

## Denys Dollin: my war time

On 3 September 1939 I can remember us all sitting by the fire listening to the radio on the evening that war had been declared by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain after his return from Munich.



Denys at the age of 10

In March 1940 my sister Christine was born and later that year Mum took in two evacuees, Mavis Blower and Gloria Weaver from Portsmouth. A few weeks after they arrived, Gloria was taken ill and returned home. Mavis stayed with us for most of the war.

Although the raids were in Southampton, 5 miles away from Eastleigh, you could feel the ground shaking from the explosions of the bombs, the noise of the bombs falling and the gunfire. It was like being close to a firework display: the dozens of search lights sweeping the night sky trying to find the German aircraft; the flash of the anti-aircraft shells and the orange flare of the anti-aircraft rockets, which we called flaming oranges, streaming upwards in a line one behind the other; and the smoke in the sky glowing, from the fires lit by the incendiary bombs. It was such a spectacle that it seemed strange to feel afraid and for a boy allowed to watch as long as the bombs didn't come too close, it was awesome, as they would say today.



Shortly after Christine was born, I was coming home from somewhere when the siren went and I heard an aircraft take off from Eastleigh airport. As it flew over I could see it was heading straight for the barrage balloon that was on its way up from Barton Peveril playing field.

I just stood still watching, wondering if the pilot would see it and turn away in time to miss the cable. The tip of the Lockheed Hudson's wing caught the cable, the aircraft pivoted round in a complete circle before the tip broke off and the plane nosedived into a house in Nutbeem Road a few yards from a field of allotments. The live ammunition started exploding and I could see the tracer bullets flying in all directions. It seemed to be like something in a dream and although I knew it was real, the true horror of the impact did not sink in. The bombing raids became closer and more personal after this.