

CHAPTER 15: VILLAGE PEOPLE AND MORE WAR STORIES

My mention of Col. Hankey reminds me that there were other families of note who lived on West Dean Estate in distinctive and special houses, although they rented their houses from the Estate, compared to the rest of us residents, they lived comfortable and work free lives. There was Miss. Montgomery, she was a lady of refinement who always dressed in older fashion clothes and noticeable jewelry, who employed her own chauffer-gardener, he lived above their garage and was Miss. M's protector as well; she also employed a cook and a maid. She resided in the pretty thatched small house on the main road, opposite the railway station driveway. There was the posh unapproachable family who lived in Little West Dean House off Church Lane. It was somewhat like a miniature of West Dean House. Another retired veteran army officer; Capt. Meaker and his family lived in a charming brick house behind Kendall's Farm. Then there was Miss. Roberts who lived alone in the rambling quite large house on the west side of us. She came from aristocratic military forebears; having descended from the famous British military officer of the 19th. Century and the First World War. General Frederick Roberts, Earl of Kandahar. Her brother was a banker in South Africa and he sent her regular money to live on, together with some from other relatives donations and some other investment monies. In her youth she had lived in India with her army relatives, I understood. She had been a sickly nursed child and had never had a regular job in her life. She had a maid who came in from the village and helped clean and tidy the house; make the beds and wash clothes. On the other hand she loved preparing and cooking meals and I was frequently invited to join her table for breakfast and dinner (lunch time for us in those days). Usually there were only the two of us. Most of the time Miss. Roberts lived alone and I think she enjoyed my company; she had never married and had no children. I always had to sit properly at the table with a napkin on my lap and was impressed with the importance of correctly using the right knives, forks and spoons, in the right order. She was actually my social superior and knew all the right manners and etiquette for eating. I learned about cutting crusts from bread for toast and sandwiches. Vegetables had to be totally cleaned and pared off, using only the best middle bits. Earl Grey tea was only drunk at tea time with lemon slices (the latter prior to the war); Assam and Ceylon teas were blended for breakfast. It was not (MIF) milk in first, in the tea cup; it was (MIL) milk in last and stirred with pure silver tea spoon. One must, on no account, be a MIF)In fact, all the table ware was referred to as 'the silver' because that is what it all was and had to be. Boiled eggs were eaten with special small silver spoons with gold

washed bowls. The china was the best bone china or porcelain for every meal. She was a cat lover and her numerous pet cats were all fed on the same exotic dishes. They had names like Aloysius (My favourite) and Ebenezer and after they died, were buried by Miss Roberts, with a prayer and great ceremony in the garden and covered by small stone tombstones with their name engraved on the top. I attended several of these events.

One event Miss. Roberts accommodated in the late 1930s was a wedding of her socialite relatives; I was allowed to attend and had my first taste of Caviar, smoked Salmon and Champagne; another lesson in high living for all these luxurious things I crave to this day but infrequently have been able to afford such a life style.

Miss. Roberts was often having guests 'down from London'; socialites, aristocratic people and bohemian actor types. One time when I was about ten year's old a thirteen year old girl of delightful appearance and attraction came with her actor parents. We got on like 'a house on fire'. She was dark haired with big brown eyes and beautiful white skin; a 'tomboyish' character. She was an only child as well as me, also like me she was a chatterbox and we would find a secret corner among the hay in the storage barn and natter for hours. In the course of this we discussed genders and she wanted to see my 'bits and pieces' I said, "OK, if I could see hers" and she agreed. So, I obliged by lowering my trousers; she contemplated me with a stare and then ran away. I said, "that's not fair, how about you?" She replied, "You can climb the tree outside the bathroom window tonight and then I'll show you." So, of course, I climbed into the tree and she did; I got the full frontal of a naked pubescent young girl with emerging breasts and a patch of dark hair below. Being an only child, for me, this was indeed a revelation

There were other things that fell out of the sky during World War Two on West Dean Park. For example: metal foil in strips about one inch wide and an average of ten inches long were showered through the air regularly by German planes all over the countryside. They were intended to interfere with Radar reception signals, causing a snow effect on the screens of the Radar monitors as the enemy planes passed overhead.

