

## Air Raid on Southend

Here is an actual newspaper report straight after the air raid on Southend on Sunday 12th August 1917, at just after 5pm, when visitors and residents were leaving the beaches and taking the train's home.

### TERRIBLE AIR RAID ON SOUTHEND

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### GHASTLY SCENES OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

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KILLED : 32.      INJURED : 43.

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On Sunday evening, after an interval of two years and two months, bombs were dropped on Southend by enemy aircraft, dealing out death and destruction of the most terrible description.

The following were the casualties -

KILLED : 32.

Men, 10.   Women, 13.   Children, 9.

INJURED : 43.

Men, 13.   Women, 18.   Children, 12.

Of the killed 15 were residents and 17 were visitors. The deaths occurred approximately in the vicinity of the following places: -

- GER Station      15
- Milton Street      9
- Guildford Road      6
- Lovelace Gardens 2

Total                      32

The death roll by Tuesday had reached 32, and the injured number 43. The greatest numbers were killed by a bomb which fell on the path in Victoria Avenue. The path on the opposite side was thronged with holiday makers, some of whom were on their way to the railway station, while others were churchgoers, and a number were making purchases at a newsagents shop and an adjoining restaurant. Two of the victims were blown through the doorway of an empty shop, a boy was killed, and four sisters and brothers were injured. One of the first on the scene was Alderman Martin, of Southend, who had motored in from Rochford while the firing from the guns and the bomb dropping were in progress. He came upon a heap of torn and mangled humanity. Twenty people in all being involved, and at once conveyed bodies to the mortuary. In the roadway was a little girl who was on her way to a Salvation Army meeting and who was killed. Another victim was a mother of two children, the latter escaping with injuries.

One bomb shattered the glass of the houses in Milton Street, in which another bomb killed Charles Humphries aged 60, a railway guard who has been in the employ of the Great Eastern Company since 1889. The bomb also killed a woman Salvationist. Just beyond an aerial torpedo completely demolished a house in Guildford Road, two of the occupants of which were killed. Three people were buried under the debris and half an hour later were rescued. All had taken shelter under the staircase. part of the aerial torpedo was found lodged between the chimneys of a house opposite.

Two more bombs fell near Lovelace Gardens, one shattering a house and the other falling on an allotment. A mother and daughter were killed, but a man who was sitting at tea with them escaped. An aerial torpedo fell on a piece of waste land off London Road, Leigh, near Lord Roberts Avenue, close to a restaurant, but did not explode. Parts of three other aerial torpedoes have been recovered by the police. The glass of many houses in Cliffsea Grove was shattered, but no one was killed, and only a few slightly injured.

Several bombs fell on Westcliff, one in Imperial Avenue and another in the garden adjoining the garden in which a bomb fell in 1915. These bombs as they fell emitted yellow fumes. one which fell close to Glen Red Cross Hospital covered part of the road with yellow powder, believed to be of a highly poisonous character.

The Mayor, Alderman Francis, accompanied by Superintendent Ellis, made a tour of the town and also visited the hospitals to which the injured were conveyed, and the mortuary and storeroom close by, where the bodies of the victims lie awaiting the inquest. The haphazard way in which the bombs were dropped points to the fact that the enemy aircraft were making a

hurried departure after being encountered by British aeroplanes to the north of the town. the raiders, who numbered nine, disappeared from view over the sea at a considerably greater height than when they were over the town.

A horse and dog were killed at Leigh, but though there were some extraordinary escapes, there was no loss of human life. The bomb which dropped on Cliffsea Grove practically wrecked three houses and seriously damaged three others. The occupants, who had taken covering the passage, were unhurt. Special Constable Heap, who was going round the district on his bicycle calling up the other Specials, was about 40 yards away when the bomb fell. He was blown from his machine, but was unhurt beyond a shaking. An aerial torpedo dropped on a house in Lord Roberts Avenue, and went right through all the floors. The horse referred to was the property of Mr. Rolfe, greengrocer, Leigh Road. It was struck by flying fragments from a bomb which exploded in Grasmere Avenue. The dog was killed in Sunningdale Avenue.

The streets have been thronged with visitors who became more sightseers and relic hunters. Wherever a bomb had fallen, there the crowds collected, impeding traffic in spite of the efforts of the police and special constables to keep them moving. The shattered shop windows had been boarded up, and on these boards shopkeepers were exposing their stock-in-trade.

"We have never been so over-burdened with telegrams," said an official at the post office, "and as for telephoning you cannot hope to get through to London in less than three hours."

A resident, who witnessed the whole raid, said, "I was at my house in Victoria Avenue, in the garden at the time. When the enemy planes arrived I - and I believe everybody else - took them for own machines, because they were flying so low. Nobody thought of taking any notice of them until the bombs began to drop, and then it was too late, but there was no panic."

Another resident said: "The greater part of somebody's allotment was transferred into my back bedroom. When the raid was over, and I emerged from my shelter under the stairs, I found every window in my house broken, all the doors blown open, and vegetables scattered all over my back rooms, by a bomb dropped 50 yards away. The place was full of suffocating sulphurous smoke. The noise was terrifying, and yet my little son slept through it all."

The police have been supplied by the Corporation with gas helmets for use in such emergencies.

Two German aeroplanes were destroyed. One was a machine of the Gotha type and the other a seaplane. The raiders were evidently making for London. On sighting the large number of our aeroplanes, which were sent up against them, they turned abruptly and made the best of their way out to sea again, dropping some bombs at Southend and unloading the rest when out at sea. The action of the anti-aircraft guns was of great assistance to our fighter squadrons.

