

NOTE

This is a preliminary narrative and should not be regarded as authoritative. It has not been checked for accuracy in all aspects, and its interpretations are not necessarily those of the Historical Section as a whole.

Ce texte est préliminaire et n'a aucun caractère officiel. On n'a pas vérifié son exactitude et les interprétations qu'il contient ne sont pas nécessairement celles du Service historique.

Directorate of History
National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0K2

July 1986

~~SECRET~~
CANCELLED

Duplicate

24
30 Apr. 41

Recent Enemy Air Raids on LONDON.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: DHD 3-3

by 602 for DHist NDHQ

Date: NOV 13 1986

Canadian Military Headquarters,
2 Cockspur Street, S.W. 1,
London, ENGLAND.

The Director,
Historical Section,
General Staff,
National Defence Headquarters,
Ottawa, CANADA.

1. A further report is submitted. This deals with the heavy night air attacks recently directed by the enemy against LONDON. These attacks caused a considerable number of casualties among Canadian Army personnel.

THE SITUATION EARLY IN APRIL

2. As noted in my Diary for the month of March, 1941 (already forwarded) the attacks on London on the nights of 8-9 and 19-20 March (I might also have mentioned that of the night of 9-10 March) were followed by another lull in activity. This continued well into the month of April. The enemy continued to attack the ports, including PLYMOUTH and BRISTOL, and provincial industrial towns, though the scale of his effort was rather less than I should have anticipated, judging from the scale of the mid-March raids which appeared to be the precursor of a tremendous air offensive (see my Report No. 17). The capital, however, had few alerts and no heavy raids.

3. In the meantime, the British air offensive against Germany, thanks to the availability of more and heavier bombers, was being carried on upon an increasing scale. HAMBURG and KIEL were heavily struck. On the night of 7-8 April the R.A.F. dropped on the latter what is described in published statements as "the heaviest load of bombs ever concentrated on a single enemy target up to that time"

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: DHD 3-3

by

for DHist NDHQ

Date:

NOV 13 1986

2

(The Times, 23 Apr 41); and on the night of 9-10 April "A heavy attack was made on BERLIN in good weather conditions. Large fires were started near the centre of the city..." (G.H.Q. Home Forces Intelligence Summary No. 255). We have also had repeated official statements to the effect that the R.A.F. has lately been employing against Germany bombs more destructive than any heretofore used. There seems to be no doubt that the Germans have felt these recent blows more than any previously dealt them; and this is the explanation of the attacks on LONDON which are the theme of the present report. The Germans, indeed, ostentatiously declared that the very heavy raid of the night of 16-17 April was a reprisal for the attack on BERLIN, a week earlier, just referred to.

THE RAID OF THE NIGHT OF 16-17 APRIL

4. This raid began as soon as it was dark enough to protect the enemy bombers from observation by our fighters. I did not hear the alert, which must however have sounded about 2100 hrs. When I left the restaurant in LEICESTER SQUARE where I had been having dinner gunfire was already audible. After visiting the Sun Life Building I went home to Bayswater by bus, and before I reached there it was clear that we were in for a heavy raid. From a little before 2200 hrs until 2300 hrs I stood in LEINSTER TERRACE with a soldier and a local A.R.P. warden watching the progress of the attack. Many flares were being dropped; there were many bright flashes whose origin we could not identify, but which I have since heard attributed to a new form of incendiary bomb; our guns and searchlights were very active; the sound of aeroplane motors overhead was almost continuous; and once we were driven to cover by a loud and long-continued swish which at first we took for the whistle of a large bomb but which we later realized must have been the sound of a parcel of incendiaries descending. I heard this sound several times more in the course of the night.

