

## ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY PRESS

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### **SOUTH COAST AIR RAIDS.**

#### **DAMAGE AND CASUALTIES AT A PORT**

A South Coast port, which was subjected to an early morning low-flying raid by German fighter-bombers a few days previously, was twice attacked by bombers during the night of Monday-Tuesday, resulting in further serious damage to property and a considerable number of casualties.

The first raid started with the dropping of a group of powerful parachute flares, which brilliantly illuminated the target area, and then the bombers came at regular intervals for about an hour, first with incendiaries and then with high explosive bombs, most of them heavy ones. The incendiaries started several big fires in waterside premises which blazed furiously and further lit up the district making it a clear target, and in spite of a very fierce barrage from the ground defences, which was continuous as long as there was a plane in the vicinity, the raiders dive-bombed the place, and also scattered high explosive bombs over a wide area, including another town. A second attack came about four hours later and, although this did not last as long as the first raid, it was severe and further damage and casualties resulted. The concentrated barrage prevented the raiders hitting some of their chief objectives, but many buildings in the business and residential parts of the town suffered either complete destruction or extensive damage.

It was by far the worst raid the district has experienced and it is satisfactory to be able to give whole-hearted praise for every branch of the civil defence service. They were faced with an exceedingly heavy task, necessitating a full concentration of all the personnel and equipment available, and untiring efforts amid great danger, but they never faltered and those who had suffered terribly as the result of the bombing were the first to pay tribute to their skill and bravery. The civil defence services were grateful for the prompt and effective assistance rendered by military medical units which came to their aid immediately, without request.

A noble example of devotion to duty was set by the A.R.P. officer in the town which suffered most. This officer (Mr. S.F. Burchell), who lost a limb in the first war, suffered a crushing blow early in the attack. His wife and her parents were killed and his three-year-old son injured when a bomb hit the private shelter in which they were taking cover, yet he refused to leave his post of duty and carried on throughout the night and following day, giving an inspiring and heroic lead to his men. Rescue and first-aid parties and ambulance drivers laboured almost without a pause for refreshment; the firemen, in spite of casualties in their ranks, continued to fight the flames with bombs falling around them; and those responsible for the care of the homeless and the transport of the wounded to hospital worked magnificently. In short, the whole of the A.R.P. personnel came out of the ordeal with every credit. The help of the police, other military units, including the Home Guard, and of the W.V.S., must also be acknowledged.

Among those who lost their lives were Mr. and Mrs. G.H. Cole. Mr. Cole was a county councillor, a former chairman of the district council, and one of the leading business men in the town.

A gratifying circumstance, amid much to sadden, was the way in which the brick shelters in the streets stood up to the bombing. They saved hundreds of lives. Near misses shattered houses farther away, but in almost every case the shelters remained intact and their occupants were uninjured, although in some instances the shelters were bodily moved by the blast. There was one case where a shelter actually fell into a crater made by a bomb which exploded only a yard or two from it, but some of those inside were got out unharmed although several lost their lives.

Practically the only criticism heard was that some of the shelters were not unlocked earlier when they were badly needed. This is a matter which should receive the immediate attention of those responsible. Morrison indoor shelters also saved many lives.

With admirable promptitude the rest centre and billeting services were brought into operation, and proved a great comfort to the many who had been rendered homeless. The gallant helpers in these services did not escape casualties, as Mrs. Hann, who was going round the stricken area with a W.V.S. mobile canteen, was killed during the second raid, and the billeting officer, Mr. E.A. Kersey, a greatly esteemed employee of the District Council, and his wife and child, and the son of the Mayor of a neighbouring borough, who was one of the gallant fire-fighters, who were among those who lost their lives. One bomb which fell in the central business part of the town shattered the public memorial to the men who gave their lives in the last war.

The public generally bore the ordeal with admirable fortitude and pluck, although the state of some of them next morning was pitiable as they tried to rescue precious possessions from their ruined homes, or searched for missing relatives. In one case it was not until 24 hours had passed that a woman discovered her husband in hospital.

After being cared for at the rest centres the homeless were evacuated to other towns and villages in the country, special transport being admirably arranged for this purpose. They were received with every sympathy, and some of those who helped in securing billets for them were constantly at work throughout the afternoon and evening of Tuesday and even until past midnight. Many others left the town fearing another raid the following night, and they could be seen on foot, on bicycles, or in cars, making their way to safety with their portmanteaux and parcels of bare necessities. It was a pathetic spectacle, but everything possible was done to succour them, special billeting offices and feeding arrangements being put into operation in the places to which they trekked. There were numerous amazing escapes from injury. One family whose house collapsed into a crater were extricated unscathed. A 6-weeks-old baby was rescued alive from a wrecked house in which the mother and 14-year-old old sister were killed. A section of the N.F.S. working a pump during the second raid were almost buried with mud thrown up when a bomb burst near them, but not one man was injured, although their motor-van close by was riddled with bomb splinters.

The following experience of a mother and her 11-year-old son is typical of what many had to endure. Almost the first bomb which fell shattered their home. They were sheltering under the stairs and escaped injury, but fearing that the house would totally collapse they left it and sought shelter in a street refuge. On the way they had to fling themselves on the ground three or four times as other bombs whistled down uncomfortably close. They spent nearly an hour in the shelter and several times it seemed as if their last minute had come, as the shelter rocked with concussion as bombs fell near. One scored a direct hit on an emergency water tank standing close to the shelter, hurling portions of it in all directions, but the shelter stood firm. When the raid was over a fellow shelterer, a man who was a stranger to her, asked the mother what she was going to do as she could not go back to her ruined home. She said she would like to get to relatives at a place 5 miles away, so he immediately got out his car and took her and her boy there. On the way they collided with a cow and at another place the car became enmeshed in fallen telephone wires, but in spite of all difficulties the journey was safely completed. Then the motorist Good Samaritan discovered that his petrol had run out, but he was enabled to make the return journey as a motorist living near siphoned out of his own car sufficient petrol for the journey, which was completed safely. The motorist's action was just one example of the fine spirit of comradeship which prevailed among those who had to withstand the terrifying experience.

