



## BOMBS STRIKE TOWN CENTRE

By **RON CLARKE**, Harrington Museum, and **BEN BROWN**, Sywell Aviation Museum

**O**N the afternoon of August 3, 1942, the Wellingborough Carnival Parade was under way. It was a welcome break from wartime austerity and the streets were lined with onlookers, sometimes four or five deep.

The fete was usually held at Bassetts Close, but this had been taken over by the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry, and the venue of the parade had changed to the Wellingborough Public School playing fields on London Road.

Those who did not fancy the fete made their way to one of the four cinemas, and, by late afternoon, the town centre was almost deserted.

By this time, the Luftwaffe was on its way. The crew of two Dornier 217E-4 medium bombers, and other aircraft, were receiving instructions for a bombing raid over East Anglia under the auspices of Seven Squadron, 2nd KampfGruppe.

### SEPARATED

As they crossed south over Cromer, they separated. One aircraft flew north to attack Beverley in Yorkshire. One made its way to Norwich, and one to R.A.F. Cottesmore in Rutland. The two remaining aircraft headed for the Leicester area.

Following a south-westerly course to the Midlands, one aircraft came across the Nene Valley and decided to follow it. Seeing a built-up area to his right – Wellingborough – he turned and lined up for attack.

At 6.10 p.m. the aircraft dropped four 250 k.g. bombs on the area.

The first landed in Market Square, narrowly missing the Regal Cinema, which was packed with people. It exploded near Anne's Pantry Café, where a waitress, Mrs. O'Hara, two R.A.F. men and a young boy were killed. Three more were killed in nearby streets and buildings – many others were injured. By the time rescue services arrived there was a thick brown dust hanging over the area.

### DEMOLISHED

The second bomb struck Thompson Stables at the rear of the Post Office on Midland Road. Shrapnel and blast demolished a number of buildings and although several horses were killed, there were no human fatalities, although many were injured.

The third bomb hit houses in Winstanley Road, near the Gospel Mission. Many houses were wrecked, but as most people were either at the cinema or the fete, there were no deaths.

The rescue services soon arrived to deal with the wounded.

The final bomb fell near to the third, and hit Copes Baker's Warehouse, devastating the area and injuring many people. People in the cinemas heard the sirens and four explosions.

### AIR RAID

Gerald Pratt thought the bombs were part of the "Movie-tone News" he was watching with his father in the Regal Cinema. The Manager eventually appeared and said that there had been an air raid but that the show would go on.

Approximately 10 minutes after the attack, the second Dornier, piloted by Erich Beyerer, spotted the dust cloud over Wellingborough as he was heading towards Northampton. Guessing what had happened, Beyerer turned right towards the town to drop his bomb load and further add to the mayhem. However, he did not succeed. As he turned right, he nearly collided with two Supermarine Spitfire Vbs from 485 Squadron RAF, based at RAF Kings Cliffe. They had been vectored into the area by the air defence controller at R.A.F. Wittering after the

TO PAGE 4.



Luftwaffe wreaks havoc: The scene in Wellingborough town centre after the German strike.

## 3,500 evacuees perish in German attack on ship

By **GORDON HALL** and **LINDA GROOM** (taken from *Wollaston Roll of Honour 1914–18, 1937–39*)

ON June 17, 1940, the Germans were advancing through France, and sweeping all before them.

The 16,000-ton Cunard liner "Lancastria" lay five miles off St Nazaire, and troops, R.A.F. personnel and civilian refugees, including women and children, were being evacuated from France. The exact number on board may never be known but almost certainly exceeded 6,000. The "Lancastria" was attacked by German aircraft.

She sank rapidly and only about 2,500 of those on board were saved. Sadly, Charles Bellamy, Aircraftsman and 2nd Class 947377, 98 Squadron, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, died aged just 20.

Winston Churchill forbade publication of the news in the interests of public morale – hence the story was not generally known despite being Britain's worst maritime disaster.



Charles Bellamy of Wollaston.

## French footsteps in Finedon's fog

By **GARY COOMBS**  
PRIVATE "H" of the VDF (Home Guard) was on duty at Finedon Cross-Roads on a foggy autumn night.

He heard footsteps in the direction of Thrapston. As they got closer, he challenged the unseen individual. No reply. He again issued the challenge. Again, no reply.

Raising his rifle, he shouted again. A tall man, with a large nose and dressed in a French uniform, appeared.

It was General Charles de Gaulle, Leader of the Free French. (See also page 4.)