One night in the late autumn of 1940, the family was in bed, when there was an enormous roar of aircraft engines passing over and shaking our house it was so low. We then heard crashes and bangs on our clay tile roof. I jumped out of bed and looked out of the window and saw small, fat and fiercely red-burning fires in several places in our garden and a glow beyond in the farmyard. These were incendiary bombs. Immediately after this some high explosive bombs

made brief whistle sounds and then exploded nearby, shaking the whole structure of our house. Although I was keen and ready to go out, I did not want to miss the excitement, my Dad ordered me to stay in the house and he went out to put out the fires and inspect the farm buildings. Fortunately the low flight of the bomber and the heavy clay tiles on our roof and the thick slate tiles on the farm buildings, together with the steep pitches of the roofs, caused the incendiary bomb to bounce off to the ground. My Dad was gone several hours checking for buildings that might have caught on fire and using a wheel barrow with dirt in and a shovel to cover the burning bombs where they were in dangerous locations. Apparently he had worked most of the night with the Head Gamekeeper and the Head Gardener. They went up on the roof of West Dean House but apparently the incendiary bombs fell in a spread line in the field in front of the Big House and across the Park from the Southernmost end to Far Meadow; catching our house and the farm buildings on the edge of the drop. My Dad did not get much sleep that night, if any and was very tight lipped about the episode. Luckily, to the best of my knowledge, there was no serious damage to buildings or anything else. No livestock in the fields was hit.

When daylight came the army searched for and collected all the unexploded incendiary ordnances. There were a lot of the these because they had landed on soft parkland turf. However, after I came home from school, I was more thorough in searching the fields and bushes and in some blackberry brambles I found a bomb that had not exploded. What a prize for my collection, it looked almost brand new, clad in aluminium body, brass nose and black fins. I displayed it in the middle of my artifacts. It became my latest secret hoard. I somehow knew that one had to put a nail through a hole in the bottom of the bomb, where the detonator was placed. This was how they were transported in the bomber plane; each one had a safety pin in the hole, which extracted and primed them when they left the plane.

Unfortunately, or fortunately for me, after a short while, my Dad discovered that I had this bomb, confiscated it and gave it to the military. With much admonition for me, I might add.

A couple of days later I discovered the craters of the high explosive bombs that had shook our house so much. I was surprised that they were about a third of a mile away; considering the enormous bangs and the violence of the house shaking. There were four bomb craters grouped together and situated in Mr. Brown's farm meadow just on the North side of Trundle Hill Road. Two of these holes were covered with sticky black oil; therefore, these were oil bombs, the others were simply high-explosive bombs. There was shrapnel treasure every

where! They were in all probability 500 pounders. I guess this bomber crew just wanted to unload their bombs in a rural area and go home, because the selection of bombs described above in an example, I understand, of how to stage a 'fire raid'. Bad for cities like Coventry, London and Portsmouth but not much of a problem in the open countryside.

As simple as I understand the subject, a 'fire raid' is started by incendiary bombs, fueled by oil bombs and then forced upward air flow is created by high explosive bombs, causing a vicious cycle of intense fire by burned oxygen replacement. Britain copied this strategy on an enormous scale when attacking German cities later in the war.

In the early autumn of 1940 after The Battle of Britain in the skies died down, there was a lull in aerial activity; every one of us thought the German invasion of Britain was imminent. Little did we know that Field Marshall Hermann Goering, the Chief of the German air force, did not have the confidence to engage his bombers in an invasion, which would include daylight air battles, because the British Royal Air Force, with some pilots from the Commonwealth, America (volunteers), (Formed The Eagle Squadron) Poland and Czechoslovakia etc., had decimated the German fighter plane numbers. So, Goering argued with Hitler that he did not have enough protection for his beloved bombers. From then on the bombers were used at night under the protection of darkness to carry out the Blitz (total destruction) of central London and other cities in order to destroy the morale and spirit of the British people. This went on almost nightly for many months until about May 1941.

