

The Blitz was the most traumatic period of aerial bombing the city of London has ever faced. Its name derived from the German word “Blitzkrieg” which means lightning war

(Exploring). The Blitz lasted from September 7th of 1940, to May 10th 1941. In the first wave of bombing The Germans bombed for 57 nights in a row (Exploring). By the end of May in 1941 more than 43,000 civilians, half of them in London, had been killed by the bombings, and more than a million houses had been damaged or destroyed in London alone (Exploring).



The Battle of Britain began in July 1940. From July until September the Luftwaffe (the generic term used for the German air force) attacked the Royal Air Force fighter command to gain air superiority to prepare for the invasion of Britain (Exploring). The bombing involved attacking fighter airfields to destroy fighter command’s ability to defend themselves in an invasion (Exploring). Attacks on aircraft industry were also carried out to make sure that the



British couldn't replace their losses (Exploring). During a raid on August 24th some German bombers strayed over London and dropped bombs on the east and northeast parts of the city. This prompted England to retaliate, and the

next night they bombed Berlin causing ten deaths (Exploring). This angered Hitler who said, *"If they send over a hundred bombers to bomb our cities. . . then we shall send a thousand planes to bomb theirs. And if they think that they can destroy our cities. . . then we shall wipe theirs from the face of the earth"* (WW2). Hitler thought that Berlin was untouchable and would protect it by any means necessary.

The first wave of bombings started the afternoon of September 7th, 1940. The air raid siren sounded over London and the first of the German bombers dropped their bombs (WW2). From four in the afternoon till six in the afternoon over 340 German bombers, protected by 600 fighter planes attacked the London docks with hundreds of incendiary bombs (WW2). Two hours later, with the flames of the last bombing raid to guide them, a second wave of German bombers attacked until 4:30 the following morning (WW2). After the first night 430 people had been killed and sixteen hundred injured. Homes, businesses, churches, and factories all became

victims of the German Luftwaffe. The East end of London which was the industrial center of the city was the main target (Exploring). Protection from the bombings was limited, few anti aircraft guns had fire control systems, and the search lights were usually ineffective at higher altitudes. Even the secret cabinet war room under the treasury to hide government officials was vulnerable to the bombings (WW2). Few fighter airplanes were able to operate at night, and London's ground based radar was limited (WW2). During this first raid only 92 guns were able to protect London. General Sir Frederick Pile, the commander in chief of the anti aircraft command, quickly reorganized the defense system of London, and by September 11th twice as many guns were available with orders to fire at will (WW2). Being able to see the guns that were protecting the city was uplifting to the citizens of London, and boosted morale (WW2). The RAF also sent up large silver balloons as an anti aircraft device, known as barrage balloons, the balloons prevented planes from making low level attacks (Portcities). The specially formed Balloon command was in charge of operating the balloons (Portcities). 100 to 200 bombers attacked London every night between mid-September and mid-November (WW2). The heaviest attack was on October 15th, 400 bombers attacked the city for six hours, the RAF tried to oppose them with 41 fighters but they only managed to take down one Heinkel bomber (WW2). By mid-November the Germans had dropped more than 13,000 tons of high explosives and more than 1 million incendiary bombs (WW2).



From November 1940 to February 1941, the Luftwaffe attacked industrial ports and cities like Coventry, Southampton, Birmingham, Liverpool, Clydebank, Bristol, Swindon, and Plymouth (BBC). During this time fourteen

attacks were mounted on ports excluding London, nine on industrial targets inland, and eight on London (BBC). The most devastating of these raids occurred on December 29th when German planes attacked the city of London itself with incendiaries and high explosive bombs, causing what has been called the second great fire of London (BBC). British defenses were weak and the Germans had only lost 133 aircraft during the four months of the second wave of attack. The Germans were starting to realize that bombing London would not make it any easier to invade Britain, and RAF was remaining effective (BBC). British defenses were vastly improved with ground based radar guiding night fighters in the sky; they also had airborne radar, which were effective against night bombers and an increased number of anti-aircraft guns and searchlights were radar controlled which helped to improve accuracy (BBC). The Germans priority became the Soviet Union so their air power moved east. The last Major attack on London was May 10th, 515 bombers destroyed or damaged many important landmarks like the British Museum, the House's of Parliament, and St. James Place (BBC). The raid killed more than any other before it with 1,364 deaths and 1,616 seriously injured (BBC).

To protect the city the Air raid precautions staff and emergency service was set up.

London was divided into manageable areas to look out for unexploded bombs and bomb damage (Portcities). Each borough was divided into districts under the command of a chief air warden, these districts were split into different ports, the posts were divided into six or more sectors, sectors had three to six ARP wardens serving under a senior warden, and each warden patrolled an area covering several streets (Portcities). The duties of the wardens included reporting to their posts when and where a bomb exploded, after reporting the warden would return to the scene where the bomb had exploded and look after the wounded until the civil defense arrived (Portcities). Each borough also had a first-aid post (Portcities). The civilians of London had a lot to do with the protection of their city. One of the three objectives of the bombing was to destroy civilian morale (BBC). Many civilians who were not able to join the military became members of the Home Guard, the air raid precautions service, The Auxiliary Fire service, and many other organizations (BBC). In the Novel "London" by Edward Rutherfurd, Charlie Dogget is part of the Auxiliary Fire Service. The Auxiliary fire service was set up to support the regular London fire brigade, which was getting overwhelmed by the German bombings (Portcities). The new service needed equipment, so many of London's taxicabs were taken over by the Civil defense, painted grey and turned into makeshift fire engines (Portcities). On the first night of the Blitz, nine Auxiliary fire brigades each used 100 fire engines to extinguish the widespread fires (Portcities). The next night one fire engine was in use for forty hours (Portcities). Rutherfurd opens chapter twenty with these lines "I was born lucky, I suppose." Then goes on to talk about