## Scott the dog's active service

OVER the years, Robert Page had many dogs to help him on the farm, but perhaps the most outstanding, and last, farm dog he had was Scott.

When Robert was called up, Scott sat pining in his kennel

all day. After some time, Robert's brother Bert wrote to tell him that Scott would have to be put down, as he could do nothing with him.

However, Robert offered him to "War Dogs" who accepted him after three months.

Three months after being accepted, Robert got a postcard to say that Scott had been posted overseas. Unfortunately, he later received a telegram stating that Scott had been invalidated out and would need to be collected from Wellingborough railway station.

Scott had been badly injured in Egypt, where he was on guard duty. The vets had done a marvellous job on the large wound on the middle of his back. Half of one paw had been shot away and he was almost deaf and blind. They had sewed him up so efficiently that the scars barely showed and eventually the hair grew over.

Scott was renowned for his ability to stand still. Soon after he returned home, he appeared in the Wellingborough Hospital procession on the back of a truck. Many people asked whether he was stuffed as he was so still. However, it just showed his training and temperament, because Robert's brother, Gordon, had simply told him to "sit!"

## A SUPERB CELEBRATION OF OUR WARTIME EFFORT

THE opportunity for Wellingborough Heritage Centre to work in partnership with the Borough Council of Wellingborough has enabled this wonderful supplement about life in the town and district during the Second World War to be produced.

Thanks must go to Jennifer Bell, of the Economic Development section, who has co-ordinated this supplement with the heritage centre.

### FRIENDSHIPS

Many of the stories and images have either come from the museum collection, from publications that the museum sells, or have been provided by people or organisations, who over the past 18 years in which the Wellingborough Heritage Centre has been in existence, have formed friendships and links.

These stories show aspects of life in Wellingborough and the surrounding villages during the Second World War and are not intended to give an overall view of wartime life as space does not permit this.

It is, however, hoped that they go some way to commemorate and celebrate the wartime effort and spirit, not only of the storywriters, but all who lived through, fought, died and survived the period 1939–45.

To find out more about life in those days, visit the "Long Road to Peace" exhibition at the Centre.

### DONATIONS

If any members of the public feel that they have a story to tell or have objects or images connected with the town and its borough during the Second World War (or in fact any other period), the Heritage Centre would be pleased to receive any donations of items or loan of photographs or documents for copying.

I hope that you enjoy this supplement and that it will give everyone, both young and old, an opportunity to reflect on this important period of history.

Mr. Jon-Paul Carr, MA, Curator, Wellingborough Heritage Centre, Croyland Hall, Burystead Place, Wellingborough NN8 1AH, Telephone (01933) 276838.

# Memories of growing up during the war

**W**ARTIME as a small child was an exciting time, from the arrival of batches of evacuees with strange accents, to the trying on of the awe-inspiring gas masks. School was different too. Lessons were interrupted for air raid drill when we had to crawl underneath our desks to shelter, writes Cllr. **EILEEN HIGGINS**.

Sweets were strictly rationed, but we never went hungry. I have no doubt that our parents made great sacrifices to ensure that this was so.

I only remember being badly affected by the war on a dreadful Bank Holiday weekend—we heard that my mother's brother was "missing presumed killed". He was only 16 years my senior, and more like an elder brother. His death was later confirmed.

The end of the war, V.J. Day, is a vivid memory. I was at Girl Guide camp at Castle Ashby, a very hot week during which we were plagued by wasps and were all sporting signs of our struggle with them! We had some jolly celebrations which lasted well into the night. Perhaps that is where I found my taste for parties!

I WAS just seven when war broke out on September 3, 1939. I remember it well because it was my mother's birthday, writes **GEORGE HANGAR**.

I lived with my Aunt in Wel-

lingborough. We were joined by evacuees who came from London. They lived on the third floor and it was hard work carrying buckets of water up and the other stuff down!

I had a large family, six sisters and one brother. My father had served in the First World War and knew how important it was for soldiers to relax, therefore our house was open to anyone in uniform.

## TENSION

British, French, Americans and Canadians were all treated equally in our house, although there was tension in the town when the Americans arrived.

Sunday mornings would see our house filled with Americans. They had never had fried tomatoes and would turn up with frying pans and eggs; I think my mother and sisters spent all morning cooking breakfasts.