Anyway, about this time period, as a result of this general fear of a German invasion on the part of the British authorities and the people. My Dad was loaned one of a brace of his boss Coker's 12 gauge double barreled shotguns and given a large number of ammo filled boxes. My Dad said to me, "Son, I'm going to have to teach you how to use my old two barrel 12 gauge hammer gun. The Germans may be about to invade the country and we may have to defend ourselves and the farm". Just the sort of bland talk one might expect from an old soldier! I was still only 11 ½ year's old! We went out together and shot at some pigeons, rabbits and trees and that was about the full extent of my gun training but I picked up the craft of 'point and shoot' pretty quick, having practiced with catapults and bows and arrows for most of my earlier life.

One group of Commonwealth soldiers, who fought on the side of the British, the French Canadians, always seemed to be fighting among themselves, particularly when they got drunk. They were frequently in the news for this sort of local trouble. They formed most of the force

that went over and invaded France near the town of Dieppe. This was probably one of Winston Churchill's strategic diversionary tactics to make the enemy think this was where we might re-invade France in that region. However, it turned out to be a fiasco and rout; the German forces were overwhelming in that area. Most of the Allied soldiers were killed, only a few survived and were injured or captured or both.

The relationship with West Dean Park and the foregoing event was; the German's subsequently produced a black and white flyer-leaflet: printed with images of the dead, injured and captured British and French Canadian soldiers; showing the total carnage that occurred. The Germans dropped from planes at night, thousands of these leaflets all over the Park fields and the surrounding areas. I possessed some of these for years in my war collection but unfortunately they were lost in a house move. I wish that I still had a copy!

Sometime during 1941 in the night, there was a single tremendous explosion which shook our house with a jolt like an earthquake. Next day I heard that a bomb had dropped at Seven Points on the South East corner of St. Roches Arboretum forest area. I walked over there to look and discovered just outside of the fence of the Arboretum an enormous crater in the chalk rock, about fifty feet across and thirty feet deep. An amazing size excavated by a bomb into rock.

There was some 'lovely' shrapnel for me to collect, as well as some beautiful sage green parachute nylon-like rope lengths about half an inch thick and some very thick fabric sections made of the same nylon-like material. This was most likely a man-made fibre similar to the Nylon used today. I heard that the estimated weight of this bomb was 2000 lbs. Fortunately, most of the blast was directed upwards and the nearby Seven Points houses were damaged very little. The German bombardier in the plane was probably trying to aim for the Radar installation on the top of the nearby Trundle Hill. I suppose the remains of the huge crater can be seen today.

One of my favourite and fun war time things to do was to visit the Operation's Post and Radar antennae installation, a thousand feet high, on the top of Trundle Hill. Interestingly, several thousand years ago this hill had a former military use as a Celtic hill-earthworks and fort. Anyway, the OP was used for 360o physical observation with binoculars and had an underground communications and Radar receiving room. Nearby there was a phalanx of 'pom-pom' anti air craft guns in a square enclosure.

The soldiers on duty there were very friendly towards me and I sometimes took them some apples. Often they invited me down to their cookhouse and mess, camouflaged in the beech

wood forest on the east side of the hill and gave me meals. One clear-sky day, I believe in 1943, I was visiting my soldier friends at the OP on the very top of Trundle Hill. Tangmere aerodrome could be clearly seen in the distance, with the coast and the English Channel beyond. The soldiers were all intently looking in that direction and some came to join them from below ground. They were passing a couple of pairs of binoculars around between themselves. They obviously knew something was going to happen. They had no doubt seen planes approaching on their Radar screens. With my very acute naked young eyes I saw British fighter planes taking off and escaping from Tangmere airfield, then steeply climbing to the north. The soldiers were standing around and staring towards the English Channel, clearly they had been forewarned about imminent action in communion with the Spitfire pilots. Of course, today, we know about the 'cracking' of the German Enigma code and the fact that we often knew when the German attacking planes were on their way. I think to myself now; at that time, what an incredible example I experienced of this not generally known surreptitious interception of enemy communications. Suddenly there were rising, high-pitched whining sounds coming from the high-sky in the direction of Tangmere aerodrome. Just like the sound of crashing aircraft heading towards the ground. Then, there they were, coming into sight, a flight of about ten German Junker's 'Stuka' Ju87b dive bombers. Those of the unique inverted 'V' shape 'gull' wings. They were diving one after the other 'like a waterfall'; creating their frightening noise: designed to strike terror when used against cities filled with civilians, especially at the beginning of the war later they were no match for British fighter planes. They dropped their bombs on the runways and buildings of the aerodrome and then wheeled away in all directions. At this instant British fighter planes began to appear diving from above, firing at the German bombers. A soldier let me look through his binoculars. Then the sergeant came out of the underground Operation's Post and, much to my chagrin, for my protection, told me to go below and escorted me into a corner seat. I suppose they thought this important Radar establishment might be targeted next. For me however, what a thrill, in all the times I had visited this site, entry into the underground Operation's Room was strictly forbidden to me. Normally I was only allowed into a camouflaged nearby rest hut. Thus, I had my first sight and exposure to busy operators seated in front of radio receivers and transmitters but more intriguing the Radar oscilloscope monitors; which I am sure were top secret devices in that time period. After about an hour when all the activity and excitement had died down, the sergeant came over to where I was sitting and leaned over me and

