

NOTE

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Directorate of History  
National Defence Headquarters  
Ottawa, Canada  
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Triplicate

**CANCELLED**

Present Phase of the War. Recent  
Enemy Air Raids on Britain.

27  
23 May 41

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

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

DECLASSIFIED  
Authority: DHD 3-3  
by One for DHist NDHQ  
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1. A further report is presented. This is intended to provide the Official Historian with a sort of aide-memoire on the present state of the war as seen from this country, additional to my previous report No. 17, dated 18 Mar 41. Particular attention is paid to recent enemy air attacks upon this country, including the heavy LONDON raid of the night of 10-11 May.
2. Since Report No. 17 was written the anticipated German attack on Greece has materialized (beginning on 6 April) and in spite of the aid extended to Greece by Britain both the Greek mainland, and the whole of Yugoslavia, were speedily overrun. The forces of the pro-Axis government in Iraq, set up as the result of a recent coup d'etat, have attacked the British troops in that country. Germany, with a view to assisting this movement, has effected at least a partial occupation of Syria with the permission of the increasingly pro-German French government at VICHY; and more recently a heavy air-borne attack has been launched against the British and Greek forces in Crete, where fierce fighting is believed to be in progress at the moment of writing. General WAVELL's army has lost most of the ground gained by its brilliant victories in Egypt and Cyrenaica, though a portion of it has successfully defended TOBRUK; and German and Italian forces are operating in the vicinity of the western frontier of Egypt. The Mediterranean area is still the main theatre of active war; and in this area there are no Canadian troops except the Engineer detachment employed on the defences of GIBRALTAR (see my Report No. 17, para. 18).

# ENEMY AIR ACTIVITY OVER BRITAIN

3. During the past few weeks the enemy has continued the policy of heavy aerial attacks on ports and industrial cities, combined with intensified submarine and air activity against British shipping in the Atlantic. As suggested in my Report No. 17 (para. 3) there has been a large increase in civilian casualties since February, the announced totals being as follows (The Times, 19 May 41):

	KILLED	INJURED	DECLASSIFIED
March	4,259	5,557	Authority: DHD 3-3 by <u>COE</u> for DHist NDHQ Date: <u>NOV 13 1986</u>
April	6,065	6,926	

During a period of heavy night raiding late in April and early in May, the points most heavily struck appear to have been PLYMOUTH, <sup>BELFAST,</sup> HULL, PORTSMOUTH, CLYDESIDE and MERSEYSIDE. The most unpleasant feature of these raids was the fact that they were not only heavy but persistent, the same town being struck on several successive nights. PLYMOUTH suffered particularly heavily; The Times of 1 May 41 says of the attack of the night of 29-30 April, "The severity of the raid lay in the fact that it was the second time in succession and the fifth night in nine that the city had been the enemy's main objective."

4. Somewhat more recently, MERSEYSIDE and to a somewhat less degree CLYDESIDE have suffered similarly. The following quotation from Miltel No. 237 (War Office Secret Cipher Telegram, 10 Apr 41) may be said to speak for itself:

Merseyside. 7th successive raid the worst, chiefly BOOTLE - position grave. Homeless 20,000. 11 of 12 rest centres out of action resources exhausted. Plans to evacuate 12,000 tonight. Large unofficial exodus.

It must be added that the next day's telegram (Miltel No. 238) says of MERSEYSIDE, "Situation greatly eased by organised evacuation. Morale excellent." The damage, however, has been very great. Mr. JOHN BIRD of the Southam newspapers, who has lately

may /  
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returned from the north, told me on the evening of 22 May that he was inclined to think the damage in the LIVERPOOL area the worst he had seen. The port facilities especially, he said, had been very heavily hit; and I note that Miltel No. 239, in a general review of the week ending 8 May, remarks, "several ships sunk in air raids Liverpool Belfast..."

5. So far as LONDON is concerned, it may be said that the enemy's recent policy has been to attack the capital seldom but very heavily. The two heavy raids of the nights of 16-17 and 19-20 April (see my Report No. 24) were followed more recently by another Saturday night attack, that of the night of 10-11 May.

6. I do not propose to deal with this heavy raid at great length, but some account of it should be given. The moon was full and the night very clear. The alert sounded at 2301 hrs (soon after dark under the present regime of two hours of "Summer Time"). Gunfire was very heavy in spite of the fact that our fighters were very active. Several times during the night I heard machine-gun fire overhead, and on various occasions saw the trails of tracer bullets. Once I saw tracer flying in both directions, indicating an exchange between planes; this was followed by the appearance of what may have been a small fire in one of the machines.

7. This raid was somewhat more spasmodic than that of the night of 16-17 April, and it showed a tendency to "taper off" towards the end, though there were still fierce and frequent bursts of bombing and gunfire. The nature of the sounds heard strongly suggested that the enemy was dive-bombing; and I believe that I heard more bombs come down than on the night of 16-17 April. I spent some time in the streets and had occasion to admire the calmness and composure of the civil defence workers. I finally went to bed about 0445 hrs. G.H.Q. HOME FORCES Intelligence Summary No. 285 (to 1200 hrs 11 May 41) states that "The



country was clear of enemy aircraft at 0545."

