

London in the Blackout Amazingly Black and Quiet

This is the fourth of a series of articles about conditions in Great Britain and other countries visited by a group of Canadian newspaper editors. It was written for the weekly newspapers of Canada by their own representative on the tour, Hugh Tompkins, of The Pergus News-Record.

First impressions may not be accurate, but they are always interesting.

The first thing that any visitor to England would see is the damage done by the bombs. I was no exception. The airport where our plane had dropped us down on British soil was interesting in its way, but much like a dozen others I had visited in Canada. There were only two apparent differences: the planes were of different types, though there were a few familiar Avro Ansons, and the buildings were protected against the blasts from bombs dropping nearby.

The customs examination was brief, though the examiner did show some interest in the things I had thought it necessary to take to England with me. I had a short brush with the lady censor. She took away all the letters I had carried from Canada and appeared to be horrified that I had taken along a map of the British Isles. Apparently, I had unwittingly committed a grave crime and she said she must confiscate it.

Evidently, a few girls get that way when given some brief authority. I met censors several times during the next six weeks, but none like that young lady. She even went so far as to take away two picture postcards I had bought in the Azores on the flight across the Atlantic. After a brief argument, in which the customs man took my part, I got the map back. The letters and post cards arrived by mail at my hotel in London a week later, after being censored.

First Impressions of Bombing
It was only a few miles to the nearest city, a nonport on the west coast of England. I had never been across the Atlantic before, so I watched with interest for the things I had been told about so often—the small fields enclosed by hedges, the slated or tiled roofs, the little locomotives pulling long trains of tiny wagons. Nothing really seemed strange, for photography had made them all familiar. Only the barrage balloons floating over the nearby hills showed that England had changed.

As our car entered the city, we all looked around curiously for signs of damage. Rumors in Canada said that this ancient port was practically destroyed. German versions said that the dock area was rendered useless. As we crossed a bridge over the river, I looked at the shipping and saw no sign of damage to the docks. The first blitzed house stood on a corner. Or it had stood on the corner, for not a thing was left except a pile of bricks in the basement. The houses on either side seemed undamaged, except for a new boarded-up window, but the corner one was gone as cleanly as though it had been carved out with a big knife.

I thought to myself: "This is exactly what I expected to see: it looks just like the pictures."
In the next block, another house had been hit. It wasn't as thoroughly destroyed. One side wall remained, and up it in irregular intervals were the fireplaces which had once supplied a bit of heat to its room. Part of the floor of one upstairs room hung in the air, with a bed on it.

Again there was that feeling that this was just what I had expected. It remained while we drove down a long street, with half a dozen houses missing at more or less regular intervals. After that, my feelings began to change. Perhaps it was the ruined churches. Several of them had nothing left but blackened walls. On the main business street, many stores were without windows; others were hollow shells.

It made me angry before long. This

was not only dark, but quiet as well. This didn't seem like a railway station. Outside, not a light allowed in the city.

Somehow, our hosts from the British Council found us, and they knew what to do. In a few moments, they had a porter hunting for a taxi. When he came, we never saw, but he came back with two, and in the light of later experience, that was something of an achievement.

Our taxi driver was old and his cab was ancient. Four persons and their luggage seemed like too much of a load, but we entrusted ourselves to him, hoping he knew what to do. The only outdoor lights in London are the traffic signals and the shelter signs. Even the traffic lights are covered, except a tiny cross in the centre. The shelter signs have only a dim "S" showing on them.

An Unusual Quietness
The feeling persisted that this could not possibly be the world's largest city. Sometimes the taxi would stop and a bus or some more taxis would go across the intersection. Each had one dim headlight, fitted with shutters so that it was a circle of semi-darkness on the pavement. The windows of the buses were covered. They were just dim outlines as they passed.

The tiny red cross at the corner would disappear and be replaced by a green one and the driver would start up again. Some of the editors, familiar with London in the past, asked him questions about the locality. Only once, at the corner of Hyde Park, did one of them guess correctly.

I am told that London in normal times is noisy at night, though not so bad as New York. In the blackout, it is quiet. There seem to be no private cars. Taxi and bus drivers must find their way largely by instinct.

