



*Translation of German Air Force Operations Report, closed at 1000 hrs, on 15th November, 1940.
Secret*

During the night ending 15th November strong bomber formations were sent to attack Coventry in order to cripple considerably this centre of the aircraft and aircraft accessories industry.

The attack took place in especially favourable weather conditions. Over the target the cloud covering was very largely dispersed and at times a cloudless sky and wind from the northwest and west made visibility good, which allowed the target to be made out, sight bombing and observation of the effects. In addition special aircraft were detailed as pathfinders to drop flares.

Altogether in the period from 2020 hours until 0635 hours, 449 bombers dropped about 503 tons of high-explosive bombs, including heavy and very heavy calibre bombs, and incendiary oil-bombs as well as 881 containers of incendiaries and 64 light-capacity flare-bombs.

In detail these effects were observed : Considerable incendiary effect in the southeast of the town. About 15 to 20 large and 40 to 50 small fires in the whole town area, among others in the neighbourhood of the RAF Supply Depot and of the Brestone Stamping Co., Ltd. (Factory for aircraft parts).

One shed was seen to cave in at the factory for aircraft engine parts on the south-western outskirts. On the western edge of the town there was an explosion of very large proportions with a flash lasting 8 to 10 seconds. In six cases spreading fires were seen after the bomb explosions.

In an hour from the commencement of the attack crews reported that the whole of the town centre was a sea of flames, especially south of the thoroughfare from Guphill Ford (2 km west of Coventry) to Wyken Home (in the eastern part of the town).

Formations which had previously taken part in many attacks on London declared that they had never before seen bombardment effects on this scale. Pending confirmation by photographs it can be accepted that the attack on Coventry has achieved its intended purpose.

The defence was proportionately strong in relation to the importance of the target area, heavy anti-aircraft guns from positions forming a ring around Coventry sent up plotted fire to a height of 3000 to 6000 metres over the town. The number of heavy A.A. batteries was estimated to be six to eight. They appeared to fire on uniform orders, as all the batteries fired four or five rounds per gun and then paused for one and a half to two minutes. Besides these several medium A.A. batteries were engaged. Searchlight activity was comparatively small. Several barrage balloons were placed at a height of 1500 to 2000 metres all round the town. Two night fighters were observed over Coventry during the attack and one single-engined night fighter over the Wash; they did not however attack.

In spite of the strength of the defences we suffered no casualties during the operation.

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A NIGHT IN
LITTLE PARK STREET

by
J. B. SHELTON

With illustrations by

KENNETH BEAUCHAMP



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on the tenth anniversary of
the great Coventry raid



A NIGHT IN LITTLE PARK STREET

Early in November, 1940, Goering launched a new plan for the strategic bombing of Britain. One of the orders in this plan was the "preparation for attacks on Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton." For these raids the German Air Force used their new radar navigational aid, " X" beam. By this system the pathfinder aircraft of a special unit were able to find the target by radar, aim their incendiary bombs at the target and light it up so that the main force of bombers could bomb by visual means. This method was first used by the Germans on the raid on Coventry.

(Air Ministry Records)

I

THE raid of November 14th, 1940, began very like all other raids, with the hurrying of people in the streets to their nearest shelters.

With my wife I had been enjoying a cup of well mashed tea and a few rounds of toast and butter when the sirens sounded, just as they had done on many evenings at the same time ; in fact we had become quite accustomed to it although it was not very pleasant.

Women left their homes carrying any old clothes to keep them warm in their brick or Anderson shelters, and cries were heard from

frightened children—often caused by some hysterical mother more than by the sights and sounds of the raid, although a greater number of mothers assured their children they would be safe and bravely shepherded them to refuge. The occupants of my houses nearby as usual made for the shelter at the garden end of my stable yard, and Mr Shepherd and myself made for the outer protection ready to deal with any emergency arising.

We watched the flares dropped by the attacking planes. Rows of them seemed to hang suspended in the sky and reminded one of the fairy lights of a coronation. Suddenly a terrific hissing was heard as thousands of incendiary bombs fell, and like sparks from a blacksmith's forge flying upwards so the incendiaries flew down and spit death and destruction at all on whom they fell, reminding one of the story of an accident to fireworks in Broadgate when at the Coronation of George III in 1761 the entire fireworks were exploded by the sparks from a Catherine wheel.

In my yard I had a number of stables and horses which needed watching carefully in case incendiaries should pierce the roof. In this Mr Shepherd volunteered to help me as the brave man had done on other occasions, and without his help things would

have been hopeless, for within a short distance of the stables twenty or more incendiary bombs now fell. We had had in former times plenty of practice in making them harmless, but these were a new type and much more powerful in their adder-like hissing. After doing as in previous raids we found it had little avail, but fortunately neither of us was hurt and later we were informed of the method to deal with these monsters.

