

Tuesday, August 18, 2015

**Dear Friends,**

I have just sent this message to my family and thought it might also prove interesting to you. I was then 14+ and my brother - Ron 18 and Trevor 12. Father was already working for MI6 (Section VIII) at Whaddon Hall - some five miles west of Bletchley Park.

**Geoffrey**

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I noticed the TV news mentioned today's date - **18th August** - as being so important in **1940** during the Battle of Britain. It was certainly memorable to me. It was a Sunday and a beautiful sunny day.

On Thursday afternoon, the **15th August**, German bombers attacked Croydon aerodrome in mistake for nearby Kenley and the sky was full of planes. My mother was a Red Cross Nurse on duty that day at their base in Kenley (the town not the airfield). She was part of a team in a single deck bus - converted into a First Aid Post. On the raid alarm they set off for Croydon airfield - only some three miles away from their base.

I know she had a very bad time - due to the large number of casualties they had to deal with. However, she never went into details and it was only later that we learned how bad it had been there. Apart from many casualties, there was extensive damage to planes on the ground and the airport buildings. My brother and I then spent time improving our own air raid shelter behind the fence of our back garden. There was a space of about twenty feet before the slope of the newly built Caterham bypass rose some thirty feet above.

The shelter was dug into chalk deep enough for us to sit in then we covered it with railway sleepers left over from the small railway used on the construction of the bypass a few months before.

Apart from some aerial combat - way above us on the Friday 16th and Saturday 17th - things were relatively quiet and **Sunday 18th** started off in the same way. But early in the afternoon the warnings went off and we quickly moved into our new shelter - never used before. We had used sleepers to form seats along one side and covered the roof sleepers with the chalk we had excavated.

Looking back - I realize we had built quite a good shelter - much better than crouching under the dining room table as we had done to start with on the Thursday - before we foolishly went out and watched the dog-fights going on above us.

I will not describe the raid - it was deafening with aircraft both German bombers and fighters - all mixed up with the RAF planes and the bombs landing on the airfield - its main runway ends only two miles from our house.

However, the biggest noise came from a string of bombs that landed in the field across the road and on the nearby roundabout. The sleepers over our heads moved with the closest explosions.

The bombers had also machine gunned the houses as they flew low overhead and caused damage to roofs including our own. The main damage was caused by shrapnel falling from the ack-ack fire coming up from the airfield. We inspected the roof and apart from lots of holes it was intact. The nearest bomb craters were

in the field - perhaps some 100 yards away. We had been concealed from the main blasts due to the bypass rising above us and almost level with the roof.

In and around the bomb craters we found pieces of the bomb and took lots of them home.

That's quite enough - but perhaps you will all realize why this **18th August** was special for me - now the last one of us left!