

Memories of 1940

~~CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER~~

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Recollections of 1940

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. This is a brief memory of the ~~Nineteen Forties~~. All the incidents that I will tell you about I can verify that they happened because I saw them, though I'm not sure whether I've got them in the right order. But as Eric Morecambe said of Andre Previn - ~~I'm playing~~ all the right notes - but not necessarily in the right order.

VOUCH FOR

In 1940 I was 12 years old. ~~Don't bother working it out -~~ I'm 90 years old next birthday!!

I WAS 89 on OCT

The winter of 1940 was a very cold one, heavy snow fall, which had some advantages ~~AT NIGHT~~ ~~DURING THE DAY SLEDGING IN FRONT OF TESTON HOUSE~~ ~~OR AT FARLEIGH~~

We were all able to go Sledging down the Malling road- there was no traffic about at night - so children and adults alike enjoyed the sport, my mother steered a large sledge made of railway sleepers! ~~NOT EXACTLY THE CRESTIA RUN~~

As a result of the weather and West Malling still being a grassy aerodrome- there was not much aerial activity ~~LYSANDERS~~ ~~CLOUDY~~

As weather improved - more activity - on a ~~clear~~ day we would see a Heinkel - there was West Malling anti aircraft ACK ACK guns booming.

Plane came over very low through the valley, following ground contours and over river - The West malling guns could not dip that low so they showered shrapnel in all directions and over us as well but the plane escaped!

OCCASIONAL

My mother woke me one night "Geoff Geoff look out the window" - there was a plane caught in the searchlight beam - and flying along the beam - it looked very dramatic, but they didn't catch him ~~HE WAS FIRING DOWN THE BEAM TRACERS~~

Bob B JULY TO OCTOBER

Any book tells you there was activity every day across Kent somewhere - but we didn't see a lot of it .

At school we would be hustled into the shelter at the first sound of any activity - but we could hear the planes overhead.

Our first real encounter was on the 15<sup>th</sup> August, a small formation went over with a fighter escort - right above our heads The fighters were ahead with guns firing in both directions - it was rather strange - smoke from the guns trailing in ~~both~~ <sup>OPPOSITE</sup> directions

One of the planes started to spin - looked up - right above us as if on a string, came down slowly and came very low - we were pulled back into the shelter by my mother- The plane landed on the river bank at Teston- the pilot was killed straight away.

The painting I did of it uses some artistic license - soe one who saw it crash said it was ablaze before it came down - but that wouldn't have looked good in the painting - the pilot ~~ejected~~ but landed in the river - he wasn't found until the next day

His name was PO Frank Cale, and in 1980s when I was asked to make a plaque for him , as I was trying to put the spitfire detail on the plaque - I thought I would try get the code right- I investigated further - wrote to the Fighter Pilots assoc. 4 pilots names given from 266 squadron whom I contacted - all of whom wrote to me - one wrote 3 pages - I also tried in Flight Magazine - got a contact from Australia - he didn't know - so I put UOH.

Franks wife who had remarried sent several photos - eventually found some photos of the whole aircraft and "Lo and behold" the letter was H.

I actually met Franks sisters and brother in law in Australia when I visited later that year.

*The next incident - was a lunchtime - scraping noise - plane landed on its belly - slid across 2 fields - Tonbridge road - landed on the embankment of the railway line*

We set off in hot pursuit

Pilot emerged in - in KHAKI - couldn't work out why - He was French - Henri Lafonte ! and the local farmer Mr Cooper took him to the North Pole pub for a drink. After the war Henri Lafonte was in Charge of Charles de Gaulle airport

One other aircraft crashed in Teston a Hurricane landed in the woods ~~at Teston~~ - we saw the wreck - there was nothing left but the cockpit but pilot got out with only bruising.

Although most engagements took place at a great height - on one occasion when I was in the garden - a Spitfire went over very low, banked steeply and swerved away - another aircraft - and I saw a business end of a Messerschmitt A109 - in hot pursuit - I don't know what happened in the end of those two.

Another big occasion was on Sun 15th September - at lunchtime - a large formation of planes came over quite low (Dornier I think) - sun shining off the plexi-glass cockpits, they were unopposed at the time but later on the afternoon - Heinkel came over wheels down smoking badly - and landed at West Malling -

several fighters – shooting at him - and pilot was very upset as they killed the gunner in the aircraft.

I read about the same encounter – that seven different pilots claimed to have shot the Heinkel down that day.

Towards the end of the battle a 109 was shot down at East Farleigh, landed in a hop field – cut the poles clean down at ground level - we made our way over there - and had a good look over it - we didn't take any souvenirs – as it was fairly intact.

One night the enemy had scattered incendiary bombs over the hop fields - one of which was unexploded - we lads, the Lambert Twins duly gathered it up - on the way back at the railway station - Tiny Eastwood sold lemonade at the station - so we stopped for a drink- we put the bomb in a pile of hedge trimmings , unfortunately after our lemonade the bomb and the hedge trimmings had disappeared and as we made our way back the soldiers in the block house on the hill - had got hold off our bomb!!

We said - That's our bomb ! - but they didn't return it. They set it up and fired a rifle at it - it burnt brightly with a magnesium flame - we were allowed to watch.

So I will finish there in a Blaze of Glory !

to the back right sequence