Once the Americans arrived, there was no problem with food. It was said that for every ton of



Eileen Higgins and George Hangar—the war held many happy memories for them when they were children.



ammunition there were 10 tons of the "necessities of life" and luckily they loved children so I was never short of chocolate.

Entertainment was very different back then, we didn't have televisions and the radio was for dad who wanted to listen to the latest updates on the war. So we would play out in the streets.

## Sharpshooters

WITHIN minutes of Home Secretary Anthony Eden's 'Home Guard' speech in 1940, men were clamouring to join up.

Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert Sotheby was Commander of the Ecton Platoon Home Guard. They were a fine body of sharpshooters thanks to an indoor rifle range he had built in the old Riding School at Ecton Hall, where he lived.

# Sywell 'drome does its bit

By **BEN BROWN**

SYWELL Aerodrome was established in 1928 and quickly became a fashionable place to be seen at and to fly from.

In the 1930s aviation was new, exciting and daring, and Sywell was the home of many private aircraft, often shown off at spectacular aerial pageants.

By the mid-1930s, Brooklands Aviation Ltd, based in Surrey, had established a repair and maintenance facility at the aerodrome. The company also undertook flying lessons to augment its income.

With the clouds of war looming, Brooklands assisted with

the training of future R.A.F. pilots, leading to the establishment of six Elementary Flying Training Schools (6.E.T.F.S.) at the aerodrome by 1938.

Many future R.A.F. pilots passed through Sywell, learning to fly on the legendary de Havilland Tiger Moth biplane, before moving on to North American Harvard or Miles Master advanced trainers elsewhere. From there, they could go on to fly anything, from Hawker Hurricane fighters to Short Stirling bombers.

Many students were from the Colonies or Occupied Territories, and Sywell had a strong affinity with the Free French, many of whom trained at Sywell.

## BUSY

Indeed the Cross of Lorraine (the Free French symbol) was incorporated into the 6.E.F.T.S. squadron crest. So busy was the airfield at the time that a second landing ground was established at Denton.

Many thousands of students earned their wings at Sywell before the war ended. Some did not survive training, or operational sorties thereafter.

Brooklands Aviation was also active on the maintenance side. Almost all of the 11,000 Vickers Wellington bombers would have passed through Brooklands for maintenance, battle damage repair or upgrading at one time or another.

A hangar was constructed at Sywell early in the war for the assembly of Armstrong Whitworth Whitley bombers.

## COMBAT

When they proved less than ideal in combat, production was switched to Mk. II Avro Lancaster bombers (with radial, rather than Merlin in-line engines) some 100 being built, then roaded to Bitteswell for flight-testing.

In all, more than 3,500 people were involved at Brooklands Sywell and its other sites in Northampton.

In addition, local garages and coachbuilders in the Northampton and Wellingborough areas often worked on Wellington bomber sub-assemblies as part of the shadow-factory scheme for Brooklands.

Sywell may not have been on the frontline of combat during the war, but the many people based there helped to train and equip the pilots of Allied Air Forces.

# NEWS FROM THE AREA'S VILLAGES

## Bozeat

(Taken from "Bozeat 2000—The Story of a Northamptonshire Village" by Philip Bligh.)

**PILOT SAVES VILLAGE:** Bozeat folk, to this day, tell the story of a young pilot who saved their village. There is a plaque in the church in memory of this event, and each Easter Sunday there is an Easter Lily in the church to remember this young man. We still have Americans visiting us who ask to see the memorial.

The citation in the church reads: "A few days before Christmas 1944, during the Second World War, Lt. John Ahern, 22-year-old US Air Force pilot, found his plane had got into difficulties. He directed his crew to bale out, saying he would follow them when the plane was past the houses in Bozeat. He was never to follow his crew, for after clearing the houses of Bozeat he was killed when the machine crashed. It came down in a field behind Red Gables Farm occupied by Cyril Drage. The farm buildings were damaged by the blast, but the farmer's family were unharmed."

In gratitude to Lt. Ahern, who gave his life for Bozeat, the villagers made a house-to-house collection for his mother in America, organised by the Women's Voluntary Service. The American Air Force showed its appreciation by presenting the plaque. Four hundred people gathered in the church when it was handed over by an American Air Force chaplain. The service was conducted by the Rev. S. F. W. Powell and the lesson read by Rev. E. Hardwick, the Methodist Minister.

## Earls Barton

(Stories from Earls Barton taken from "Looking Back at life in Earls Barton" organised by Earls Barton Museum.)

