



An RAF Mother's WWII Diary Blog - January 1944-December 1944: 'Sorrows and Salvation'

May Hill

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May Hill lived in a close-knit community in a small seaside village where she had married her childhood sweetheart Will in 1912. The nearest large town, Skegness, had grown in popularity as a major seaside resort since before the turn of the century. May's village, Chapel St Leonards, also attracted increasing numbers of holiday visitors with each new decade, swelling the summer populations. By the 1930s May, like many fellow-villagers, was accepting holiday-makers as paying guests. In 1936, the first Butlins holiday camp opened in Skegness with great acclaim, further boosting the reputation of the area as a holiday centre.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 changed the situation dramatically. Lincolnshire, with much flat landscape near the East Coast, assumed great strategic importance as an ideal location for military airfields and soon became known as 'bomber county'. Centres for training RAF and Army recruits were set up in the Skegness area and almost overnight Butlins was transformed to become 'HMS Royal Arthur', a huge Royal Navy training centre. Chapel St Leonards soon became home for several serving officers. Many Army recruits were billeted in houses near May's home and the whole area took on the character of an armed encampment. May's only son, Ron became a young volunteer in the RAF, her husband a Coastguard, and close family members early casualties.

May began to keep a Diary, recording and commenting on happenings both local and across the world. These eloquent comprehensive Diaries and her Poetry, which reflected her thoughts and prayers, have come to light at different times over a number of years and have been affectionately transcribed by her grandchildren. Whilst many episodes held most significance for the family and the village community, major wartime events such as the capitulation of Italy and the coming of the Second Front – 'D-Day' are featured, along with comments based on May's own strong views.

The publication in 2009 of 'The Casualties Were Small', a compilation of May's poetry with a related selection of diary extracts, attracted many enthusiastic responses from a wide readership, from junior school students to ninety-plus retired seniors, in Britain and worldwide:

... 'Truly a living history, life of the times as it unfolded ... a very emotional journey for me personally ... a remarkable woman, very brave and sensitive ... May's poems are touching, nostalgic, angry at times ... her deep faith shines through in all her writing ... completely engrossing and I have to admit to shedding a tear when I came to the end'.

From November 2010 the whole sequence of May's wartime diaries began to appear day by day in the Blog exactly 'Seventy Years On' commencing with the first preserved entry on 27th November 1940.

Now the final full year's uninterrupted Diary entries, following a short introduction to May and her immediate family, are conveniently presented as Volume Four in this Kindle Edition. Poems are included and a reference section contains Blog headlines with Notes linked to each dated entry.

Volume Four (January 1944 to December 1944) is sub-titled 'Sorrows and Salvation': The early part of the

year saw the death of May's beloved husband Will. The Diaries were set aside for a little while and then resumed, only to come to a sad abrupt finish before the end of the year.

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