



the super masters of the skies over Britain again.

Night after night the United States listened to the pounding that Britain received. From September 7 to November 3, 1940, heavy bombardment rained on the ancient capital; for fifty-seven consecutive nights horror, destruction and bombing went nonstop in London. People in the U.S. were able to hear and see through radio and the movie newsreels (largely uncensored) the war as it was fought in the English cities and countrysides, besides burning London. The presence of U.S. reporters gave the fighting a headline coverage; overseas correspondents' descriptions could not be ignored in the United States. The main targets of London were the shipyards, transportation arteries, warehouses, and military factories, and somewhere in between came the civilian thousands, the people, the innocents.

By the end of nineteen forty, the British people across the ocean were knee-deep in the throes of war, and remained in it for many months. War made people sick and war killed. Safe and sound Americans received eye-opening history lessons on war life from live radio accounts given to them by brave newscasters, similar to the way brave newscasters reported live from Iraq in 2003. London was a city dotted with shelters and shelter signs, which ranged from a variety of safe places to little itchy-bitsy cocoons of earth and boards—which by today's standards seem unbelievably unsafe.

Shelters were located in store basements, underground restaurants, backyard surface shelters, bank vaults, and the subways called the tubes. During the bombings, Britons awaited the gas-bomb attack, (Some 25,000 casualties were attributed to gas attack in 1915-17.) In open spaces there were gas detectors. These were a flat sheet of brass-colored metal on top of a waist-high post, resembling a sun dial. If and when terrifying fumes of poison descended, it was claimed the metal changed color. Humanity found itself holding its breath for the impressions of poison-gas attacks were horrendous. During World War I, gas had killed over 1000 people directly. However, gas masks and gas attack never turned into the procedure for war which it was thought could have been. Indispensable as it may have seemed, to some, people were

so afraid of gas attack with its invisible way of killing, that agreeing with a ban numerous countries had implemented as soon as the war had started in 1939, Hitler forbade its use as a potent weapon. And, not a single country in the 1940's used it as a potent weapon. From firsthand accounts, it is possible to trace a little bit of life in that insidious world of a war without gas or nuclear fission bombs.

Across the airwaves, the focus of the war was on London, with daily reports personified in the voice of London, America's Edward Murrow. The sound of his radio narration was a nightly event and probably was the most listened to voice of the war at that time. There were other famous newsmen from the United States like W. L. Shirer, Eric Sevareid, Lowell Thomas, and Ernest T. Pyle. With a brief anecdote from 1940-41 by the latter, we give an account of what it was like to live in war-torn Britain. The following narrative was written in 1940 and 1941 for the syndicated Scripps-Howard Newspaper Alliance. It was later turned into a book. [Oddly enough the owner of the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain was anti-Roosevelt and anti-U.S. intervention.] The following are the words of reporter Pyle, known to millions as Ernie Pyle. His words are enscribed from a last outpost of freedom, at that time the last major European country left free.

"...we left the city and its wreckage behind and were out in green country again. Every open field had something in it to keep enemy planes from landing. Some fields were crisscrossed with row after row of tall white poles. Others had rolls of wire. Some had shallow ditches. Some had mounds of earth piled up in rows so geometrically regular that you would have thought they were planting crops....

Every tree, every field, every cricket ground, every house and street seemed to be doing its bit. In the backyards of suburban homes along the railroad tracks there were somber marks of what war has done to the English way of life. I mean private bomb shelters; almost every backyard had one. From the train window a shelter looked like just a large mound of dirt....All this you must remember, was still a long way from London....

Now, dusk came on, and we could no longer see fields nor bomb shelters. The conductor came through and asked us to black out

the compartment. The windows have black shades on rollers, which you pull down and hook at the bottom. The windows themselves are painted black except for a square in the middle, and this is fully covered when you pull the curtain. A faint blue light shines at the top of the compartment.

Thus, we rode on toward London[by train]....

Coventry represents to Americans, and to most Englishmen too, the all-out one-night blitz at its worst. Many other cities have been blitzed since then, but Coventry remains the No. 1 example in our minds.

The Coventry blitz occurred on the night of November 14, 1940. I have read a great deal about it, and have seen many pictures of it. Further, I have seen so much hideous damage in London that you could no longer call me an amateur at viewing wreckage. However, when we drove into Coventry I was horrified.

We walked and drove around for three hours. And, late in the afternoon I realized that I had been saying to myself half out loud...over and over again like a chant: "My God, this is awful."

The center of Coventry is in ruins. All of the hotels are gone. A big newspaper office is a jumble of wilted presses and Linotype machines, with twisted steel girders sagging among them. There are not many public eating places left. You can stand on what used to be a main corner in downtown Coventry, and in three directions see nothing but waste. You can walk what was a street but now you walk in ankle-deep mud....

Nobody has been able to put that night of Coventry's into words. The noise was fiendish. It seemed that the entire city was burning down. They say the final death toll was a little over 500. It seems almost impossible that the loss of life should have been no more than that, for Coventry is a city of a quarter of a million people.

The city had two mass burials, with more than 200 bodies in each. And such is Coventry's opinion of the Germans that they kept the time of the funerals secret...[many] were buried privately by their families. Scores of bodies were unidentified. The only way the death of some of the people was known was from the fact that their families never saw them again. I feel certain that they will still be finding bodies in Coventry long after the war is over, when the final removal of tumbled debris is undertaken.

Daylight found Coventry in a daze. I have friends in Birmingham who were here by dawn. As they drove into town they found people leaving the city by any means at hand. My friends say the

look of horror in the faces of these people was something they can never forget. Everyone was stunned. YOU COULD ASK A SIMPLE QUESTION and they either did not know the answer or would just stare at you. Their minds seemed dead...most of Coventry ruins will have to lie where they are until peace comes. Coventry will not look like a normal city again until many years after the war.

Poison gas drills are held in various suburbs. Recent tests showed some masks out of fit—gas gets in through the side. Four hundred masks a day are being lost or left on subway trains. The newspapers continually berate the public about not carrying masks, yet not one person in a hundred does it.

The whole spirit of the war is different from that of the [first] World War. Over here there doesn't seem to be the pumped-up, hysterical hatred that we had for Germany in the World War. I've heard Germans referred to as "the Boche" only once in London. You don't hear atrocity stories told around here about the Germans...the spirit of bravery in the face of death is different in this war too. You all remember, or at least have read about, the eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-die attitude of soldiers on leave...champagne and girls and on with the dance while there's still time.

That is not true in this war. There is night life in London, but not that daredevil kind of night life. Late parties are rare. Drunkenness is not common. Allied soldiers on leave act much like civilians in peacetime. For in this war it isn't the soldiers who may die tomorrow—it's the people.

Maybe you would like to hear something about Americans in England. Well, there are approximately 4000 of them. If you would tell that to any individual American who lives here he would be amazed, because the most gregarious one probably does not know more than a hundred. Outside of newspapermen, I haven't met a dozen Americans altogether. But 4000 is the Embassy's figure.

Some 1600 of those 4000 want to go home, and have notified the Embassy to that effect. But there is no way for them to get there unless they fly to Lisbon, and you have to pull to get a seat on the plane to Lisbon. Unless the United States sends another ship to Ireland, these people are here for the duration. Most Americans think it is ridiculous that our government refuses to let them travel home on British ships, because of the danger yet forces them to stay here amid constant danger.

Of these 4000 Americans, not more than 200 take an active part

Air Raid Warden: "How many down there?"

Air Raid Warden: "Are there any expectant mothers?"

A Voice: "No, not yet governor.

Give us time. We've only been down here 20 minutes."