5. While this raid continued, sleep was out of the question (if only because of the engine noises, which frequently suggested that the enemy planes were flying at quite a low altitude). I went out of doors twice more later in the night to watch developments, and in addition visited the roof of the house in which I live, at about 0430 hrs.
6. It was a clear starlit night throughout; the moon rose late. After 0200 hrs there was little gunfire, perhaps because the guns had ceased firing to enable our night fighters to make use of the moonlight to find the enemy. I heard later that some of our gun-positions had been hit. There are many fresh craters in the Parks, probably indicating attempts by the enemy to silence the batteries there.
7. Many fires were started; I noticed a large one about 2200 hrs in the direction of VICTORIA STATION. From the roof, at 0430 hrs, three were visible, including a very large and near one in the region of PADDINGTON STATION.
8. Only about 0400 hrs did enemy activity begin to slacken, and for the first time since shortly after midnight engine noises were not heard. The All Clear finally sounded at 0455 hrs. I had heard the whistle of many bombs, but none actually fell in the close vicinity of my house.
9. The following extract from a War Office Secret Cipher Telegram (Miltel No. 214, 18.4.41) gives an impression of the extent and severity of this raid:

Heavy attack LONDON by 460 aircraft. 66 boroughs affected, main attack central and southern LONDON. Much damage private property. Killed and injured probably 1500. Worst damage and casualties Chelsea and Marylebone. Unexploded parachute mine Charing Cross: bombs Paddington Station, Piccadilly, Admiralty, eight hospitals. Forty large fires, several hundred smaller fires, including gas works Battersea and factories.

Miltel No. 216 revises the figures of casualties: "now reported 653 killed 2015 injured".

10. The following, from G.H.Q. Home Forces Intelligence Summary No. 261 (to 1200 hrs 17 Apr) may also be quoted:

A very heavy attack was launched on LONDON, commencing at about 2030 hours with raids from the CALAIS/GRIS NEZ area. These were followed later by raids from DIEPPE and the SEINE BAY. The period of greatest activity was between 2100 and 2345 hours. With one short lull between 2345 and 0015 hours, activity over LONDON continued steadily until about 0400 hours. The country was clear by 0455 hours... The scale of effort overland is estimated at 500 aircraft of which 480 attacked LONDON.

11. The opinion was freely expressed in the press, and by individuals who had been in the capital throughout the period of bombing, that this was LONDON's worst raid. It was certainly a most unpleasant night. General MONTAGUE remarked to me the next day that if the enemy could contrive to attack on this scale every night for any extended period, LONDON would have to be evacuated.

SOME OF THE DAMAGE

12. An account of some of the effects of this raid, as seen by one individual, may have some interest.

13. Transport was considerably disrupted the following morning. Damage in OXFORD STREET (where Selfridge's store had been in part burned out) necessitated a large "diversion" on the route of the bus that takes me to the Sun Life Building. Before reaching the latter, I saw several actual bomb-craters and a prodigious amount of minor blast-damage and broken glass. (The most characteristic London sound, on the morning after a "blitz", is that of glass being swept up.) A small bomb had come down in the roadway at the east end of PICCADILLY CIRCUS; and a very bad traffic-jam at the foot of the HAYMARKET led me to fear that the Sun Life Building might have suffered. However, it had not been struck, though a number of bombs had again come down fairly close to it, including one on the near end of the Admiralty Arch and one (somewhat more distant) in PANTON STREET, off the HAYMARKET. Steps were being taken to ascertain what casualties C.M.H.Q. had suffered; and officers,

including some who had been bombed out of their homes, were exchanging varieties of experience.

14. One badly-damaged building in the immediate vicinity was that of the Royal Empire Society in NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, on the other side of TRAFALGAR SQUARE. Major FRASER FULTON (R.C.C.S.) (T.L.O., Sigs., C.M.H.Q.) lived in this building and had a narrow escape. A heavy oil-bomb came through the roof, penetrated four floors (the building is of modern steel-and-concrete construction) and exploded on the second floor where a number of the residents had gathered, Major FULTON among them. One of the group was killed and several others injured, and the interior of this fine structure, including an excellent library, was burned.