**MARGARET HARRISON:** In the war, things were very tight with food. My mother used to eke us out so she used to go without to let us children have it, being five of us. In the house we lived in down Station Road, when the air-raid siren sounded, we used to all cram in a little under-the-stairs cupboard. You used to sit in there and you could hear the German planes going over.

Every window had to be blacked out. You weren't allowed to show even a glimmer of light down the side of the curtains, otherwise you'd have the Air Raid Warden, who patrolled the streets, knocking on your door saying: "You've got a bit of light showing there."

We used to sit in there, all of us at night, on a wooden form that father fixed up and we used to sit in our night clothes if the sirens had gone after we had gone to bed, until the All-Clear siren went.

**HAZEL BIGGS:** I was 12 when the war started. Gradually things became very short. You had clothing coupons for what you were wearing, I think you had 20 coupons and they lasted you for 12 months. If you had a pair of shoes, it took about seven coupons, and if you had a coat, it took about 18, so if you had a few things, you then had to search around other people for spare coupons.

If you had stockings they cost three coupons and if they started to ladder, you had to mend them—you hadn't got enough coupons to get any more!

It was the same with food. You had a ration book and all the pages had different markings on them. There would be so much for meat, so much for something else. If you had used your points up, you couldn't have any more until the next page became valid.

My husband was in the war and he came through it all right.

**MOLLIE COPE:** The day war was declared, my mother cried because she knew that the boys would have to go. She had five brothers in the First World War, all in France at the same time. Fortunately they all came home, which was an absolute miracle.

My brother Clem, he joined the Air Force, brother Ted went into the Army. Clem was away for four years, and when he came back, he didn't know me, because I was just a little girl when he went away. I was a young woman when he came home. He went to Italy, North Africa and France.

Ted went to the Middle East; he was away for four years. Then the war ended but my two younger brothers still had to go and do two years—Barry and Renny both went into the Army. They both went to Egypt and the Middle East.

**MICHAEL STREETON:** I think my worst memory of the war was when the two bombers collided over Mears Ashby—two Fortress bombers. We were in the second classroom down at Mrs Halliday's school, and these two bombers collided and crashed, killing all the occupants. That was quite frightening; it was one of the biggest bangs I've ever heard in my life!

We had had a bomb north of King Street, near what was the

cutting, which has all been filled in. My father was too old to be in the war. He was in the Home Guard.

## Wilby

(The village between 1939–45 by a resident.)

**LIFE IN THE VILLAGE:** During the war, Wilby met a lot of different faces, including evacuees from the Romford area, and even French Canadian soldiers on their way to Dunkirk.

Unfortunately, several servicemen from the village were lost. My family was lucky. My brother was called up at just 17 years and six months. Two of my sisters worked in munitions, the third was sent to work in the Land Army at Orlingbury.

I was still at Victoria School, Wellingborough, but later worked in the office of the munitions factory.

We all helped each other with food, those who had chickens supplied the eggs and when they stopped laying, they went into the stew pot!

The older men went out all day on Saturdays to catch rabbits, which were later sold for 6d.

My father kept pigs. We were only allowed to keep half and the rest were divided between other families and the Ministry of Food. On the whole, we didn't do too badly as a family and my mother was a wonderful cook.

For me the blackout was horrible. No street lights or house lights showing, we cycled everywhere with a tiny lamp half blacked out—very scary!

The whole village celebrated the end of the war with a grand party at Manor House, owned by George Thompson.

# Spitfire presentation helps the war effort

By BEN BROWN, Sywell Aviation Museum

**E**ARLY in the Second World War, Lord Beaverbrook originated the idea of "Presentation" aircraft, following on from the success of "Tank Banks" in the Great War.

An individual, organisation or town could present the cost of an airframe. For a Spitfire, this was set at £5,000, although the real cost was nearer £12,000. An aircraft would be allocated to bear the name of the donor, or any caption they chose, on the side of fuselage.

Aircraft types other than Spitfires were also presented, but there were more "presentation" Spitfires than any other. Many towns and organisations had "Spitfire Funds" and went to great lengths to raise the money—details of 975 are recorded.

Since the majority of Spitfires presented were Mk. I, II or V, this represents about 11 per cent of the total production.

Wellingborough presented two Spitfires in 1941, both sponsored by the "Northamptonshire Evening Telegraph", and handed over by Mr. John White.

Supermarine Spitfire Mk. V

## MEMORIES OF AN EVACUEE

(Taken from "Wollaston Remembered" by Ernie Bryan.)