The cab stopped under some kind of roof. A man with a tiny pocket flashlight helped us out and called for someone to take the bags. We passed one by one through a revolving door and emerged suddenly into the bright light of a hotel lobby.

There was something familiar about the place. The feeling persisted even after I had been taken to my room with its Roman bath and Royal Doulton fixtures, reminders of past splendor. Then I remembered. I had seen this famous hotel in moving pictures long ago.

Bomb Damage in London
The next morning, I saw London for the first time. Our hosts from the British Council came around in an old car and drove us around the central part of the city, particularly that part of Old London which had been destroyed by the Great Fire in 1666 and rebuilt better than it had been. Now it has been destroyed again.

East of St. Paul's Cathedral and north of Fleet Street, there is an area of almost a square mile with hardly a building standing. Perhaps you have seen that remarkable photograph which shows the great dome of St. Paul's standing up above a mass of smoke and flames, while in the foreground the walls of ruined houses are silhouetted against the fire. I had wondered sometimes if that photograph was not faked. In a room of the Press Club in London, I saw the original. Walking through the ruins of the old City of London, it is still easy to picture that terrible night.

Many of the walls which stood up in that blackened area since the big blitz last December have been torn down by demolition squads. Where there are basements, they have been cemented and turned into water reservoirs for fighting future fires.

This was an area of office buildings and publishing houses, with a number of fine old churches and some of the most famous administrative buildings. It was burned in a concentrated blitz one week-end before the Londoners had learned how to fight the incendiary bomb. I don't think it could ever happen again. An incendiary bomb is small and light. A large bombing plane might carry a thousand of them. They are showered down by hundreds and are just heavy enough to go through a slate roof. It is two minutes or so before they burst into flame. Every second counts. The incendiary bomb can be conquered in the first two or three minutes. After that, it takes the fire brigade to do anything about it.

Strangely enough, the things that touch the heart of the observer in desolate areas like this are the small things. In ruined houses, it is dolls or other toys lying around in former office buildings. It is battered typewriters piled up, a dozen or so together, or some other evidence of the normal life that was once carried on there.

Yet even in the midst of this desolation, I had the feeling that the German bombers had failed. They had not even tried to hit military targets. It is thought that they tried to wipe out the whole of London's fire fighting apparatus. They didn't succeed. The fire brigades were massed in that small area and more bombers came over, dropping high explosive bombs. Suddenly they stopped coming. It is said that a mist arose back over the Channel and it was feared they could not return safely. Whether that was the reason or not, London's fire fighters escaped to fight another day.

Seeing other parts of London later, I felt again and again that the German bombers had failed. They destroyed thousands of houses and stores and offices and dozens of

churches. They did get many factories along the Thames. But they not only failed to frighten the British people; they also missed many of the most tempting targets.

For instance, every bridge over the Thames is in operation. It is said that one has been hit though thousands of bombs have gone into the water in an attempt to cut traffic. There are temporary bridges which can be quickly finished if any bridge is destroyed. They have never been needed.

I wandered through the dock area near Tower Bridge one day. The little houses in the East End have taken a bad punishment. In two places, I saw vacant lots piled high with bricks that must have come from hundreds of houses. But the docks were still in operation as usual with convoys going out the Thames. It was obvious that Tower Bridge itself had never been hit. The Tower of London has lost only a corner of one small bastion.

There hasn't been any bombing in London lately. It is now five months since the last bombs have fallen on the capital. Only once while I was in London did an enemy plane ever come near the city. From the roof of a newspaper office, I watched the flashes of the anti-aircraft guns away to the east. The German never got through.

There was bombing going on all that time, but it was around the coasts of Britain. I came through a bombing one night in Boulogne, and will tell of it in a later story. But conditions have obviously changed. The Germans no longer have superiority in the air. Defences are stronger. It doesn't seem likely that the British will be "blitzed" again as they were last winter; actual invasion seems impossible.

Is Your Guest For Christmas Man On Leave

Make Your Holidays Smoother, Soldier or Airman Feel at Home—Here Are Hints from Two Sources

BY ADELAIDE KERR
Associated Press Staff Writer

So you're going to have a sailor, a soldier or airman, or perhaps a couple of them, for Christmas or New Year's.

