

## Village Echoes

Recently in the local press it has been reported that several Kent ambulance stations are being transferred to one central station at Paddock Wood. During World War 2, Goudhurst had its own ambulance station situated near Cloth Edge in Church Road: the wooden building still exists and is undergoing restoration at the time of writing.

The ambulances were manned by members of the Red Cross & St John's Ambulance. They attended almost five hundred call-outs between September 1939 and February 1945. The majority were to civilian cases but over sixty were to members of the armed services, be it aircrew from crashed aircraft or the military motor cyclists and drivers who crashed in various locations in the parish during the war.

On the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1940 two landmines exploded in the village, one near the vicarage, the other in the Five Fields close to the ambulance garage which was damaged, and the ambulance was damaged beyond repair. The garage was repaired and extended to accommodate a new ambulance donated by an American couple, A & E de Limur. A lorry from Ladham estate, donated by Sir George Jessel, was converted for use as a second or standby ambulance.

There were several near-misses to the ambulances and their crews, including one in 1940 when the commandant, Len Prickett, and Pte Farley were returning to the garage when the village was machine-gunned, bullets just missing them and hitting nearby buildings. In 1944 Len Prickett and J. Isted were returning from Pembury Hospital, having delivered Walter Osborne who had been kicked in the face by a frightened horse. As the ambulance approached Kippings Cross a flying bomb exploded close to the road damaging the vehicle. Commandant Prickett suffered a badly bruised face and Pte Isted chest injuries.

It was during the time of the doodlebugs that the ambulance had one of its busiest nights when a doodlebug exploded at Fegans Homes, now Blantyre Prison. Seven boys and a master had to be taken to hospital. At least there were no fatalities, unlike eight months before when Mrs Fegan & Mrs Keyes died when their cottage not far from Fegans Home was hit by an incendiary bomb. The ambulance service did sterling work all through the war years taking maternity cases, wounded civilians, British, Polish, American and German aircrew as well as army, navy and Land Army personnel, either injured or suffering illness, to the hospitals both military at Benenden and Canterbury or civilian at Pembury or Tunbridge Wells, covering about 18,000 miles between them.

After the war Goudhurst lost its own ambulance as well as its own fire engine. Did you know we had our own fire brigade? That's another story.



Dedication of the de Limur ambulance 1941.

Local History Society