never seen any like them before,

On September 7th over a thousand German planes attacked over Kent. There was great confusion in Kent as a deciphered code word indicated that an invasion was imminent. The church bells were rung and road blocks were set up but it was a false alarm, The Home Guard turned out but they were poorly armed with shot guns, a few rifles and petrol bombs (these were milk bottles full of petrol with a bit of cloth stuffed into the top for a wick, You would light the wick, throw the bottle at a tank and say your prayers).

Everyone was on the alert, We didn't know what to expect we had been told to stay off the roads and to do as we were told by the police or the army, We weren't to help the invader but to attack him whenever possible and to take one with us, Thank God he never came.

Uncle Bill had been wounded. He had been shot in the wrist so he was home on leave his son Leslie had joined the Navy and his daughter Doll was getting married so they had a party, We all went and I can remember sitting on the stairs with Stanley drinking lemonade out of a jam jar in an air raid, stopping the night and sleeping six to a bed.

Jean went out one evening to a dance and there was a bad air raid she had spend the night in the shelter in town. Mum was frantic with worry. Jean walked in next day without a care in the world. Dad got hold of a motor bike and a box sidecar. Uncle Bill and Dad used it to collect the pig swill petrol was only one shilling a gallon (5p in today's money) Peter and I used to mess about with it.

Sunday the 15 September 1940 Alan Grewcock, Leslie Dalton, Len Biggs and I were standing on top of our air raid shelter. We looked out towards the Thames Estuary. The sky was black. It was full of German and Italian aircraft. There were hundreds, stacked up in layers waiting their turn to bomb London and the docks and the air field

Then the RAF arrived and there was the biggest dog fight I have ever seen took place. There were planes all over the sky we could see the pilots and the crews quite clearly. planes shot down in flames ours and the Germans, It lasted all day I believe that the German Luftwaffe lost over 60 planes that day. It was the end of the BATTLE OF BRITAIN. We had won. As Mr Churchill said in his speech

'NEVER WAS SO MUCH OWED BY SO MANY TO SO FEW'