**Bombing of Britain Information – SWW**

In July, 1940 the German airforce began its mass bomber attacks on British radar stations, aircraft factories and fighter airfields. During the next three months the Royal Air Force lost 792 planes and over 500 pilots were killed. This period became known as the Battle of Britain.

On the 7th September, 1940 the German airforce changed its strategy and began to concentrate on bombing London. On the first day of the Blitz killed 430 citizens and 1,600 were severely injured. The German bombers returned the next day and a further 412 died.

Between September 1940 and May 1941, the Luftwaffe made 127 large-scale night raids. Of these, 71 were targeted on London. The main targets outside the capital were Liverpool, Birmingham, Plymouth, Bristol, Glasgow, Southampton, Coventry, Hull, Portsmouth, Manchester, Belfast, Sheffield, Newcastle, Nottingham and Cardiff.

During the Blitz some two million houses (60 per cent of these in London) were destroyed and 60,000 civilians were killed and 87,000 were seriously injured. Of those killed, the majority lived in London. Until half-way through the Second World War, more women and children in Britain had been killed than soldiers.

The Blitz is the title given to the German bombing campaign on British cities during World War Two. However, the term ‘Blitz’ is more commonly used for the bombing campaign against London. After the failure of the Battle of Britain, the Germans attempted to bomb London into submission – a tactic used again with the V weapons campaign in 1944-45.

London was especially badly hit. At the start of the campaign, the government did not allow the use of underground rail stations as they considered them a potential safety hazard. However, the population of London took the matter into their own hands and opened up the chained entrances to the tube stations. In the Underground they were safe from the high explosive and incendiary bombs that rained down on London night after night. With one or two exceptions, their confidence was rewarded. The City tube station was hit when a bomb went through the road and fell into it. Over 200 were killed.

Despite blackout restrictions, the Luftwaffe had a relatively easy way of getting to London. They simply had to follow the route of the River Thames – which also directed them to the docks based at the East End of the city. Each night, the first bombs dropped were incendiary bombs designed to give the following bombers the most obvious of markers. After the incendiary bombs, came the high explosives.

London could take it but only because there was little else they could do. Under wartime restrictions, people could not simply leave their homes and move elsewhere. The poorest in London lived in the East End and it was this area that was especially hit hard by bombing because of the docks that were based there. However, most of the families there could do little else except stay where they were unless specifically moved by the government. These families developed what became known as a ‘war-time spirit’. They adapted their lives to the constant night-time bombing.

By May 1941, 43,000 had been killed across Britain and 1.4 million had been made homeless. Not only was London attacked but so were many British cities. Coventry and Plymouth were particularly badly bombed but most of Britain’s cities were also attacked – Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool etc.

The defence of these cities relied on anti-aircraft guns, searchlights and an early warning system. The Royal Observer Corps played a vital role in this as many units were based on the coast and could inform the authorities in London of impending attacks. ROC units based on the West Coast could also given early warning of German bombers coming in from Norway. As Britain had no night-time fighters then, the bombers ‘only’ had to cope with AA fire and avoiding barrage balloons and searchlights.

Britain also adopted a bombing campaign against German cities. ‘Bomber’ Harris, commander of Bomber Command, was a strong believer in aerial bombardment destroying a nation’s morale – hence the attacks. However, the same ‘war-time’ spirit shown in British cities during the raids, was also shown in German.

The Blitz on Britain was called off in May 1941. Hitler had a far more prized target. In the following month, Operation Barbarossa was launched – the attack on Russia. The huge military force needed for this attack included many bombers and two-thirds of the German military was to be tied up on the Eastern Front for the duration of the war.