



# BROCKENHURST

A walk through history  
to commemorate the  
70th anniversary of  
D-Day



Photo copyright Barry Hillier

"It was here, in the New Forest, that a vast army lived, trained and assembled for the D-Day landings....And here too, were ordinary civilians whose lives were turned upside down by the invasion of so many British and Allied personnel.

The need to hide armies, the need to have fighter and bomber bases as near to the front line as possible and the need to carry out intelligence and training activities were all served by the ideal terrain and natural landscape within the bounds of the Forest."

*The New Forest at War* by John Leete

## A Walk through History

### 1. Evacuees Billeted and Schooled

In September 1939 a special train brought the boys of Portsmouth Secondary School to Brockenhurst to be billeted throughout the village in people's homes and to share school facilities with Brockenhurst pupils at the County High School (now Brockenhurst College), with another building in Highwood Road. Arriving ill-equipped for the village road and path conditions in wet weather, some bemoaned the lack of city comforts, however, many had fond memories of their time in Brockenhurst and indeed the theme of the Portsmouth School's 2007 Annual Dinner was "The Evacuation", recalling the five years when the school transferred some 50 miles to this beautiful part of the country.

### 2. Orphans Swell the Numbers

September 1939 saw the arrival of pupils from Southampton Girls' Orphanage to swell the numbers. Shelters were built alongside the school, where during air raids, pupils used to sit with their gas masks and a block of chocolate each in case they were detained for a long time. They sang patriotic songs and played games to raise their spirits.

### 3. Two Dugouts in Black Bridge Field

From East Bank Road to the West of the station take a walk over Black Bridge and across the field toward the Lymington Road. If you look closely at the ground you can see the outline of a dugout; this is one of two that were created here in 1940 as an anti-invasion measure to be manned by the Home Guard.

### 4. Bombs Fall in the Centre of Brockenhurst

The first bombs were dropped on the village at about 3.00 a.m on Wednesday 13 August 1940. At that time Gates Garage was only the old building and the new showrooms were just a field. (B1. & B2) Two bombs were dropped in the field next to the garage, only one doing damage. (B3) Across the road a bomb dislodged the conservatory of Wide Lane Cottage (now Cottage Lodge Hotel); (B4) one bomb took the front off Purkess bakery shop (where the Jack Hull memorial is); (B5) one fell at the bottom of Cairo Cottage garden (undertakers garage); (B6) one on the British Legion Club and (B7)

one in Careys Cottages.

In 1942 two very large bombs were dropped, one night in the field between the Lymington Road and the railway end of Church Lane – about 200 yds away from a train load of explosives! These craters can still be seen.

### 5. Outlying Forest Areas are Cultivated for Food

To increase food production the War Agricultural Committee established a depot at Hollands Wood and proceeded to clear large areas of the Forest Lawns for food production. The areas of Black Knoll, Whitemoor, Longslade Bottom and Wilverley were cleared of gorse and ploughed to produce potatoes and other crops. As a result of this, today they are open plains.

### 6. Brockenhurst Hotels are Commandeered

At the beginning of the war Balmer Lawn Hotel was transformed into an Army Staff College and in 1943 it became a centre for planning the Normandy invasion. General Eisenhower visited frequently and some of the 'Orders for the Day' were issued from the hotel for the D-Day invasion. Careys Manor was used to accommodate a number of Welsh Guards. The Canadians came to the village in 1943 and an HQ contingent occupied Careys Manor and the Balmer Lawn Hotel. The children's Christmas party which they hosted in December 1943 is still remembered with fondness by some today who tasted ice cream and peanut butter for the first time!

### 7. WWII Traffic Congestion in Brockenhurst

With troops and equipment pouring into the village in preparation for D-Day the whole village became a huge one-way system with vehicles amassing in the main roads and side streets of Brockenhurst. Parking bays were marked out for military vehicles and along Sway Road and elsewhere concrete blocks had been laid to provide hard standing for trucks. As D-Day approached all the parking bays filled and Military Police patrolled road junctions; no traffic was allowed to enter Sway Road at Latchmoor. East Bank Road was full of signals units awaiting orders; nothing was allowed through the watersplashes.

### 8. Brockenhurst Station is a Major Staging Post for Men and Machinery

When we look at the modern railway station today it is hard to believe that spring of 1944 brought train loads of tanks and trucks, with thousands of service-men and women to be encamped in Brockenhurst and surrounding areas, or to make their way to the aerodromes. Imagine the noise and smells of the steam trains as they shunted back and forth. Trainloads of equipment arrived and seven new sidings were built to relieve pressure at Eastleigh. One eye-witness reports over 100 wagons in the sidings, many of them full of bombs and ammunition on their way to the New Forest airfields.

### 9. The War Memorial.

The war took its toll - Brockenhurst, a village of just over 2,000 people at the time, suffered the loss of some 40 dead, the youngest serviceman being just 17 yrs old. The War Memorial records the names of the 31 local men who lost their lives during 1939-45 war and 9 civilians killed.

"June 1944, the month that changed the course of modern world history. Men and machines in their thousands began the assault on Fortress Europe... Wave after wave of aircraft left the airfields of the Forest, boats left from every part of the Forest coastline. The build-up had taken months. In contrast, the Forest was empty of men and machines within a matter of hours. There was an eerie silence."

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"Cottage Lodge is delighted to sponsor this leaflet."

Leaflet produced by Sue Hunter for Brockenhurst village's commemoration of the 70th anniversary of D-Day, June 2014.

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