When the flare of these fire bombs died down we could see the glare of burning houses, factories and sheds. The entry from my yard to the street had two large doors which I had closed in order to keep flying sparks from entering. I opened them and went into the street finding the old Swift cycle factory (now a storehouse and printer's press etc.,) well alight, and a fireman attaching his water pipes to the hydrant near my front door. As these factories were four or five acres in extent it was difficult to deal with them, but little did I know that the water supply had been cut all over the city and that hundreds of firemen were standing helplessly looking on at the extensive conflagration spreading. As I returned to the stables, high explosive bombs began to fall every half minute or so and made the ground and sheds seem to leap in the air.



*'Little did I know that the water supply had been cut
all over the city'*

In an hour from the commencement of the attack crews reported that the whole of the town centre was a sea of flame. Altogether 449 bombers dropped about 543 tons of high explosive bombs and incendiary oil bombs, as well as 881 containers of incendiaries and 64 light capacity flare bombs.

(German Air Force Records)

II

SMALL fires became large ones until they joined and were a four or five acre flame, and by 8.30 p.m. the flames were licking the property on my side of the street. Suddenly my doors were flung open and someone (who it was I have never found out) hurried a terrified horse into the yard without halter and bridle and closed the doors again. Mr Shepherd and myself caught the terrified animal and took it into the stable, and looking back down the yard I saw both doors blazing fiercely. An oil bomb had dropped in the middle of the street and the man who led in the horse must have been killed by it. The horse was in my care for two weeks before I discovered the owner who had taken his wife and child away from Coventry and left his horse to its fate.

By now flames were everywhere. I went

hurriedly to my back door and opened it, only to find that the flames met me. There was no hope of saving anything. I had a tank of three hundred gallons of water but this I had stored in case the hay shed and stables fired. Opposite my house were stored many gallons of varnish and turpentine used in repair work. This now fired and on the West side everything was burning. Cardboard and plywood floated on the wind and drifted like snowflakes, some pieces as large as the top of a water bucket, and when they alighted on the ground it appeared as though hundreds of children's gunpowder sparklers were competing for the best display. Many fell on the stable roofs, but happily the slates were sound. On the North side I found there were thirty or more houses and shops burning with fury and that the fire was advancing towards my corn store ; and on the South side two houses were ablaze and a Government meat store which joined the wall of my house and contained three hundred tons of meat. Needless to say the fat caused a big blaze which seemed to reach the sky and so lit the place that it was brighter than daylight. The only pleasing feature was the lovely smell of roasting joints. On the East side a garage, on which incendiaries had fallen, was well alight with flames from the petrol reaching the top of a sixty foot ash tree standing near.



'The fires joined and became a four or five acre flame'



'This gap enabled fifty people, who had no other escape, to reach a shelter'

This heat spread to another factory adjoining the other side and the flames ran along my wooden garden fence which had to be pulled down and the blaze checked with soil. This gap, incidentally, enabled fifty people, who had no other escape, to reach a shelter. They streamed across carrying dogs, cats, canaries, fowl, etc., and the other fence on the opposite side of my garden had to be removed to let them through to St John's Street. I saw very little of this scene except that I provided the people with iron bars for the job, because Mr Shepherd and I were too busy checking the fire falling thickly round the stables and sheds. I need not say how useful the three hundred gallons of water were to check the flames. We had closed all stable doors and commencing at each end we sprinkled water on the ground in front as sparingly as we could. This went on until 10 p.m. and so far had been successful.

By 3.30 a.m. 200 fires were started, many of which were not under control until the following evening, and 525 " incidents " were reported.

(Home Office Records)

III

MR Shepherd's house and my office and library were separate buildings and we hoped to try and save them also, but at last the flames broke through into Mr Shepherd's house and a cupboard and a piano caught fire. We carried a few buckets of water and checked the fire downstairs, but in the roof the flames spread, and with care of the horses coming first no more water could be spared, and we had to watch the flames burning through his house towards my office and library. When I could spare a moment I rushed into the office and at risk from falling timbers and bricks brought out about forty books and dropped them into two iron washtubs. Turning these upside down I hoped the books would be saved. With sadness I had to leave deeds, photographs, paintings, papers and at least five hundred books in their cupboards to be devoured by the flames. As my houses burnt down the fire from



'I hoped the books would be saved'

surrounding places got worse. The sparks were now much larger and fell more thickly, and they dried the ground we were continually damping and burnt holes in our clothing as we walked about; and all the time high explosives kept falling and we would lie on the ground to evade the blast.