#### "MILITARY WORKS" OF SOUTHEND

The German official report stated:- One of our aviation squadrons yesterday attacked England. Bombs were dropped with visibly good results on the military works of Southend and Margate, at the mouth of the Thames. One of our aeroplanes is missing. - Admiralty, per Wireless Press.

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The following victims had been identified up to the time of the holding of the inquest on Tuesday:

- Emily Gladys Cornish, his daughter, aged 13
- Victor William Sullivan, aged 10, of 173 Bostall Lane, Abbey Wood
- Charles Humphries, aged 70, of 46 Coleman Street, Southend
- Anne Collier, 30, of 12 Elizabeth Road, Thorpe Bay
- Dorothy Evelyn Rice, 14, of 69 Princes Street, Southend
- Jessie Camilla Galloway, aged 17, of 127 Elderfield Road, Clapton
- John and Leah Cohen, both aged 60 husband and wife, of 21 Holbrook Road, Plaistow
- Mary Ann Donaldson, 34, of 2 Princetown Street, Holborn
- Elizabeth Mary West, aged 55, of Lovelace Gardens, Southend, and her daughter, Gladys West, aged 13
- Oliver Watson 30 and Beatrice Watson 27, husband and wife, of 180 Shaftesbury Avenue, Thorpe Bay
- Lena Gooding, 7, of 11 Guildford Road, Southend
- Alfred Lewis, 74, of 41 Langton Road, Brixton
- Frederick Hawes, 14, of 12 Guildford Road, Southend
- Jessie Orton, 28, and daughter aged 6, of same name, of 8 Glass Street, Three Colts Lane, Bethnal Green
- Arthur Hills, 45, of 19, Oak Road, Northumberland Heath, Erith
- James Grant, 10, of 16, Broadway Market, Southend
- George Henry Crees, 70, of 16, St Ann's Road, Southend
- Clara Gavell, 19, of Sandringham Hotel, Westcliff
- Walter Henry Batty, 42, and his wife Edith Kate Batty, of 19, Brigadier Avenue, Enfield

- Florence Mason, 14, of 9, Burnaby Road, Southend
- Violet Mann, 40, of 58, Myddleton Street, Clerkenwell.

The following is a list of places where bombs fell:-

- On pavement in Victoria Avenue, near High School for Boys (this caused terrible havoc)
- In front of the High School
- On pavement in the High Street
- At the rear of the Labour Exchange
- Two in Milton Street (killing several)
- Guildford Street (killing three)
- Crowstone Road, Westcliff
- Ceylon Road, Westcliff
- Boston Avenue, Southend
- Southchurch Road, near All Saints Church
- Southchurch Avenue, near Glen Hospital
- Allotment at Bournemouth Park Road
- Allotment, Christchurch Road
- Ilfracombe Road, Southchurch
- Allotment at back of Lovelace Gardens, Southchurch
- House in Lovelace Gardens (2 deaths)
- Surbiton Road, Southchurch
- Cliffsea Grove, Leigh
- Lord Roberts Avenue, Leigh
- Allotment at Woodfield Park Drive, Leigh
- Sunningdale Avenue, Westcliff
- London Road, Leigh (near Leigh Hall Road)
- Lansdowne Avenue, Leigh
- Grasmear Avenue, Leigh
- Allotment at Fernleigh Drive, Leigh
- On the foreshore
- Two in a field in Rochford
- Garden at North Street, Prittlewell
- Field at Eastwood
- Field at Little Wakering

About 40 bombs were dropped in all. Rather more than 30 houses were damaged. A great many windows were smashed in many parts of the town.

The German aeroplanes came from a north-easterly direction and as they neared the town our own aeroplanes were seen in pursuit of them.

Seven cows in a meadow off the London Road, Leigh were killed. A workshop at Leigh was completely shattered, but the staircase remained in tact. Some potatoes which had been growing on an allotment at the rear of Lovelace Gardens were thrown into the rooms of some of the houses whose windows were shattered.

One of the granite sets, weighing from 6lbs to 8lbs., which formed part of the tramway track opposite Porter's Grange, was discovered in a conservatory in Boscombe Road, nearly a quarter of a mile away.

All the windows of the Technical School were smashed, and also those of the Hotel Victoria, one of the principal hotels. A number of bombs also fell at Westcliff, but the loss of life was mainly in the poorer districts of Southend.

Mrs Allen and her three children of Silverdale Avenue, Westcliff, were refused shelter at a house on the northern outskirts of Prittlewell. Bombs and pieces of shrapnel shells were falling at the time.

A warning was issued to the police and fire brigade at 5.22, but the inhabitants had no warning beyond the verbal advice from policemen to take cover. At the time of the raid the streets were full of holiday-makers and people going to church - it is estimated that there were nearly 50,000 visitors.

Five people were buried in a house which was demolished, but four out of five were rescued alive. A mother and daughter living in Lovelace Gardens were killed in their house, and the husband, who is a cripple, was badly injured. A man was blown to pieces in Milton Street.

Several aerial torpedoes were fired and one of them damaged a house at Leigh, but did not explode. The inhabitants had a miraculous escape. One bomb fell near All Saints' Church and broke gas and water mains; and another, from which a yellow powder was emitted, fell near the Glen Hospital, and another a few yards away in an allotment.

In the Broadway, which was thronged with people making their way to the stations for the home-going trains several bombs fell. The fronts of shops were blown out, people dropped right and left, and goods came tumbling out of the windows and were scattered over the pavement among the victims. The killed and injured were taken away on barrows, in motor cars and on fire engines. No large building was demolished but there was a great deal of destruction of smaller property. In all, the raiders were over the town about 10 minutes. At one time nearly 40 machines were in the air, some being our own airmen, who were firing on enemy machines as the latter were dropping bombs.

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Source:

<http://www.southendtimeline.com/airraidonsouthend.htm>