

RECORD OF ENEMY ACTION IN BOROUGH

What Civil Defence has done in Christchurch

C.T. January 13, 1945

THE first full story of enemy air activity over Christchurch is told in the following statement issued to the Christchurch Times by the Civil Defence Controller, Councillor T. Markham, compiled from the official log books and from notes recorded by Brig.-General J. G. Browne, C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O., J.P., Chief Warden, whose assistance in supplying the detail is gratefully acknowledged by the Controller.

Whilst Christchurch was not in itself a military target, there were very good reasons for expecting attacks by the enemy. Though, most fortunately, these expectations did not seriously materialise, the local Civil Defence Services had onerous duties to perform and acquitted themselves with honour.

Amongst other worries there was the possibility, after Dunkirk, that the enemy might choose to attempt a landing along the low cliff line between Steamer Point and the mouth of the Harbour.

C.D. WAS READY – AND WAITING

Christchurch Borough, and the line of the two rivers, was a well marked route for enemy aircraft raiding into England. Thus, what the inhabitants had to stand, and what kept Civil Defence on duty for such long hours was the continuous passing over of wave after wave of enemy machines, making either for London or the Midlands, in which case they followed the line of the River Avon, or, when making for South Wales, Bristol, or the big manufacturing towns of Lancashire, they took the line of the River Stour.

Passing over took some time, sometimes more than 1½ hours, then came the period when they were attacking their objective, and then the return, and it was not until the last machine had passed over that "all clear" came, for a very good reason that the last machines might off-load any bombs left. For this reason Civil Defence were on duty without a break for long periods at night, the longest being: —

January 4/5, 1941: 12 hours 39 minutes.

November 17/18, 1940: 11 hours 14 minutes.

January 17/18, 1941: 10 hours 50 minutes.

and a large number of times more than 8 hours at a stretch.

In addition there were periods when, for a number of nights in succession, Civil Defence were up, very often when the siren had not gone, but a "yellow" or "purple" message had come, which at that time put Civil Defence on duty. For instance, in 1940, they were on duty each night from August 26-29th, followed after one night's interval by the nights of September 1-7th, and again, November 28-December 4th. In 1941, from March 10-22 was continuous night work, April 7-18 only one night without an Alert, and from April 22-March 17th every night, and the same from June 4-12. Civil Defence, Wardens in particular, were always under strength, so that these long hours were a considerable strain on the personnel, who were continuously on duty, one third of whom were over 50 years of age.

In addition to all this, there were the occasions when the First Aid, Rescue Services, and the Canteen turned out to help places as far away as Plymouth.

There were 957 Alerts in Christchurch, the largest number in one month being 55 in August, 1942. The number of warnings of all kinds was 3,569. This includes "yellows," which stopped on October 28th, 1941.

As regards incidents, there were 31 in Christchurch, involving the dropping of:—
89 high explosive.

24 U.X.B. (19 were taken away by the B.D.S. or blown up. The others exploded within 24 hours).

2 oil bombs.

9 incendiary bomb attacks.

4 machine gun attacks, 2 by day and 2 by night.

In casualties Christchurch was remarkably lucky, having only 4 killed and 23 wounded. In destruction and damage to houses, the Borough had about the same proportion as most others, i.e., 1,008 in all, excluding glass.

The first yellow warning was on the night of June 20th, resulting in a wonderful dressing-gown parade of those who had no time to dress. The first siren was on June 27th, but not until July 27th did Christchurch get its first bomb, an H.E. followed by I.B.s on the same spot on August 16th, which were quickly extinguished by the Wardens. This was followed by three lots of bombs on the mouth of the harbour, and then an attack on Somerford area, resulting in the first experience of dealing with U.X.B.s at Stoney Lane, Humphrey's Bridge, and Sauflands. This one was found later on.

August 29th was an attack on Christchurch itself, the enemy put down incendiary bombs on St. Catherine's Hill, causing loss of a certain amount of equipment. They also machine gunned the area, and the next lot of incendiaries were into the town, firing several houses in High Street. One I.B. which hit the Town Hall, fell between the Mayor and the Sub-Controller. The Fire Brigade were up quickly and dealt with the burning buildings, and the Wardens, Police and Special Constables, and a number of civilians got straight on to the incendiaries and extinguished them. They covered a wide area round the High Street and Castle Street, in the gardens and houses between Wick Lane and the Quay. Two went through the roof of Priory Cottage.

The prompt way in which they were dealt with and the fires started on St. Catherine's Hill which was blazing, undoubtedly drew the attention of the enemy from the town, where they could be heard circling overhead and bombs could be heard exploding north of the town, by the area which was on fire.