Towards 11.30 p.m. we saw that it was quite hopeless to save any of the houses, but we still had the haysheds, cornsheds and stables intact. As I looked up into the hayshed a large piece of blazing plywood came sideways through a crack in the boards and set alight the already overheated trusses. I called to Mr Shepherd, " water—hayshed—quick ", and ran up the ladder into the loft throwing down the trusses not on fire. The tank was opposite the shed, water was soon handed to me, and the immediate danger was over thanks to Mr Shepherd.

Meanwhile his house was gutted and the flames devouring my library were more fierce than ever, and around 1 a.m. my library, office, and the dividing wall crashed in, making two large holes in my cornshed which was on the ground floor beneath the hayshed. The terrific heat set alight my three tons of oats, but by sprinkling a few buckets of precious water over the oats we saved the adjoining stables, although unfortunately the heat soon renewed the danger to them.

The greatest concentration of the raid was in an area three quarters of a mile by half a mile in the centre of the city. About a third of the area was completely devastated and another third required subsequent demolition. The number of persons killed was between 554 and 568, and those seriously injured and detained in hospital 865.

(Home Office Records)

IV

AT 1.30 a.m. we decided to move the horses. I had made provision for such an emergency three months before, and indeed for that length of time I had not removed my clothes because of constant raids and had sometimes slept on the straw in the sheds. At the rear of each horse a large chaff bag was kept to blindfold it if necessary, and each horse was tied with a cord with a sharp knife kept in readiness in case a quick exit was required. Now came the critical moment. We paused, wondering what was the best method to coax the horses out. I suddenly remembered that the horses were hungry as they had not been suppered up, and so I fetched an armful of the sweetest clover I could find, went into the stables, coaxed and patted each horse with some reassuring words, and let them smell and taste the clover. This had a calming

effect, and the hungry horses followed me and were out in the floating fire before they realised it. Four horses were brought out without the bags over their heads, but the fifth, a young horse, required a bag and caused some commotion. With Mr Shepherd, who was as accustomed to horses as myself, I finally persuaded it to leave the stable. It plunged and reared through the fire but we headed it towards the garden where the flames were not quite so bad. By now the smell and taste of the clover and the knowledge that other horses were near calmed it. We tethered each horse to a fruit tree in the garden and gave them a good feed of clover. Away from the fire the night was cold and clear so we tied large bags on the horses to keep them warm. When they had had their fill it was interesting to see two of the horses lie down and go fast asleep although high explosives were falling near.

I have as yet said nothing about the noise other than the explosions of the falling bombs. Crash after crash followed every few moments and now most of the roofs were fallen in. The falling walls, girders, pillars, machinery crashing four storeys, the droning of the planes as they let go their bombs, and the rattling of shrapnel on corrugated sheeting was deafening all night long. It beggars all description. The

'It plunged and reared through the fire'



drifting fires were worse, and one had to guess where the noises like thunder came from. I found out afterwards that it must have been the crashing of the pillars of the cathedral. It was hell let loose, and no-one could possibly have lived in our street. The cellars which we had been asked to use as shelters became ovens, and the exits blocked, but fortunately we had refused to use them.

After twelve hours of this terror, hungry, tired and sleepy people emerged from their shelters as daylight began to show. Birds that had survived (not many I fear) came forth as usual for their breakfast. Cats and dogs stood outside their homes mystified at finding them gone. My own cat which must have been in the house and probably escaped when I opened the kitchen door had his tail scorched. It was not until several weeks later that we found him being fed by some workmen on a bombed site. They had found him a box with a bed of hay to rest in.

During the course of the raid 2,294 buildings were demolished and 45,704 buildings were damaged. In a period of 28 months all damaged houses were made habitable.

(Home Office Records)

WHEN the planes drew off at daylight and the last bombs had fallen, and the horses were fed again under the leafless trees I made my way to see if my daughter was alive. I was overjoyed to find she was safe, although a shell from one of our guns had pierced the roof of her house. She came with me to fetch my wife to her home, and had hurried before me, through the gap that had been made in the fence, towards our shelter. Little did I know the hidden danger awaiting us. I ran to her and just as we both turned into the brick entry of the shelter a delayed action bomb exploded and four houses in St John's Street which we had just passed became a mass of ruins. From the entry, which withstood the shock, we saw a mass of rubble like the eruption of a volcano showering over my garden and horses. Bricks were thrown so high that when they fell in the garden they buried themselves. One of the horses had his skull fractured and another a

wound on his chest, and had they not been tied safely they would have stampeded, for it was terrifying. My wife who had been in the shelter and safe while there, had gone to speak to one of the people who left our shelter during the early hours of the morning, when this bomb exploded. The blast carried her amongst the horses, and pieces of masonry fell on her. Her injuries were rather serious. It was then that I was informed that in one of the demolished houses a woman and her five children were buried, so leaving my wife in the care of my daughter I hurried back to help rescue them. Willing hands helped to hold up the roof which was a danger to rescuers below. A man and a nurse worked their way through a small opening and to our joy the mother and three of her children were brought out alive. Sad to say, two of the children were dead beneath a mass of rubble. They were still there when His Majesty King George VI passed the houses on November 16th.