15. In the afternoon of 17 April I took a walk with the idea of seeing some of the damage. I found that the Charing Cross Hotel had been seriously damaged by fire, and many buildings in the adjacent section of the STRAND had suffered from fire and blast. A bomb had landed on the tram-lines on the VICTORIA EMBANKMENT east of WATERLOO BRIDGE. LEICESTER SQUARE had suffered again, and hoses were still playing on a ruined block of buildings at the corner of CRANBOURN STREET, while there was also a large crater at the opposite (COVENTRY STREET) corner. A cinema theatre on the corner of ST. MARTIN'S STREET, damaged in an earlier raid and under repairs, had been hit again. Two heavy bombs had come down in PICCADILLY, one just at the south-west corner of the Piccadilly Hotel, the other in the roadway somewhat to the west. JERMYN STREET had been badly devastated, and hoses were still playing (a considerable fire was still burning here at 2030 hrs on the evening of 17 April); and practically all the glass in ST. JAMES'S SQUARE was out, a parachute mine (according to report) having come down on a building on the south side. Half of this building was in the Square and half in PALL MALL; very little was left erect.

16. On 19 April I walked towards the City to see something of the damage in that direction. It had been reported in the press that

St. Paul's Cathedral had again been struck, in the north transept. The cathedral was closed, but practically all the glass was out of it. Heavy bombs had fallen in the STRAND between St. Mary-le-Strand and St. Clement Danes; there was one especially bad piece of demolition on a lofty group of old buildings at the corner of NORFOLK STREET.

17. Other buildings damaged in this raid, but which I have not myself seen, include the Royal Hospital, CHELSEA; Guy's Hospital; and a number of churches, among them the City Temple, St. Andrew's (Holborn), and Chelsea Old Church.

18. I understand the Admiralty was hit more than once, apart from the hit on the Arch mentioned above; and Houses in WHITEHALL PLACE close to the War Office were demolished. There were stories of Thames bridges being hit; but apart from some damage on CHARING CROSS BRIDGE (Major FULTON saw something burning here, and I have been told that it was a train) I know of no foundation for this. On 19 April, however, I did see a very small area roped off at the crown of BLACKFRIARS BRIDGE; and this suggested the possibility, at least, that a bomb had gone through the roadway into the river. The unharmed survival of the river bridges is an interesting phenomenon of the LONDON bombing. Incidentally, substitute bridges of timber have already been partially built at more than one point for use in case of need; there is one such half-finished below WESTMINSTER BRIDGE, and another below VAUXHALL BRIDGE. This practice has been carried beyond the LONDON area; there is another half-completed "strategic bridge" near the regular Thames bridge at STAINES.

EFFICACY OF DEFENCES

19. One of the most unfortunate aspects of this heavy raid was the small toll levied upon the attackers by the LONDON defences. Six aircraft only were brought down, three by gunfire and three by night fighters (The Times, 18 Apr 41). The enemy's losses, in

other words, were in the order of one plane out of each seventy-five employed. This suggests that the problem of the night-bomber is very far from solution.

CANADIAN CASUALTIES

20. This raid occasioned relatively heavy casualties to the Canadian Army: the heaviest yet sustained ^{by it} from enemy action in any one incident of this war. At the moment of writing it is not quite certain that the list is complete; but as given to me by "A" Branch, C.M.H.Q., on 28 April it stands at 21 other ranks killed or died of wounds and possibly 49 other ranks injured. There were no officer casualties. A considerable proportion of these losses (probably 9 killed and 25 injured) resulted from one episode - the demolition of the Victoria League Club. This institution (in MALET STREET, W.C. 1) was a popular place of residence for Canadian soldiers on leave. It was wholly destroyed, and three of the ladies who managed it were killed. Some men who were registered there have not yet been accounted for. Five men on the strength of Canadian Military Headquarters are known to have been killed. Four of them, all from the Cipher Office, lived at the Victoria League Club; the fifth, a mechanic at the C.M.H.Q. garage, was killed with his wife, an English girl whom he had recently married, when their house near the garage was destroyed. (The garage itself, in DILKE STREET, CHELSEA, suffered some roof-damage from blast.)