**EDIE BAYES (nee Madden) looks back at her evacuation from Walthamstow.**

EVERY day for a week, my friends and I went to Chapel End School in Walthamstow with our suitcases. Then, on the Friday, buses came into the playground to take us to the station.

It wasn't until I looked out of the window that I realised my mum and dad weren't coming.

There they were, with my little sister, waving to me. I cried. I was 10 years old and had never been separated from my family before. I realise now I'm older, how they must have felt. Although we were rather poor, owing to dad's disability (he had been gassed in the 1914-18 war), I was rich in love and care.

Carrying our cases, we got on a special train. We all wore tags with our name on and gas masks over our shoulders. When we arrived at Wollaston School, we were given a bag of fruit and some chocolate, then we divided into groups. Four of us waited outside the Boot Inn for our foster parents. Three, a girl and a brother and sister, went to houses in Wall Terrace, since demolished. Then Laura Phillips came along.

"I must have a gel," she said, "she's got to sleep with our Pat."

As I was the only one left, it was 'Hobson's Choice', so she took me up the yard to her tiny cottage. I'd never been in a house like it. The door opened straight into the living room, no bathroom, toilet or running water.

On Sunday September 3, I went with the neighbour's children down the 'Rec'. There were swings and a see-saw. I thought it was lovely, so much green and space. But my foster mother was none too pleased—the Sabbath was not the day for that sort of thing.



Above: "Wellingborough".  
Below: "The Shopmate".



WS3816 coded FY-K was named "The Shopmate".

Built at Vickers Supermarine at Castle Bromwich, it flew first on presentation August 22, 1941 and was assigned to 611 Squadron R.A.F. It had a very short career, failing to return from operations on September 20, 1941 after force landing in enemy territory. It was captured by German forces, possibly flown, and then scrapped.

Supermarine Spitfire Mk. V WS3817 was named "Wellingborough" and flew first a day later than "The Shopmate", on August 23, and saw service with 92, 417, 242, 243 and 501 Squadrons R.A.F. It had a landing accident just prior to D-Day on March 24, 1944 and was then relegated to being a training aeroplane.

She survived the war and was Struck Off Charge and scrapped on September 18, 1945.

## Children say thank-you

WHEN the war ended in May 1945, the Children's Hostel at 28 Harrowden Road had no flags to wave, so they made a banner.

This was designed and made by Miss Ruth Lavender and Miss Margaret Johnson, and two friends who often visited and were in the district at the time, with suggestions from the children.

It was a "thank you" to all the people who had made the four years in Wellingborough such a happy time.

In 1941, Ruth and Margaret were working as Moral Welfare Workers in the East End of London, from where the children were gradually being evacuated. Dr. Smith, the Medical Officer for Health for Northamptonshire, sent an S.O.S. to London County Council for workers to go and help settle the more disturbed evacuees in the county.

So the Misses Lavender and Johnson applied, and duly arrived at 28 Harrowden Road,

owned by Mrs. Jinks. Dr. Smith arranged for it to be used as a hostel.

Twelve children, aged five to nine, stayed weeks or months until it seemed they would fit into ordinary billets, and a Miss Hardy arranged for their move and filled the vacancy with another child.

Help was received from the Wellingborough Girls' High School, Air Raid Wardens Mr. Gawthorpe and Mrs. Hickling, Dr. Arthur and Dr. Pearce (who looked after the children's health), Fr. Chambers and Fr. Keightly, and the congregation of All Hallows, and The Avenue and Park Street schools.

The American Red Cross supplied 7 lb. jars of delicious jam, and barrels of powdered milk and sweetened cocoa powder—and not quite so successfully knitted jumpers and frocks!

The banner was presented to the Wellingborough Heritage Centre in 1989, where it is now on show.



Harrowden Road Hostel youngsters proudly display their new banner.

## VILLAGE NEWS

### Grendon

By Mrs. JOAN HILL

**WARTIME MEMORIES:** August 3, 1942 saw many of the villagers on "Hanging Hill" watching the cricket match and witnessing the German planes fly over as they were chased by the R.A.F.

That day, Wellingborough was bombed and my sister returned home very upset as she described how her tea had been ruined by ceiling plaster falling on to her plate (she was in a house in Knox Road). It was not until after this that we heard about the damage and loss of life.

Unless they were in reserved occupations, the young men and women were either drafted or volunteered into the Services; those left behind had to work in factories making ammunition, parts, etc, in Wollaston or Wellingborough, which was a cycle-ride of three or six miles.