how Charlie Dogget should have been dead hours before the chapter opened because “They had just endured another night of Hitler’s Blitz-and in Charlie’s case, they had seen a miracle” (London 1088). Rutherford also discusses the vehicles that the firemen drove, which were London taxis. He also goes into discuss how Auxiliary Fire service volunteers like Charlie “had been given rigorous training by the London firemen so that, when the war began a number were taken on at once as full-time members at three pounds a week” (London 1091). Rutherford goes on to discuss how many people made assumptions that men who joined the AFS (Auxiliary Fire Service) were dodging joining the army, but the Blitz gave the firemen the chance to show their patriotism. Rutherford discusses the attacks,

“The Blitz was not just a raid: it was an inferno.

Night after night the bombs rained down on the docks. Sugar refineries, tar distilleries, more than



a million tons of timber blazed, exploded and sent up walls of fire that the men in the converted taxis could scarcely hope to quench. But the most terrible fires of all that grim September had been the huge cylindrical tanks of oil that poured black smoke up into the atmosphere for days on end, and that could be seen almost a hundred miles away” (London 1092).

Over 800 firefighters lost their lives during the blitz and 7,000 were seriously injured. The civil defense teams gave their best efforts but the intense bombings of the German Luftwaffe on the port was so great that Londoners had to take up arms and try and put out the fires themselves (Portcities). The Government even put up posters on how to deal with incendiary devices and how to stop a fire from spreading (Portcities). Rescue teams like the Light and Heavy rescue team included people who were too young or too old to be called up for the arm services (Portcities). These rescue teams would go under the rubble of damaged buildings and try and

rescue people who were trapped (Portcities). The heavy rescue teams consisted of people who had worked as civil engineers, carpenters, bricklayers and plumbers before the war (Portcities). With their experience they could safely demolish collapsing buildings and figure out the safest way to rescue people who laid injured under the rubble (Portcities). The



heavy rescue team was also trained to deal with the aftermath of gas attack, but Hitler never used his stockpiles of nerve gas on the people of London (Portcities). To stop the bombers from using the light of the city to guide them, the government ordered a “blackout” (Portcities). Lights were to be turned off or down, special hoods were placed over the lights of cars letting only a tiny slit of light through to the road (Portcities). In 1939, the first month of the blackout, the number of people killed in road accidents doubled (Portcities). ARP wardens enforced the blackout law and would knock on anyone’s door who was not obeying the blackout (Portcities). Although

unpopular, many Londoners obeyed the blackout rule, and it became a sort of ritual (Portcities). Many of the precautions were adopted to boost public morale as much as practical usefulness, because German bombers could use the shape of the Thames River to guide them to their targets (Portcities).

To protect themselves the civilians of London dug up their gardens and built simple corrugated steel Anderson shelters covered by the earth (Portcities). The shelters offered protection from falling debris and shrapnel, but offered no protection from a direct hit (Portcities). The shelters were mass produced and cost five pounds each, and by April of 1940, hundreds of thousands were sold (Portcities). As the raids got worse larger shelters were built, consisting of brick and concrete (Portcities). These shelters offered more protection than the Anderson shelters because they were deeper (Portcities). Many civilians sought refuge in unofficial shelters like under railway bridges, in warehouses, and in the cellars of larger buildings (Portcities). Railway arches were a popular place of shelter but were much more dangerous than they appeared (Portcities). The raids went on night after night, so instead of disturbing their sleep many citizens took up residence in any particular street shelter (Portcities). Londoners moved in the thousands to underground tube stations. On one night in September of 1940, 177,000 people sheltered themselves in the tube stations (Portcities). Deeper underground stations were more safe; on January 11th 1941 a direct hit on bank caused the road above to collapse on to the people seeking refuge in a shallow underground station (Portcities). Sheltering



in the tube was at first looked down upon by the government because it was dangerous, and they worried that people would develop a “Shelter mentality” and never leave the tube stations to go on with their daily lives (Portcities).

Despite the government’s disapproval, popular action ruled and people found refuge in the tube stations. This gave rise to a new feeling of community, because the citizens of

London were taking up refuge together and looking out for one another. Londoners moved in the thousands.

The Blitz of London is one of the most traumatic periods in the history of London. The Germans bombed the city of London into shambles. They destroyed buildings, homes, and took many civilian lives. One of the three main objectives of the bombing was to destroy civilian morale. The Germans did not complete this objective or any of their other ones. They hoped to be able to bomb London so much that it would make it easy to invade Britain, but started to realize that this was not true. The citizens of London pulled together and fought the fires, supported each other, and did everything they could to keep their city together. Edward Rutherfurd discusses the Blitz in his book “London” and uses the character Charlie Dogget to show what the volunteer firefighters went through, ““that’s funny! I thought being a fireman was supposed to be safer than going in the bleeding army,’ he remarked cheerfully as he came down. But as they made their way back to Battersea that morning the thought did occur to his friends

that a man can only have just so much luck, and Charlie seemed to have used up rather a lot of his last night” (London 1092). This quote shows that the firemen during the blitz had just as much to worry about as a man fighting in combat in the war. The Blitz tried to destroy the morale of the people of London but unlike the buildings of the city their morale could not be demolished.

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