Hundreds in their homes and shelters alas had passed to the beyond. So many had fallen that for weeks friends who happened to meet in the street not knowing whether the other was alive would grip hands with a gladness in their hearts at seeing each other. Who knew what sad news awaited them when they emerged from their shelters, and what husbands



' Friends who happened to meet in the street would grip hands with gladness '

who were wardens, policemen, firemen, rescue workers, watchmen, etc., had been hurt or killed? Many were never heard of again. People walked as in a dream and only when they chanced to meet someone they knew did their brains work again. There was desolation on all sides. No water, no gas, no electricity. No, not even the all-clear was sounded for all power had been cut. People knew not which way to go. The effects of an earthquake could not have been worse. Most roads were blocked and ambulances could not run. Fire engines which had arrived from all over England stood at the city outskirts, helpless because the entire water supply had failed. The surrounding fires made many return to the shelters. Hundreds of hungry people flocked to the rest centres and the spirit of the Carmelite Friars seemed to live again as the cloisters they had built six hundred years before were filled with the homeless. Not only had fire engines appeared as if out of the clouds, but also food vans which had travelled throughout the night from many cities. These provided hungry folk with food and a cheering cup of tea free of charge, and I have yet to learn how they provided their water, for the only available supply in this district was a tap at the bottom of Gulson Road, three quarters of a mile from Little Park Street.



'The effects of an earthquake could not have been worse'

When I returned to my stables I found not a roof left undamaged and rafters broken to matchwood. At least three horses would have been killed and the others injured had they been inside, for the stables were much nearer to the bomb than the trees in the garden to which they were tied. Of my own house I had only a small outhouse left. This I had to use as a bedroom, for it was impossible for me to go away until I could make other arrangements for the horses. Perhaps two bags of chaff on a wooden frame was not an ideal bed but it was the best I could do. At any rate, I had slept in my clothes for three months and it made very little difference. Having sent my injured wife to East Kirby in Nottinghamshire I felt more satisfied and, needing no rocking, slept soundly except for brief intervals when one or two planes were flying over to see the damage they had done.

Some 3,000 homeless were dealt with by the authorities. The Corporation provided transport for any of those persons who wished to leave the city, and on 16th November arrangements were made to transport 10,000 people from the city. Only 300 availed themselves of this facility.

(Home Office Records)

VI

I met the Provost of Coventry on the following day. He shook my hand so lustily that I shall never forget it. He afterwards told me that he was so overjoyed at seeing someone he knew that he could have hugged me. Such was the feeling of many, for one was taken and the other left. Messengers, doctors, nurses, sick folk passed to the beyond. How wonderful it seems to me now that Mr. Shepherd, brave, helpful man should get off without a scratch and myself get in my eye only one spark out of all those millions, it giving me pain for a few weeks. When things are black there is always some little incident to make you smile. I had tried a number of times to purchase a fire helmet, but failed, so I decided to put strings in the sides of a metal corn server I had for the horses, to fit it over my cap. I had put it on the floor of the shed in readiness

and when I went in after the raid it was still lying there. I had been too busy in my work and had forgotten to put it on.

During the following week I met Mr Phillips, who lives in St. John's Street, and whose house had fortunately not suffered much damage. He asked me how I was placed for a suit for the next Sunday. I told him that I had only what I stood up in, so he invited me to his house and, producing three new suits, offered me one, saying, " Here, this fits me, it will fit you. You may keep it as long as you need it." Kindnesses like this, of which there were many, are not soon forgotten. In the next week I went to East Kirby to see how my wife was progressing. She was staying with my aged sister. I found her confined to bed, being treated by a local doctor. She had been so badly bruised by rubble and blast that her face was the colour of a black person. It was weeks before she was able to return to Coventry, but she is now in better health and is able to do her housework.

As for myself, I believe I had double strength given me to overcome all difficulties, and for this I am thankful.

Coventry, January, 1941



This is a record of the experiences of a citizen of Coventry during the night of the great air raid of November 14/15th 1940 — the raid the whole world most remembers.

The author, Mr. Shelton, was over sixty years of age at the time, and his endurance during that night was but typical of the courage of literally millions of his fellow countrymen during the German air bombardments. For his efforts in saving several horses in his charge Mr. Shelton was honoured with the R.S.P.C.A.'s Queen Victoria Medal for meritorious service.

Now, ten years later, he still lives on the bombed site of his former home in a converted caravan amidst a garden he has made among the ruins, The experiences he records were jotted down a few weeks after the raid, and are now published on the tenth anniversary as testament to a nation's civilian determination against the unequalled and unforgettable brutality of the Germans.