The men joined the Local

Defence Volunteers (later the Home Guard) and the women the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (W.R.V.S.).

I was 'volunteered' as Chief Fire Officer for the village, but the duties were not too exciting. We only had to be out on watch if the sirens went and at harvest time we had to patrol the village, as it was thought the enemy might drop incendiary bombs on the ripe cornfields. Why they would want to waste their bombs on this I could never imagine?

Grendon Hall was taken over by the military. It was staffed by Americans and Free French Officers, who were being trained to be dropped behind enemy lines in France. It was often very sad as we would only see them for a couple of weeks before they embarked upon their mission. Unfortunately we would never hear what happened to them.

We were surrounded by many different people and nationalities. There was an Italian Prison Camp off the road to Earls Barton. Some of the prisoners worked on local farms and were even allowed to live there. Canadians and the Pioneer Corps were at Castle Ashby and American Air Forces nearby.

Life in the village was very different to that in towns as we were not subjected to life in air-raid shelters.

### Isham

(Taken from Isham "In Touch", with thanks to Mr Jenkinson who provided us with this extract.)

**V.E. DAY, MAY 8:** Celebrations and observance of Victory in Europe began in the village with a special Thanksgiving Service at St. Peter's, the Parish Church, on Tuesday evening, conducted by the Rector, the Rev. R. A. Leathley.

Later in the evening, villagers paraded round the streets, bearing an effigy of Hitler, which was burned on a huge bonfire. A firework display held near the bonfire was a great attraction for all the children. On Wednesday evening an enjoyable dance and social was held in the Church Hall.

Talking to some of Isham's 1945 youngsters reveals that most can remember the bonfire being held in Dunkley's Field below the South Street houses, but they are a bit vague about a tea party also held in Church Street, in the area in front of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Farby's shop. "But we're bound to have had jelly!" was the unanimous retort.

A clear account of the celebrations in Orlingbury Road, Isham, can be given. It must be remembered that there was no great length of time to prepare for these 'instantaneous' celebrations—most of the menfolk were still away from home—times were difficult indeed. Nevertheless, in Orlingbury Road out came the trestle tables, along what would be now numbers 78 to 92. Out, too, came the wind-up gramophone belonging to Beattie Floyd (now Mrs. Frank Terry) to provide the music. Up went the bunting and flags, on went the paper hats.

All the families—Gibsons, Floyds, Dyers, Foxs, Tydeswells and Prescotts—had cooked and made what they could. There were plenty of rock cakes! Celebrations went on all day long.

## YOUNG TRIO DEFENDS THE TOWN

By Mr. JOHN RAYMOND  
Mayor's Consort

WHAT the "unbeatable" Goering's German Luftwaffe did not realise when they unleashed bombers and started the Battle of Britain was that they were matching themselves against the most highly-defended airspace in the world. Elm Street in Wellingborough and its approaches, Harrowden Road and Hatton Park Road, were particularly well defended.

Our small squadron, known locally as the Three Musketeers and aged between three and four, flew three Spitfires with arms outstretched, equipped only with one leather pilot's hat, but with the sound of regular bursts of machine fire emitting from pursed lips.

At home, as air-raid protection against collapsing masonry, a brown steel frame was assembled downstairs, equipped with cream wire mesh at the entrance to protect against flying glass—the Morrison Shelter.

This is where my mother and I slept when the air raid siren went at night followed by waves of bombers passing over on their way to Coventry. My father, however, on his occasional visits home from the services, refused to get up for the Germans.

At my infants' school, The Avenue, a brick shelter was built on the right of the present gates and adjacent to the fence. There we practised the drill of evacuating the school and putting on our new gas masks. I was disappointed to find mine was a standard issue, whereas some others had gas masks designed to represent Disney characters.

From DDay, V.I. Doodlebugs—or flying bombs—began to appear, and we were joined by our third evacuee. I remember their distinctive noise as they approached but it was reassuring to know that if you heard them, you were safe, for when the engine cut, it still had some distance to glide.

**BOMBS FROM PAGE 1.**

German planes had been spotted by an Observer Corps post in Cogenhoe.

In his combat report, Pilot Officer Black, flying Spitfire BM208, noted: "After contact, I followed the enemy aircraft over Wellingborough. I fired several bursts without effect and the Dornier climbed into the cloud layer. I followed and soon broke cloud in a position behind the aircraft. Having exhausted my cannon magazines I fired a three-second burst with my machine guns, after which the Dornier seemed to falter, before diving into the ground and exploding near Finedon/Cranford."