So are thousands of other people. Many thousands of Canadian servicemen will be on leave for the Christmas or New Year's holidays and lots of them away from home. (The Y.M.C.A. or other agency will help you get your guest if you want one and don't know how to go about it.)

"Suppose you're going to have as your house guest your cousin's son whom you haven't seen before; how would you entertain him?" I asked a veteran sergeant at one headquarters. "Don't plan his program too closely. Give a couple of hours a day to himself, so he can read or take a walk. And give him a chance to go to church."

"You ought to have a Christmas present for him on the tree but it shouldn't be too expensive. You could give him a pipe, cigarettes, handkerchiefs, a shaving kit, a toilet kit or a good knife. But don't give a wallet; he might not have anything to put in it."

Chances to Relax
Then I asked one of the servicemen what would make him happy as a guest.

"A chance to relax," he said. "Soldiers like to relax from discipline. Get up at noon and get to bed about four. We don't like to have too much planned and we don't want to be doted over. A few parties, dinners or dances are enough on a leave or furlough. They don't have to be big parties either."

"Most Canadian boys are athletic. They get a big kick out of games—hockey and bowling and things like that. You'd make a big hit with solid taking him to see a few fast games. And, of course, the movies, the theatre and some not-too-heavy books."

"If a man is visiting you for several days and doesn't know anybody else in the town, he would like to meet some boys and girls of his own age. But if his girl lives there, he wants plenty of time to see her."

Speaking of Food
"Don't talk to a fellow about war. Don't ask how long he'll be in, or when he thinks he's going to fight or 'how's the food?'"

"And speaking of food, you can do a lot to make a serviceman happy with some good home-cooked food, especially after he has been out on manoeuvres eating out of a mess kit. Broilers, chops and steaks are always welcome, because you don't get many of them—and cakes and cookies and pies and hot breads."

"And it always makes me feel good to know there is a ham in the ice box where I can go and get a snack any time."

The Week at OTTAWA

Specialty Written for The Acton Free Press by
BY ALAN HARVEY
Canadian Press Staff Writer

OTTAWA, (CP)—The two divisions of the government's double-barrelled program for fighting inflation—price and wage control—stand side by side this week in general interest to Canadians.

Since Prime Minister Mackenzie King announced first details of the program in mid-October, the intricate price-relling policy has been regular front-page news; now the equally intricate wage stabilization scheme appears due for its share of the spotlight.

Labor Minister McLarty has announced that the original order-in-council covering the wages plan has been amended to extend the cost-of-living bonus to virtually all industrial employees, as well as the wage "freezing" policy. Interpretations of the new regulations are expected shortly from the 11-man National War Labor Board.

The employers and employees who have been baffled by some of the provisions of the original order, will probably get clarification of the wage policy this month.

Exceptions Removed
The amendments remove previous exemptions affecting employers in the building and construction industries with less than 10 employees and other employers with less than 50.

The order now affects every class of employee except Dominion, provincial and municipal employees, employees in agriculture, horticulture, fishing, hunting, trapping and domestic service, and employees of some non-profit institutions. Nine provincial regional boards will be appointed to help administer the policy instead of the five originally planned.

Developments in the price control field have included announcement of seasonal increases in retail prices of coal and coke; setting of maximum wholesale turkey prices at 31 cents a pound for grade A birds in carlots at Vancouver and 32 cents at Montreal and Toronto with other grades to find their own level in relation to the retail ceiling prices.

Export Control
Meantime Trade Minister Mackenzie disclosed that export trade is being jeopardized by scarcity of certain strategic materials and hinted that additional reductions in quantity of some goods available to the domestic market may have to be accepted. John H. Evans, of Montreal, newly-appointed head of the Export Control Committee, will help formulate, will help to carry out the government's export policy. One of his jobs will be to reorganize Canada's export control machinery.

In the military field, moves are being made toward formation of a Canadian parachute corps sometime next year. Details are lacking but it is understood the corps, if it is set up, will be an army formation, drawing entirely on volunteers willing to take risks greater than those faced by the ordinary soldier.