The value of the training received in the British Red Cross and St. John's organisations by members of the A.R.P. personnel was evident in the able way in which the first-aid and rescue parties tackled their tasks. It was as severe a test as the Civil Defence Services are likely to have, and they came through it with flying colours. The National Fire Service, which has not been without its critics during the long period of change and training, proved its worth in no uncertain manner. The whole system of its training and operation was fully justified and the bravery of its personnel well proved. It was a tribute to their efficiency that the huge fires started early in the first

raid were almost extinguished before the second attack came, and although the second raid hampered their efforts and allowed the flames to get another hold, they had conquered all the outbreaks soon after dawn. The admirable work of the regular and special police must not be forgotten. It was completely in accord with the traditions of the British police service. Necessary firmness was blended with unfailing sympathy and helpfulness.

The following account of an experience of a lady Red Cross ambulance driver and the men attendants accompanying her, will give an idea of what these gallant men and women had to face. It was told by a young lady who has been ambulance driving since the outbreak of the war, the plucky daughter of a gallant soldier who served with distinction in the last war and became a brigadier-general. "We had been sent from an outside district and arrived too late to do anything during the first raid. Just before the second raid came we received orders that we could return to our station and we were about to start when the sirens wailed again and the roar of approaching planes could be heard. Our post was at a cross-roads, and it was not a very healthy spot as a hayrick set alight in the first raid was still blazing close by. It was soon obvious that one of the raiders was making this fire the target for his bombs, as he screamed down in a dive. We thought we were for it, and we all made a dive for a ditch at the side of the road where we lay with our heads well down. A few seconds later came the whistle of a bomb which exploded in a field just over the hedge from where we were lying. We were covered with dust and partially buried under pieces of the bank which were torn away by the blast, but neither of us received a scratch. The blast damaged a house near by and we soon forgot our own danger in getting injured people into our ambulance. Fortunately no other raider selected the burning haystack as his target."

During the first raid bombs which fell wide of the mark did damage and caused casualties in the outskirts of another town. One of heavy calibre fell in the back gardens of villas residences on a main road, completely demolishing three residences, seriously damaging half a dozen more, and doing minor damage to many others. Thanks to what would appear to be providential protection several residents had wonderful escapes and there was only one fatal casualty, the victim being Mr. George Kirkup, well known as a teacher of music and ex-church organist. He happened to be in the kitchen of his house where he lived alone, the nearest part of the house to the bomb, and he was apparently instantly killed when the building collapsed. The rescue squad, who with their colleagues of other branches of the A.R.P. service worked splendidly, regardless of an ever-present danger they knew to be at hand, soon extricated Mr. Kirkup, but he was beyond human aid. They also rescued Staff-Sergeant Chapman, R.A.O.C. from the ruins of his home. He had a marvellous escape from serious injury, suffering only from bruising and shock. His wife and little boy, and Mrs. Davies, the occupant of the other destroyed house, had left to take shelter with friends on the opposite side of the road a few minutes before the bomb fell. The house nearest the three demolished was badly shattered, but the occupants (Mr. and Mrs. H. Thompson) escaped injury.

A most tragic result of the raid occurred when two cottages about a mile from the town, at the junction of main roads, received a direct hit. The occupants of one of the cottages, Mr. and Mrs. W. Chiverton, and two children were rescued, but their other six children, whose ages ranged from 6 weeks to 7 years, including twins 2 years of age were killed. Mrs. Abrook was rescued from the other cottage after being buried under the ruins for six hours. Here a party of soldiers gave much appreciated help in the rescues.

In another place Mr. and Mrs. Adams and their child emerged from their garden shelter after the raid to find hardly a trace left of their home, which had received a direct hit.

The Chairman, Vice-chairman, and other members of the District Council attended the funerals of those who lost their lives when enemy raiders bombed and machine-gunned a South Coast town last week. Five of the victims were buried on Friday week, while the remaining three were interred on Saturday. The police and A.R.P. services were also represented at the funerals, one of which was attended by members of the National Fire Service, who paid their last respects to a colleague. There were also present a number of sympathisers and many beautiful floral tributes were sent.

An enemy aircraft dropped incendiary and high explosive bombs at another coast town on

Monday night. One bomb fell on the cliff face between a disused gas works and the pier, causing widespread destruction of glass over a residential area. A large and modern entertainment hall had only one window broken. A newspaper and printing office had its front windows blown out and there was minor damage to other business properties in the same street. The roofs of several small seaside bungalow huts were shattered. The bomb which caused the destruction fell within 60ft. of one which demolished part of a sea wall last year. Apparently the raider was being chased from the coast and jettisoned its bombs. A few miles out it crashed into the sea. There were no casualties except a few minor injuries from flying glass, but Mrs. Cass, wife of a postman and special constable (who was on duty at the time), collapsed and died from shock.

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#### THE BISHOP'S SYMPATHY.

Writing to the Mayor of one of the towns involved in the attack the Bishop of Portsmouth said: "Though I have not yet heard any details, I witnessed and heard enough of last night's savage raid to realise to some extent the loss and damage which must have been incurred, and I want to send to you and, if it is possible, though you to the sufferers an expression of my deep sympathy. Under the circumstances I fully appreciate your desire to postpone the welcome you were so kindly intending to extend to me on Thursday, for it would indeed be inappropriate to enter upon such an occasion at a time when there must be so much loss and sorrow."