Considering the devastation caused by the bombing, the casualty list was remarkably low, but the damage was considerable, with some 593 buildings being damaged or destroyed.

The Dornier had brought the War to Wellingborough!

**Museum/Historical Society contacts**

**Wellingborough Heritage Centre:** Croyland Hall, Burystead Place, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire NN8 1AH. Tel. 01933 276838. Open Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m.—4.30 p.m. Admission free (donations welcome). Disabled access and parking. Free parking nearby. Refreshments. Shop.

**The Sywell Aviation Museum:** Sywell Aerodrome, Sywell, Northamptonshire NN6 0BN. Tel. 01604 890925/844582. Website: www.sywellaerodrome.co.uk/history. Email: BBrown@sherwooddunham.com. Open Easter to end of September, Weekends and Bank Holidays, 10.30 a.m.—4.30 p.m. Admission free (donations welcome). Free parking, aircraft viewing area, hotel, restaurant, bar, toilets, full disabled access.

**Wollaston Museum:** 102 High Street, Wollaston, Northamptonshire NN29 7RJ. Tel. 01933 666121. Open Sundays from Easter to September, 2.30—4.30 p.m.; other times by arrangement. Admission free.

**Finedon Local History Society:** Friends' Meeting House, High Street, Finedon, Northamptonshire NN9 5JN. Tel. 01933 681025/680700. Open Saturdays and Sundays 2—4 p.m.; other times by arrangement. Admission free.

**Earls Barton Museum:** (above Jeyes the Chemist) The Square, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire NN6 0NA. Tel. 01604 811735. Open Mondays—Saturdays 10 a.m.—4 p.m. Admission free. Disabled access.

**Irchester Parish Historical Society:** Mrs Jan Arnold, 32 Farndish Road, Irchester, Northamptonshire NN29 7BE. Tel. 01933 353578. Usually meets at Irchester Community Primary School on the second Thursday of each month at 7.30 p.m.

**Thanks**

THE Borough Council of Wellingborough would like to thank the Heritage Centre, in particular, Jon Paul Carr (Curator) for his help and advice in compiling this supplement. A big thank-you must also go to Ben Brown, of Sywell Aviation, and to all those who have contributed stories and photographs.



General Charles de Gaulle (front, centre) at a visit to Finedon Hall.

**General de Gaulle pictured at Finedon Hall**

**FINEDON and the Fighting French, taken from an article from "The Picture Post", October 10, 1942.**

At the stately mansion of Finedon Hall in Northamptonshire, men of the Fighting French, who have been severely wounded in battle, are being made whole again in new surroundings.

They call it a "school" and not a "home" as the men are here not to be looked after, but to learn to look after themselves.

Established in October 1941 by Col. Baranger, formerly

Professor of Chemistry at the Sorbonne and the Belgian artist, M. Joseph Lacasse, at the suggestion of General Charles de Gaulle, it provides a wide range of interests.

Every man works as he pleases. In the laboratory, Col. Baranger continues his research into malaria, helped by several of his pupils. In the studio, M. Lacasse has set up an art school where pupils learn painting and sculpture. In the library, many men continue the studies the war interrupted. Others are involved in building, carpentry,

**Local man's courage at Arnhem rewarded**

**I**N 1938, the Government announced that it was going to introduce conscription.

Robert Page did not like the idea of this and so volunteered for the Territorial Army. He served for over a year with Raunds Company of the 4th Northamptonshire.

Although everyone else had to go to camp for two weeks, be-

cause Robert was a farmer, he only went for one. He felt proud and smart in his dress uniform, with his silver-topped cane, which he still has.

In 1939, three days before war was declared, Robert was in a cornfield when a dispatch rider handed him his call-up papers.

This was the start of his Second World War career which would take him to Ireland, the Normandy beaches in France and Arnhem in Holland.

In September 1944 Robert was in Arnhem, near to the Dutch border, where his unit had to cross over the Albert Canal.

**BAILEY BRIDGE**

A Bailey bridge was put up and Robert took a troop and his headquarters over before the bridge was blown up by the Germans. For three days, they had to hold off the German infantry and artillery until a new bridge could be brought up.

As the men were so few, Robert had to keep his armoured cars in action all the time. Instead of going back to Robert each time for ammunition, Robert had to go to them. This was done at great risk—every time he went to them he came under fire.