8. This raid caused very heavy damage in LONDON. The description given in Miltel No. 238 (11 May 41) may be quoted:

Over 60 London boroughs affected in 5 hour raid. Widespread damage, especially to Central, South Eastern and Eastern districts. Buildings hit include Westminster Hall..., Chambers of Houses of Parliament and British Museum. Direct hits Paddington St. Pancras stations. Dock and residential property suffered extensively...

Miltel No. 239 adds, "About 2,036 fires reported"; and Miltel No. 240 gives further details: "Casualties now known to total 1,000 killed. Buildings damaged included Buckingham Palace War Office. Few fires still burning nightfall 12/13th May. Morale very high." In view of the fact that by 19 April the known fatal casualties in the LONDON raid of the night of 16-17 April totalled only 653, (see Miltel No. 216) it is clear that this more recent raid was exceptionally lethal; it would not be surprising if the casualty list was the highest of any raid of the war so far.

9. It is satisfactory to record, however, that the enemy paid a much heavier price than in previous attacks. G.H.Q. HOME FORCES Intelligence Summary No. 286 estimates the German scale of effort on the night of 10-11 May at 350 long-range bombers, adding, "It is estimated that 320 different aircraft operated and that 30 of them carried out two sorties." The enemy casualties are given as 34 machines destroyed, 5 probably destroyed and 11 damaged. This may be compared with the 6 machines shot down on the night of 16-17 April. Again (compare my Report No. 17, para. 14) it seems clear that the bright moonlight had much to do with this result; but it seems clear also that this new record signifies a decided improvement in the efficiency of our defences against the night bomber.

#### CANADIAN ARMY CASUALTIES

10. As on previous occasions, this raid of the night of 10-11 ~~April~~ <sup>May</sup> caused a number of casualties to the Canadian Army. The

Casualty Section of the Records Office, ACTON, informs me that 4 other ranks were killed and 4 wounded. There were no officer casualties.

#### THE RECENT LULL

11. More recently there has been a decided lull in enemy air activity. Not only has LONDON been left alone since this heavy attack, but the country as a whole has had a breathing-spell. On the night of 14-15 May, and again on the night of 21-22 May, there were no enemy aircraft over Britain (Evening Standard, 22 May 41); and activity during the interval was on a restricted scale. This is attributed by the press partly to bad weather over the Continent, partly to the need for reorganization following the period of heavy raiding culminating in the great LONDON attack, and partly to the possibility that a portion of the enemy air strength in northern Europe may have been temporarily diverted to the Mediterranean, where the Germans at the moment are employing very large air forces.

#### BRITISH COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

12. As noted in my Report No. 24, the offensive power of the Royal Air Force, represented by bombing raids on Germany and German-occupied territory, has lately been on the increase; and one or two facts in this connection may not be out of place. I note (Miltel No. 236) that on the night of 7-8 May, 127 tons of bombs were dropped in the course of an attack on the battle-cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau at BREST. On the night of 10-11 May the R.A.F. dropped 107 tons of high explosive and 10,772 incendiaries on HAMBURG. (Miltel No. 239). On the night of 5-6 May, the R.A.F. attacked MANNHEIM with 123 aircraft. (Miltel No. 234); and on the night of 8-9 May, with an unspecified number of machines, it delivered "mainly against shipyards and industrial centres HAMBURG and BREMEN" its largest attack of the war (Miltel No. 237).

These figures appear to indicate that while the British raids have scarcely as yet attained the scale of those directed by Germany against this country, they are now very formidable. In view of the great distance which British bombers must traverse in order to reach BERLIN, we must assume that the raids made upon the German capital have been considerably less in intensity than those upon western Germany just mentioned. It appears, indeed, that no attempt has been made to deliver a really heavy blow against BERLIN since that of the night of 17-18 April (see my Report No. 24); the city has, however, been a secondary objective on more than one occasion.

13. The only other field where British forces can be said to be actively on the offensive at the moment of writing (apart from the operations in progress against RASHID ALI in Iraq) is East Africa, where the liquidation of the Italian defenders is now almost completed.

#### THE QUESTION OF INVASION

14. Almost the whole of the Canadian Army Overseas remains concentrated in Britain, with the Canadian Corps still occupying the position of readiness south of the THAMES which has been noted in earlier reports. In these circumstances the possibility of a German attempt at invasion of the British Isles is one of very special interest. At the moment, however, little new light can be shed upon this possibility. Recent intelligence summaries do not indicate that it is considered that such an enterprise is likely in the immediate future. Enemy preparations continue, but appear to look to an eventual rather than an immediate attack; the concentration of air strength and armoured forces likely to be the prelude to an invasion attempt has not been observed. War Office Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 90 (to 1800 hrs 7 May 41) remarked "June to September is the period now spoken of as likely..." and there appear to have been no important developments

in this matter since that time. Should the Germans succeed in the air-borne operations now in progress in Crete, the likelihood of an attempt upon this country may be increased.

15. Such an attempt still appears to be the Canadian Corps' best chance of action this summer; though it is always possible that in the event of a German enterprise in the Iberian Peninsula (certainly a not improbable development) Canadian troops might be employed in this theatre.

C.B.S.

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