

# What was the Blitz?



It was dangerous living in a big British city during the war. Cities were the target of German aircraft that flew over at night and dropped bombs.

## The Blitz

The heavy and frequent bombing attacks on London and other cities was known as the 'Blitz'. Night after night, from September 1940 until May 1941, German bombers attacked British cities, ports and industrial areas.

It started at 4:56pm on 7 September 1940: the air raid sirens wailed as the German Air Force, the Luftwaffe, launched a massive raid on London. (The enemy attacks from the Luftwaffe were called Air Raids.)

Over 350 bombers flew across the Channel from airfields in France and dropped 300 tonnes of bombs on the docks and streets of the East End of London.

London was bombed every day and night, apart from one, for 11 weeks. One third of London was destroyed! The bombs destroyed many buildings burying mother, fathers and children in the rubble...

During the first month, the German Air Force dropped 5,300 tons of high explosives on London in just 24 nights!

Overall, during the Blitz 32,000 civilians were killed and 87,000 were seriously injured. Two million houses (60 per cent of these in London) were destroyed in the Blitz.



## Air Raid Sirens

People were warned of a likely air raid by loud sirens, positioned in different parts of towns and cities. During the blitz, they became an almost daily part of life. The sirens made a very loud and long signal or warning sound. For an alert, the siren sound pitch rose and fell alternately. When people heard the siren they would stop what they were doing and ran for a shelter.

The All Clear (when everything was safe again) was a continuous sound from the siren. Not every alert brought a raid, and sometimes raids happened when no alert had sounded.



## Other Cities

Other cities and towns were also heavily bombed, including Swansea, Cardiff, Bristol, Southampton, Plymouth, Birmingham, Coventry and Liverpool.

One devastating raid on Coventry in November 1940 was the biggest air-raid the world had ever seen. 4,330 homes were destroyed and 554 people killed. At one point during the night 200 separate fires burned in the city.



## Types of Bombs

Different types of bombs were dropped from the enemy planes. There were:

- H.E. (High Explosive) bombs of various weights
- Incendiary Bombs, also termed Fire Bombs as they caused fires
- Oil Bombs

One in every ten bombs that fell was a 'dud'. This means that the bomb did not explode on impact. But some bombs had a delayed action fuse, which meant they could go off at any time. This meant that it was almost impossible to tell which bombs were which. People had to be evacuated until the bombs had been made safe. Fortunately, the Blitz ended in mid-May 1941.

## Further Air Attacks

From 1944, two new types of weapons were used, V-1's and V-2's, which were catapulted into the air from camouflaged launched sites in northern, occupied Europe. They had a rocket type of propulsion to launch a war head. They were known as flying bombs.

1. V1's (or "Doodlebugs") had no pilot and made a droning noise. As soon as the droning noise stopped people had 15 seconds to escape from the powerful blast that followed. Almost 9,250 V1's were fired against London, but less than 2,500 reached their target. Many V1's fell short into the sea, others fell in the countryside. About 2,000 were destroyed by anti-aircraft gunfire; 2,000 by fighter planes, and almost 300 by barrage balloons.
2. V2's arrived without any warning sound. They also flew very fast and high up in the air; much too high to be shot down by the anti-aircraft guns of fighter aircraft.