Then came a few days' interval, followed by bombs on Mundeford on the night of September 5th, I.B.s on the 8th, and next night bombs on Highcliffe and Friars' Cliff, one of these being an oil bomb. Some damage to property was done in these raids.

The 15th September seems to mark the end of the Battle of Britain, the day the enemy had such disastrous losses. At any rate an interval of about a fortnight occurred.

On September 29th several bombs were dropped on the bottom of Roeshot Hill, cutting the road and utility services. One of these was an oilbomb, and one was a UXB., which exploded next morning. Two residents who had been prodding into the crater had left half-an-hour before the bomb went off, whilst those working on the repair of the road and utility services had not yet arrived.

The same night the largest bomb so far seen fell on Chewton Common, in the open, doing very little damage.

A string of H.E.s was put down on October 5th, one being in Mundeford School playground. A lot of property damage occurred.

A daylight machine gun attack took place on October 8th, three machines flying low over Highcliffe, and shooting at various targets, while others coming round via Burton, killed with a bomb a resident of Christchurch, who was out for a walk.

On November 16th the Borough sent help to Bournemouth who had a bad land mine attack. This was followed by a big attack on Southampton, when help had to be given all round, with Rescue, First Aid, Ambulance Parties, and the N.F.S. The W.V.S. Mobile Canteen, which had just been presented by America, did its first of several tours to bombed towns. Refugees came in on following days, and were billeted in the area.

The last two incidents in the year were bombs on December 12th in King's Avenue, and again on 21st in Cedar Avenue. These were probably meant for Christchurch Town, the second to cut the road over Iford Bridge. This closed 1940.

1941 was a year of great enemy air activity until the latter part of July, from which date little occurred until the beginning of 1942. This was due probably to the enemy concentrating their full

effort in Europe against the Russian front. But for the first seven months the Borough went through very long periods on duty, the night of April 8th being notable for all stations being off the air, due to a concentrated attack on the Midlands.

Refugees came again into the Borough after the attacks on Southampton and Portsmouth in April, and had to be looked after.

On the night 9-10th May an enemy machine dropped a number of H.E. and a flare at Somerford. Most failed to explode due to the low altitude. This was followed 2 days later by H.E. bombs being dropped on nearly the same spot. There was also a machine gun attack.

On June 16th a string of H.E. was put down short of Somerford, while on the 26th June a string of H.E. was put close to the position of the searchlight north of Highcliffe, the last of which, a U.X.B., was close to Walkford Hotel.

On July 8th a large number of incendiaries were put down in Highcliffe, destroying one residence and a haystack, and damaging another. The machine was brought down in the sea.

This was the last incident of this year, and the "yellow" message was cancelled on October 28th.

In the year 1942 there were more siren warnings than before, the period April 1st to October 31 having 293 sirens in the 214 days. The only two incidents were the machine gunning of the Quay on March 8th, when one casualty was caused, and some H.E. into Holmhurst Estate.

There was less still in 1943, due probably to the enemy being hard pressed in Russia and North Africa. However, on the night of May 7-8 incendiary bombs were put down in Highcliffe, damaging some property. There was also one H.E. in Woolhayes, which did some damage, but that night there was a heavy storm of wind and rain, and though the explosion was felt, hardly anyone heard it.

On the night of August 12th H.E. were put down in Walkford, causing 3 casualties and a lot of damage to property, in a field close to the railway bridge over the Avon, and a U.X.B. in the river, close to the West Hants Water Co.

Christchurch Civil Defence went in to help Bournemouth in the serious daylight attack on May 23rd.

In 1944 enemy visits became fewer and fewer, ending with a purple warning on July 30th. There was, however, one last incident on May 15th, when 2 or 3 machines dropped bombs on Purewell, in Somerford and Highcliffe, 4 casualties and a very considerable destruction of property was the result.

The Flying Bombs did not reach the Borough, such as came this way being about 8 miles short.

On June 29th occurred the unfortunate accident at Foxwood Avenue. Some machines of the American Air Force were destroyed. The casualties amounted to 17 killed or died and 13 injured, and a great deal of destruction to property. Warden A. H. Bagshot, of Christchurch Civil Defence, died of his injuries. He had done good work as Sector Warden all through the war, and it was most unfortunate that he was killed just as it ended for this part of England.

In connection with this incident, a very complimentary acknowledgement of the services of Christchurch Civil Defence was sent to Regional Headquarters by the American Chief of Staff at Headquarters IX. Tactical Air Command, and sent to the Controller, Christchurch Civil Defence.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Brig.-Gen. Browne, C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O., J.P., Chief Warden, for his assistance in supplying the details from the official log books and his own private notes.

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Controller.