Parliament Reopening
With Parliament's reopening little more than a month away, political attention was centered at the week-end on the choice of a successor for Justice Minister Ernest Lapointe. This interest was sharpened by the recent visit to Ottawa of Premier Adélard Godbout of Quebec.

Following Mr. Lapointe's death several weeks ago Mr. Godbout's name was advanced but the understanding is that the Quebec Premier came to recommend another man for a federal cabinet post, possibly one of his colleagues.

Most frequently mentioned as the man we may have in mind is Hon. Philippe Brin, leader of the Quebec Legislative Council. He is a prominent Montreal lawyer.

Bader's Escape Answered Prayer

Legless Air Hero Met His Waterloo Over Land as Mother Asked

LONDON, (CP)—Wing Commander Douglas Bader, legless Royal Air Force fighter pilot now a prisoner in Germany, had such faith in his mother's prayers that he made her promise to pray that if he was ever ordered to bail out that it would be over land and not the sea.

He feared he would be lost if he fell into the water, because he could not climb into a dinghy with his artificial legs, his mother said. Her prayers were answered—Bader, who holds the D.S.O. and bar and the D.F.C. and bar, baled out over France and damaged one of his legs which was repaired when the R.A.F. dropped a new pair.

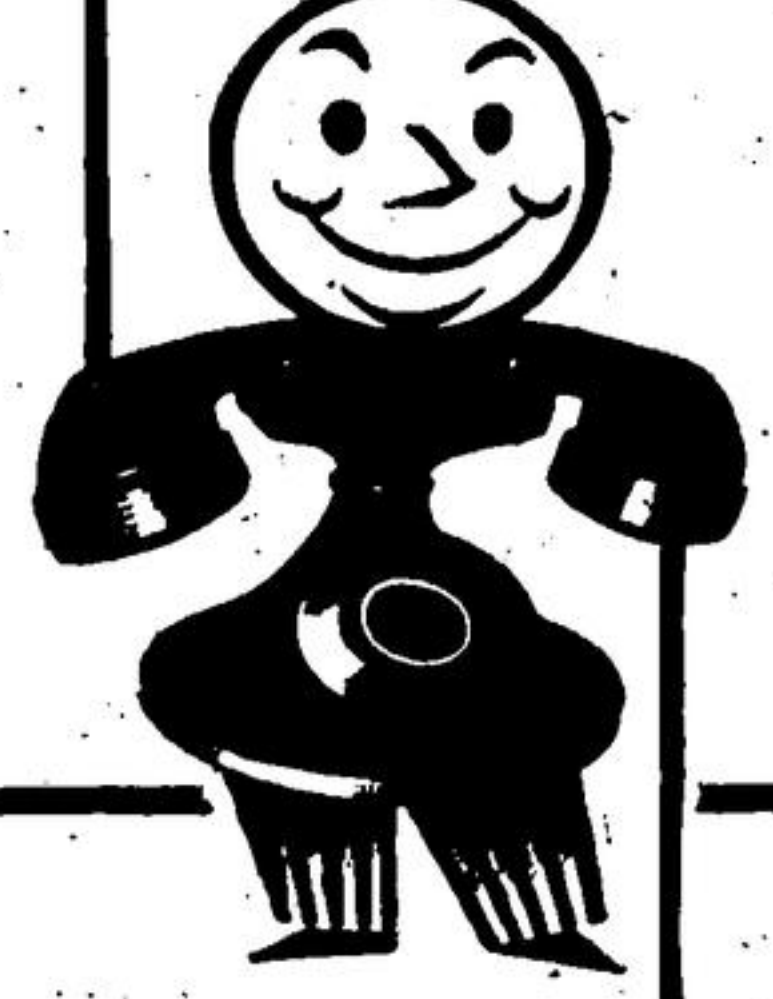
Crippled Pole To Fly Again

LONDON, (CP)—A pilot whose left arm was shot off in an aerial combat but who will soon be in action again with an artificial arm, was one of 74 members of a Polish wing of the Royal Air Force decorated by General Sikorski, Prime Minister of Poland and commander-in-chief of the Polish forces.

The awards, to men of a wing which has shot down more than 250 German planes, were the Polish Victoria Cross—the Virtute Militari—and the Cross of Gallantry—the Krzyz Walcznych.



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