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**“Recollections of Emsworth Past”
 Memories of living as a boy in Emsworth
 during the Second World War**

Mr W J Scadgell

It was my great grandfather, John Scadgell, who in 1880 moved with his wife Harriet and their eight surviving children from Westbourne to Emsworth, where the family set up a furnishing business in the rather grand High Street property now the NatWest Bank. The family members gradually married and moved away, leaving Scadgell and Son in the hands of a manager until my father sold it in the 1950s.

So it was perhaps ironic when one branch of the Scadgell family reappeared to live in Emsworth in 1942 during the Second World War. An incendiary bomb had rendered uninhabitable the house in Portsmouth where I was living with my mother and grandmother, my father being in the Royal Navy and away at sea. We had the opportunity to buy a house in Warblington Road. No. 35 it is today, but then it was aptly named “Zealandia” (sea, land and air). Just a field separated us from the sea with an unrestricted view of Thorney Island, then a base for R.A.F. Coastal Command. The house had been designed with a flat roof to enable its owners to have a good view of the sailing. But the Hudson aircraft from Thorney used to fly over us so low that my grandmother swore they would have taken our chimney pots with them if we had had a pitched roof. Before the war, the house had been painted a dazzling white, but the powers that be at Thorney said it provided a reference point for enemy bombers; so it had to become a loathsome drab green until the end of the war.

As a boy of 12, I loved it there. I would sit for hours at my bedroom window watching through binoculars the comings and goings at Thorney. I could recognise every type of British, American and German aircraft in service. So it was a delight to me when the twin-engined Hudsons were replaced by four-engined Liberators. Even more thrilling, just before D-Day, was the sight of a whole wing of sleek Mustangs or big-bellied Thunderbolts - 50 of them - still flying low while they formed up, having just taken off from the advanced fighter airfield at Funtington. Then I would count them again as they came back home two hours later.

Other recollections of the war included seeing sailors with a red bobble on their caps when I cycled past the Free French naval camp in Southleigh Road and the dramatic sight of four barrage balloons over Portsmouth on fire after being struck by lightning before their ground crews could wind them down. There was also the heart-stopping moment in the back garden one Sunday tea-time when we first heard the unmistakable engine noise of a VI “doodlebug” and watched it fly over, quite low, on its way to wreak havoc somewhere further inland. And there was the strangely surreal experience of seeing soldiers with tanks shrouded in camouflage netting, drawn up beneath the trees on either side of the road through Southleigh Forest - waiting to embark for D-Day.

To be continued

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