

DOVER: SEPTEMBER 1940

WAR-TIME MEMORIES

JOE HARMAN

When asked about my recollections of September 1940 I turned out an old diary and I realised we had been through Dunkirk and that shelling had started; the Battle of Britain was raging around us but no bombs had fallen on the town itself. The barrage balloons had arrived to protect us as fighters were needed elsewhere. German planes came in and shot down the balloons and the crews gallantly put them up again, after dis-entangling the cables from our chimney-pots.

The real danger was from stray cannon shells and one of the bus drivers had a narrow escape in Barton Road when a shell entered his cab; the scar shewed on the dash panel until the vehicle was taken out of service. The bombs up till then had been dropped in the harbour or on the surrounding hills, although we did have Air-Raid alerts because of the battles in the air, and we saw and heard bombers going through to attack the airfields.

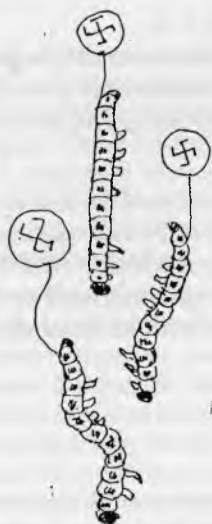
On the 4th I noted that I went to the allotment to collect potatoes, carrots and beans. There were no cabbages as the caterpillars had reduced them to bare stalks. We were reliably informed that this was one of Hitler's secret weapons!

On the seventh and eighth we had bombs on the outskirts. Things began to change on the ninth as there were bombs at Temple Ewell, possibly aimed



War Damage, c1940: Wellesley Road runs from L to R. Camden Crescent is in the foreground, Liverpool St. heads off to the east. The Grand Hotel and Granville Gardens are at extreme right and at lower left is the site of the new car park where once stood the "Dover Stage". Left of centre is the Dover Patrol Hostel where many sailors died.

at the railway line. Soon after six we had a bout of shelling, and another at about 10.30. The first batch of six appeared to come from separate batteries, judging by their arrival times. I noticed that one included a hit on the Burlington Hotel and I am convinced that the German gunners could see the tower from their side. I now possess a photograph which was taken when a shell struck the building.



The 10th was quiet as I read in my diary that I went to bed from two till eight p.m. On the 11th we had a rude awakening but fortunately we had taken cover in our East Kent blast- and splinter-proof shelter when a stick of bombs was dropped with the last bomb landing a short distance away. When the ground had stopped shaking, and the dust had settled, we emerged to view the devastation.

I grabbed the First Aid Bag and went along an alley to find the 'Sussex Arms' was just a heap of rubble. We then went through to Liverpool Street and found that the 'Grand Hotel' had lost a complete wing. I ran up St. James's Street to get help from a First Aid Post, skirting a bomb crater, and reported the extent of the damage. I was politely told that they were awaiting instructions from Central Control. Some houses opposite the garage were damaged and we concentrated on getting the residents out of cellar shelters. One very large lady was extricated covered in soot and taken into our shelter. She told us exactly what she would do to Adolph if he ever showed up in Dover. The office girls did their best to clean her up and then produced a welcome cup of tea; I



One of Hitler's Secret Weapons

applied a sticking plaster in appropriate places. The next day Council staff arrived to demolish the houses by attaching a rope from a lorry to the window frames. This method proved useless as the buildings were old and timber-framed with modern brick fronts. I should have mentioned that shelling started at about the same time on the 11th in the Western Dock area.. After 10.30 that night we had bombs in the Folkestone Road area near 'The Engineer'.

26 The 12th was reasonably quiet but on Friday the 13th we had three bombs in the Elms Vale area without warning. A bus was standing at the terminus near the recreation ground and the crew had the presence of mind to throw themselves on the floor. Every window was blown out. I remembered bringing this bus (JG 9917) back from the paint-shop in Thanet the week before. My diary records that I developed a carbuncle on my right arm and I still have the scar to prove it!

On the 15th I was on duty with the Auxiliary Fire Service at the peak of the Battle of Britain and I remember this was the day when most planes were destroyed. I had a week off work because of the carbuncle and at the same time my mother became seriously ill.

It was fairly quiet with various incidents until I returned to work on the 26th when we had shelling in the afternoon, and shells fell again on the 27th. On Monday 30th I went to see our doctor about Mother and he said that she would not last the night through. I came up Ladywell and soon after I reached home we had a bout of shelling which included a direct hit on the Fire Station.

POSTSCRIPT:

On October 2nd we had bombs in the Clarendon Street area with casualties but on Friday 4th, the day of the funeral, the only incident was that barrage balloons were brought down in high winds. We felt very exposed as we wended our way up to Charlton Cemetery.



The Grand Hotel
in 1947, five
years after it
was bombed.

The site is now
occupied by the
west end of
The Gateway

photo:
Dover Express