imposingly said to me; I was not to breathe a word of what I had seen in the Operation's Room or even that I had been in there at all or tell anyone about it, not even my parents. Another secret that I have kept until this day! Then the sergeant told me to 'scarper off' home.

The soldiers outside told me, that whilst I was underground, our Spitfire's had dived on, engaged and harried the enemy planes all the way back across the English Channel, shooting some down in the course of this chase.

That same late afternoon of the Tangmere bombing incident, exciting times continued for me. I walked home alone on my usual path, down the side of the Trundle Hill, over the Celtic defensive earth works and through the St. Roches decorative iron carriage gates. Then down the bridle path, sometimes used by stable lads and race horses led up to Goodwood race track and back to Home Farm. This path wound its way through the beech wood forest down hill to Long Meadow above the farm. The daylight was fading and I was hurrying home. Then, suddenly perceived over to my left and behind me a beam of light shining down through the tall trees and forming a lighted circle about fifteen feet in diameter on the ground. Inside the lighted circle were two of my former grey suited small aliens, with the large heads and the dark round lenses for eyes. The same type that had visited me in my bedroom several year's earlier. Their suits were shining silver in the light. I was completely scared and without hesitation, immediately started running as fast as I could. (I could sense them in my head, trying to persuade me to stop; a weird feeling!) I ran like a hare, zigzagging between the tree trunks avoiding the straight path. I was about thirteen year's old and very good at running and keeping on my feet over rough ground in those days. To this moment I continue to be able to conjure up the weird sensations I felt then, I don't know if this came from abject fear or those aliens were projecting something at me. Anyway I dashed through the fence gate into Long Meadow and then home indoors to sanctuary. Feeling with relief, that I had escaped something insidious. I believe they always knew of my whereabouts because of the device they put in my knee year's earlier.

The foregoing experience was another of my secrets that I did not tell anyone, including, especially, my parents. I knew no one would believe me. Probably, very few people will today, let alone 1943.

After my scary experience with the Extra Terrestrials in, the beech wood forest below St. Roche's Gate; when I was returning from visiting my army friends on the top of Trundle Hill: I subsequently took the precaution of selecting another route home. Then I would proceed down

the south side of Trundle Hill to Seven Points. One Sunday when I was walking along this path; it was the high summer of 1943 and the weather was warm and sunny. American soldiers were present everywhere by then, scattered in secret camouflaged camps all around Southern England; waiting for the invasion of France: 'Operation Overlord'. They fraternized with young local ladies and would bring them up by Jeep to Seven Points via Lavant Chalk Pit Lane and then walk into the area nearby, that was composed of open air soft grass covered clearings, sheltered and each area partly surrounded by low bushes. There they would lay blankets down on the ground and indulge in picnics of food and drink and mutual revelry activities. I hurried on by, catching glimpses of exposed naked bodies but they were always oblivious or careless of my fleeting presence. An interesting experience for a young boy of 14 year's old. The girls were of a sexual emerging age and most of the British young men were at various foreign battlefronts. The Americans were separated from romantic relationships in the USA. Furthermore, these young men in particular were on the verge of a battle in France that could end their existence for ever. So, taking romantic opportunities was quite natural. My route then took me down the path to the Norwegian house in the Arboretum and thence across the Park and home.

