

As Bess Walder Cummings (scroll down 75%) and her younger brother traveled aboard the SS *City of Benares*, to Canada, the vessel was torpedoed by a German U-Boat (U-48) on the 17th of September, 1940. It sank in about thirty minutes.

Braving a cold and stormy sea, and clinging to a life raft for about 19 hours, Bess (who died in August of 2010) survived. So did her brother. Nearly all of the other children were lost.

Returning home to London, the two Walder children learned that German bombers were dropping ever more fire bombs onto the city. Digging holes in the ground, to serve as shelters, people tried to save themselves and their families.

During the day time, however, a bit of normalcy returned. Captured German pilots were shocked to see people going about their business in London. But as evening approached, Londoners once again made their way to underground shelters.

Walls of flame continued to erupt, everywhere, night after night. What was it like to live in a city which became a nightly inferno? Phyllis Damonte tells us:

I think I was going dead. I think I was gradually going like a zombie, just doing what I had to do automatically. But I can't think I had any feelings.

From mid-November, 1940, German bombing raids expanded from London to other large cities, such as Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, Sheffield, Southampton. Then - on the 14th of November - 454 German bombers flew to Coventry.

The devastating attack came at night. Reg Buggins, who lived through it, recalls the utter horror people in Coventry experienced:

Forget what you've read in the papers. Forget what you've read on radio and television. I can tell you now if someone would've come up to me and said, "Look - you're going to surrender," I would have said, "Thank God!" If that had applied to the whole of the country, yes - I think we would have said, "Enough is enough - let's go for peace. Let's surrender."

Coventry was decimated, its people suffering beyond belief. One day after the bombing, Coventry residents conducted the largest mass burial ever to take place in Britain. Hardly a family was untouched by death.

On the last day of the Blitz - May 10, 1941 - about 3,000 Londoners were killed. That very night, Rudolph Hess arrived in Scotland (where he'd flown his plane). He presented a confused peace offer, but Churchill turned him down. Instead, he ordered that Hess be locked-up.

After many anguish-filled months, the Battle of Britain was over. Although the country had endured incredible attacks against its capital, and other cities, the British people had not surrendered.

Realizing an attempted invasion of England might also fail, Hitler turned east - to Russia. Before the war was finally over, the Allies would commence their own firestorm attacks on German cities - like Dresden.

An airman from the Luftwaffe's 2nd Bomber Wing, who was ordered to continuously take part on the bombing of London, wrote the following in his diary:

Above the h___ of London, no more single fires, just huge conflagrations. And we are adding our bombs to this inferno. Shocked, on this mission, I ask for the first time - WHY?

See, also:

Battle of Britain - London Blitz

Goering's Goal - Bomb Britain into Submission

Battle of Britain - Death and Dogfights

Battle of Britain - Shelter in London's Underground

Credits:

Clip from "The Battle of Britain," a documentary of the London Blitz which began on September 7, 1940.

Executive Producer:

Guido Knopp

Writer/Director:

Ralf Piechowiak
Alexander Berkel

Clip online, courtesy YouTube.

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Battle-of-Britain-Devastation-in-Coventry>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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