21. Heavy casualties were also suffered in suburban areas. The 3rd Field Regiment, R.C.A., lost 3 other ranks killed, one died of wounds, and 2 wounded in BECKENHAM, a SOUTH LONDON suburb. The 1st Anti-Tank Regiment, R.C.A., lost 7 other ranks killed; this, I am told, resulted from a hit on a vehicle, whereas the 3 Fd Regt casualties were suffered in a billet; but I have so far had no opportunity of getting first-hand evidence on either episode.

22. As soon as it is fairly certain that the list is complete, I shall obtain a memorandum of the casualties caused by this raid

from the Casualty Section, Records Office, ACTON, and will forward it.

23. These casualties, combined with the simultaneous reduction of the accommodation available in LONDON for soldiers on leave (the Overseas League was damaged on the same occasion) have raised the question of restricting leave in LONDON. At the moment, I am told by Major R.G. RUDOLF (A.G. 5, C.M.H.Q.), the practice is not to authorize men of Canadian units to visit LONDON (except on business, or merely for the purpose of passing through) unless they will not be staying at clubs. This restriction will obviously be difficult to enforce, but Major RUDOLF believes that it has materially reduced the number of Canadian soldiers ordinarily in LONDON. Whether it will be continued after additional club accommodation becomes available he does not know. At the moment, there is a definite accommodation problem.

24. From the foregoing it may be seen that the statement in my Report No. 8 (para. 20) that LONDON had lost much of its attractiveness and that it was doubtful whether many soldiers would henceforth spend their leave in the city was premature. The city has, of course, become more attractive with the passing of winter and the lengthening of the hours of daylight; and it now seems probable that a good many Canadian soldiers will continue to come to town, in spite of the threat of bombing, as long as they are permitted to do so.

THE RAID OF THE NIGHT OF 19-20 APRIL

25. The Germans announced this destructive raid, with (literally) a great fanfare, as a reprisal for the attack on BERLIN, and said that similar reprisals would answer any further damage to "cultural objects" inflicted by the Royal Air Force. As it happened, however, the R.A.F. had already "laid on" another raid on the German capital; and this was delivered on the night immediately following the great

LONDON attack. This raid on the night of 17-18 April was described as the R.A.F.'s "heaviest attack of the war on BERLIN" (The Times, 19 Apr 41). Of this attack, G.H.Q. Home Forces Intelligence Summary No. 263 remarks, "A heavy force of bombers attacked industrial targets in BERLIN, dropping a large tonnage of high explosive bombs and many thousand incendiaries."

26. In retaliation for this (according to German accounts) the enemy again made a heavy attack on LONDON on the night of 19-20 April. The following description is extracted from G.H.Q. Home Forces Intelligence Summary No. 264 (to 1200 hrs 20 Apr):

The enemy launched another heavy attack on LONDON, which was carried out in two waves.

At about 2035 hours the first night raids approached LONDON in considerable force. Raids continued in regular streams up to 2315 hours when no new raids were plotted coming in.

At 2340 hours a second wave of raids commenced and at about 0100 hours these were joined by further raids all of which converged on LONDON.

The activity to LONDON continued steadily until 0410 hours when no new raids were plotted incoming. LONDON was given the "all clear" at 0445 hours and all enemy aircraft had left the country by 0455 hours.

The force employed by the enemy on this occasion (a preliminary estimate) is given in G.H.Q. Home Forces Intelligence Summary No. 265 as 350 long-range bombers.

27. The same raid is described as follows in Miltel No. 217 (21.4.41):

Night 19/20th. Prolonged raid London, 450 aircraft. Casualties probably less than 16/17th raid. Some damage railways, docks, Waterloo Bridge. Few large fires. Many parachute mines southern Essex, much damage to property. North-west Kent many fires.

It will be noted that the two estimates of the enemy force vary fairly widely on this occasion.