However, by building up his speed behind houses and tearing across country, before hiding behind the armoured cars for protection, he got through.

Although there were quite a number of casualties, they had no medical staff and were unable to evacuate them. Robert arranged for them to be put up in a cow pen and tended them with field dressings.

**WALKING WOUNDED**

The worst case that Robert had to deal with was a "walking wounded". As a man walked into the pen, Robert could see that half his face, his ear and one eye had been blown away. The explosion had sealed and stopped the bleeding, but all Robert could do was administer morphia.

Some years later, they were reunited and Robert was amazed at the skill of the plastic surgeons. They had taken one of his ribs to build a jawbone and used skin from various places to rebuild his face, although it was still deformed and had one ear missing.

At the age of 26, Robert was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. "The Evening Telegraph" stated: "By his energy, enterprise and great personal courage, S.S.M. Page played a large part in the Squadron's success; his outstanding devotion to duty and example being a great inspiration and encouragement to his comrades during a very trying day."



Squadron Sergeant Major: Warrant Officer Class II Robert Dudley Page, D.C.M.

**NEWS FROM THE VILLAGES****Easton Maudit**

By Cllr. TIM ALLEBONE

**BRISTOL BEAUFIGHTER CRASH:** On March 24, 1944, a twin-engined Bristol Beaufighter crashed at Easton Maudit.

Number R2069 of 51 OTU, Cranfield, Bedfordshire, was on a training flight, making a mock attack on a Flying Fortress.

My father, Lt. Richard Allebone, was on leave from his Royal Artillery regiment. He watched, with his father, Frank, as the aircraft developed an engine problem over the church, turned away from the B17, and attempted to make an emergency landing in a grass field west of the village street.

The aircraft crashed into the top of a tree just behind the Limes farmhouse garden, 200 yards short of its intended landing area.

My grandfather ran to telephone for help and my father was the first on the scene. The wooden aircraft had totally disintegrated and the two-man crew, both Australians, were killed.

The accident site was cordoned off and guarded by R.A.F. personnel until the wreckage was removed.

**SPY PARACHUTES IN:** During the war, a German spy parachuted into a field just outside Easton Maudit.

He chatted in perfect English to one of my grandfather's farmworkers, Billy Walker, by the church for 20 minutes, establishing where he was. He noticed a farm cart with W. Penn, Easton Maudit, on it (as with signposts, such names and identification marks should have been painted out).

Walking towards Yardley Hastings, he called at Percy Keggin's farm to buy eggs, telling the farmer he was staying with a Mr Penn at Easton Maudit. Mr Keggin became suspicious, as he knew Wally Penn

kept chickens, and so alerted the police.

The spy was found hiding in a ditch and arrested. His belongings included a suitcase full of money and maps of the Coventry area. His task was to have identified Coventry-based munitions factories in preparation for a bombing mission.

Billy Walker, who was in the Home Guard, was later teased about his encounter with the German, especially as he had been awarded the Military Cross in the First World War.

The spy was taken to Bedford Prison, where he was hanged.

**Irchester**

(Taken from "Irchester at War", produced by the Irchester Parish Historical Society.)

**IRCHESTER BOMBING:** In the early hours of the morning on May 20, 1941, a lone German bomber dropped five bombs on the village of Irchester.

One dropped on the Pits, the site of the Country Park, another on land adjoining 23 Gypsy Lane, one on the motor garage in Wollaston Road, and a further two on Farndish Road.

The first bomb in Farndish Road landed in the garden of No. 36 and didn't explode. The second exploded at the junction of East Street and Farndish Road, destroying 15 houses, and a chapel, and causing the death of six adults and three children.

Such was the devastation, it left a crater big enough to fit a double-decker bus into.

**THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE:** December 1941 saw the entry of America into the Second World War. The U.S. turned out a total of 3,200,436 military transport vehicles between 1939—45.

Quite a few came to Knuston—a sprawling conglomeration of Nissen huts, workshops and concrete hardstands in the fields and parklands of Knuston Hall.

When the "Yanks" arrived, engineers and construction teams

shoe-making and farming. All of them are involved in the general upkeep of the house. In between work, there is leisure in the spacious grounds or on the bowling greens, or whatever pursuit they choose.

Finedon Hall is entirely self-supporting. The school not only maintains itself, but makes money too. The profits go into a pool. One half of the earnings are divided between the members of the school; the other half is set aside for the use of those who leave to take their place in the world.