American soldiers were very smartly dressed and attractive to the local girls, in their fine worsted wool military dress suits, not to mention their possession of Lucky Strike cigarettes, chewing gum and the coveted Nylon lady's stockings with the black perpendicular seam at the back.

Actually, these locally based American soldiers were the vanguard of 100's of thousands of more like them, together with Canadian, East Indian, Nepalese Ghurkas, Australian, New Zealand and other commonwealth troops, that were slowly and inexorably making their way southwards, spread out across the countryside of Britain, chiefly moving stealthily at night; so that German reconnoitering aircraft would not spot them. They had been progressively and surreptitiously landing from troop ships at north western ports like Glasgow and Liverpool, having crossed the U Boat infested and hazardous North Atlantic Ocean. These soldiers were accompanied by 1000's of armoured and transport vehicles. All of this military materiel and activity was hidden during daylight in forests and farms in super secrecy. All British landowners, often without warning, cooperated with this intrusion, on their properties. Both they and all country people without exception were silent about what they clearly saw and seldom even talked to one another about it.

Thus the greatest build up of the largest invasion armada the world had ever known, ultimately congregated along the south coast of England.

It was just about the time of 'D Day' the beginning of 'Operation Overlord' that we started hearing and seeing 'Doodle Bugs'. This was the colloquial name for the German unmanned rocket propelled called the 'V 1' by Hitler. It actually was a bomb with a small jet engine fixed on a tower above; it had two small monoplane wings. We saw them fly over West Dean Park and Home Farm; sort of following the river Lavant valley going northwards, on their way to London. Their flying sound was like the pop, pop, popping of a loud motor bike and in the quietude of the country we could hear them coming from miles away and their frequency caused us quite a few sleepless nights. The height at which they flew was about 1500 feet. They probably flew at this low height to avoid Radar. Because of this stealth and speed, which I understood was about 400 miles per hour; pretty fast flying in those days, it was very difficult for a Spitfire to catch up with them to shoot them down. I believe a Spitfire's maximum speed was about 350 to 370 miles per hour at that time. Doodle Bugs were a low level fast flying target. Nonetheless, the Spitfire pilots were not only brave but inventive, they attacked these 'buzz bombs'; another colloquial name for the 'V 1': by waiting up high and then diving at higher speed than their maximum. Anyway, it was still very difficult to shoot them down. The frequent method the Spitfire pilots used to knock the 'V1's' out of the sky, was to dive and overtake them and place their wings under the wing of the 'V1', then tilt it up to disrupt the governor-gyroscope and the magnetic compass controlling the 'Buzz Bomb' and make it crash. Sometimes the jet engine of the 'V1' would cut out near our home. My parents instructed me that if the Buzz Bomb's engine cut out to the south of our home, I was to take shelter under my bed but if it cut out north of our home I could stay in bed. Twice the jet engines of a Buzz Bomb cut out south of our farm; one crashed in a meadow at Binderton farm and the other in the beech wood east of our farm. I visited both crash sites and picked up a few pieces of the exploded Buzz Bomb for souvenirs but it was cheaply made of rather uninteresting sheet steel. In most cases I do not believe the military came to pick up the remains of these explosions there were so many to deal with. The 'V 1' was an instrument of war but had very little strategic value; having no way of targeting anywhere specifically: except to point it at a large built up region like London. Its primary purpose was the mass killing of civilians and I believe more than 15000 innocent British men, women and children were killed by these horrible weapons. Fortunately, after the 'D Day'

invasion and swift advances, the Allies overran most of the launch sites and rendered them inoperable. However, the Germans then introduced another rocket weapon, the 'V2'. This was actually a rocket with a 1000 lb. warhead that was capable of going straight up into the stratosphere and then down at supersonic speed; almost all of these were accurately aimed at central London. They could not be intercepted by aircraft or anti air craft guns and could not be heard before they hit the ground and exploded, because they were travelling at beyond the speed of sound. They were lethal and indiscriminately killed and maimed 1000's of innocent men women and children.