28. This raid gave the impression of being considerably less severe than the previous one, and was certainly less widespread, though the description in para. 26 above indicates that it

followed much the same general pattern. The weather was less favourable, being overcast, with (in the early evening at least) a dash of rain in the air. I heard no bombs come down near my house, and I managed to sleep from about 0200 hrs. There was no damage, so far as I am aware, in the immediate vicinity of C.M.H.Q. It appears to have been mainly concentrated in East and South LONDON.

29. The alert on this occasion sounded at 2120 hrs. There was considerable gunfire.

30. The only Canadian casualty known to "A" Branch, C.M.H.Q., as having resulted from this raid is the death of one man in the East End.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

31. Since the night of 19-20 April there has been no heavy raid on LONDON. There have been a number of alerts, and on the night of 26-27 April there was some gunfire, but no large attack developed. Nor has there been any further heavy attack by the R.A.F. on BERLIN. It has been announced that heavy bombs were dropped there on the night of 25-26 April, but the city was not "visited in force": see The Times, 28 Apr 41.

32. There has been some discussion in the English press on the policy which should be followed in bombing Germany, and there is, of course, some demand that the R.A.F. should resort to reprisal raids against civilian objectives. Some time ago the Bishop of Chichester proposed that an attempt should be made to arrive at an agreement with Germany whereby both parties would refrain from the night bombing of cities. The Bishop was considerably abused as a result; but I note in The Times of 28 April a letter signed by Professor GILBERT MURRAY and Mr. BERNARD SHAW which remarks that "The recent bombardments of Berlin and London, though quite successful as such, have not produced any military result beyond infuriating the unfortunate inhabitants", and concludes, "The more we

endeavour to think it out the more we find ourselves driven to the conclusion that whatever may be said from the military point of view for our treatment of Bremen, Hamburg, and Kiel, there is nothing to be said for the demolition of metropolitan cities as such, and that the Bishop of Chichester's plea for a reconsideration of that policy is entirely justified."

33. I have seen, as yet, no reaction to this letter, though it will doubtless provoke one. It will be a matter of interest, particularly to the inhabitants of LONDON, to see whether the recent exchange of heavy blows against the belligerent capitals remains an isolated incident, or whether such blows will continue.

EFFECT OF THE BOMBING ON THE LIFE OF LONDON

34. As noted above, LONDON has become, with the lengthening of the hours of daylight, a more cheerful place than it was when I wrote my Report No. 8. More legitimate theatres are now open; and the hours of their performances approximate a little more closely to those of peacetime. Many now begin at 5:00, 5:30, or 5:45 p.m.; but I see none advertised for an hour later than that last-named, except a revue opening on 4 May which will begin at 6:00. With the further lengthening of the days, and the addition of a second hour of "Summer (Daylight-Saving) Time" which goes into effect on 4 May, it seems likely that the theatres will be able to revert nearly to normal hours of playing.

35. It will be gathered that there is now little fear of day bombing. There are occasional daylight alerts, but there has not been a day raid of any consequence on LONDON since my arrival here at Christmas. During the hours of daylight the life of LONDON is virtually the normal life of peacetime.

36. The long lulls even in night raiding had led, as I have previously noted more than once, to a considerable revival in the evening life of the West End. It was interesting, however, to note that after the raid of the night of 16-17 April the public

showed a distinct (and certainly a very natural) anxiety to be out of the West End before nightfall. Buses were crowded as dusk approached; and restaurants which had lately extended their hours of business now contracted them again. After such an unpleasant experience, it would have been surprising if there had not been at least a few indications of public nervousness.

37. Since writing the preceding paragraphs, I have visited WATERLOO BRIDGE to see the damage caused in the raid of the night of 19-20 April (above, para. 27). The damage seems to have been limited to some relatively minor injuries to girders and to the footway of the temporary bridge which stands alongside the main stone structure which has been under repair for years past. Traffic was moving across the bridge on 29 April, and there was no indication that there had been a serious interruption of it.

C.B.S.

(C.P. Stacey) Major,
Historical Officer, C.M.H.Q.