

## The Bombing of New Milton on 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1940

Extract from the diary of Eric Wyeth Gadd. Published as *Hampshire Evacuees*. 1982. Mr Gadd was a school master from Bitterne who came to New Milton in the war along with a number of Bitterne Park school children who were evacuated from Southampton to safe New Milton. Mr Gadd joined the New Milton ARP unit and was the senior fire guard.

### 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1940

*Our first taste of modern warfare. At about 6.30p.m., without warning, a raider dropped H.E. and incendiary bombs on the centre of New Milton. Rober Adlard's (builder's merchants) shop was immediately ablaze.*



*At the time of the attack the children were at Smith's, Dad was on the Rec and the rest of us in the dining room at home. My most vivid memories are the shriek of the bombs, a terrific report and finding myself on my hands and knees: then, a split second later, distant shouts and the crackle of burning. I waited a second or two, while splinters, pebbles and dust fell around, then dashed to Smith's: every room in their flat empty – then downstairs- all safe in the shelter. Back to report – then fetched the children out of the shelter.*

*The fire raged for three hours, but the firemen had it under control by dark.*

*To bed at 10; hostile aircraft still overhead between 10 and 11 +, but no sirens.*



### **24<sup>th</sup> August 1940**

*Have begun to realise the extent of the damage. – about a dozen shops demolished in Station Road and (worst feature) many casualties. Adlard's shop completely gutted by bombs and (it is said) by machine gunning. Throughout the day many and varied reports as the number of people killed.*

*Later: the last query has just been settled by the publication of the list of dead: 24. Considerable unrest at the failure of the siren system: it is quite certain that some of those 24 lives would have been saved if a warning had been given. A pall of stunned silence hangs over everything.*

*Jack Richards and I have checked all our Bitterne Park children during the morning and found the roll complete.*

*Siren at 9.20pm – over at 10. Then at 11.45 began our longest warning yet, lasting till 4.15 a.m. Kiddies all settled down to sleep in shelter.*

*Everyone's still jumpy.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers War Dairy.** This battalion was posted to New Milton to defend this area of the coastline from invasion.

Aug 40.

<u>Place</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Hour</u>	<u>Summary of Events and Information</u>
New Milton	7-14		Local inhabitants are very kind & do a great deal for the troops. WVS do sterling service in the ----- fire.
	14		A draft of 100 O.R's arrived from JRO 9TC. They seem a very good lot indeed.
	15-23		The front is still being worked on hard. We have the Defences as follows, 1/3 on duty, 1/3 on 5 mins notice 1/3 on pass. We find this works well. The Btn is very happy here and playing havoc with the hearts of local ladies.
	23		Bombing of New Milton. All the time we've been on activities has been s----r interest, especially at night, but not today the
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New Milton	23	1800	C.O & ----- observed Bosche two engine bomber flying inland at about 5000 feet.
		1830	Plane heard flying overhead. Almost immediately explosions heard from direction of village. C.O & L/-- immediately proceed to village, where there is an awful shambles. The main X roads have been hit and most of the shop fronts blown in. The decorators shop is on fire. There seem to be numerous casualties mostly women. One dead soldier, one of ours, was seen to M.G. Sports car with a corpse inside is in flames. The local ARP and a lot of locals are soon in the spirit and work magnificently.
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			There has been no air raid alarm. Soon order is restored and the fire is under control. It is discovered that the corpse in the car, is a gunner officer from the 77 <sup>th</sup> Field Regt. The stretcher bearers do stirling work and the local ARP & AFS are magnificent. On checking up, we find we have lost 3 troops, no 3447692 L/Cpl Davies T. a very good fitter, No 3449320 Fus. Dean & No3445151 Fus. France A. Davies' wife Ivy was killed with him. Total casualties were 29 killed, of which 20 were women. The Boshe was shot down soon after. [Post war research suggests that the HE111 bomber of KG 55 made good its escape back to France. The crew reported bombing a railway station east of Christchurch]
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New Milton	24-31		For the remainder of the month, work continued. Our mobile Col under Capt Hudson was formed and did a

few exercises. Very good concert was given by the people of New Milton, and a party came over from Bournemouth. The activity was still fairly intense and alarms occurred 3 or 4 times daily. A few bombs were dropped in the area but did no damage. Nothing else of interest happened.

**Extract from the diary of Mr. George W. Lane, residing at "Oakfield" Station Road, New Milton.**

Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1940

*I am writing this after the blackest day in the history of New Milton and to the accompaniment [sic] of the air raid siren which is just sounding. Yesterday afternoon I went to Salisbury as I wanted to look around the Cathedral. We got back about 9.30 and as I entered Fernhill Lane we thought the place seemed stirred up and concluded that probably an air raid was in progress. Then we came over the bridge and found a hose across the road and so thought that an Auxiliary Fire Service practice was in full swing. It was no practice however but the real thing.*



A wrecked flat. The only things lost were two pictures, and a curtain. A sideboard fitted with crockery had its doors blown off, but the contents were left intact. A clock on the mantelpiece was found still to be working and striking.

The electric clock in the auctioneers' offices stopped at 6.40.

*On the other side of the road, Pearson Cole and Shoreland's high building had been cut right through, while next door to them – Lovelace's shop – simply didn't exist. Six or seven shops on that side of the road were little more than smashed up wood and brick. Round the corner the fine building of Robert Adlard, builders Merchants, was*

*smashed up and still burning. A bomb had fallen in Dr. Wallace's garden burning it into a blasted heath.*

*[Illegible] Wallace's garden I picked up a bomb splinter.*

*At 1 o' clock in the morning after inspecting the damage to my house (which was simply a window smashed, some tiles off the roof and rather a mess in the back kitchen where part of the ceiling had come down) I heard a gasping, mewing outside. Poor old Carlton, my cat, had the bottom of his face blown off, so I had the unpleasant task of chloroforming the poor thing.*

*Throughout the night one could hear banging and smashing and the clatter of fallen glass.*

*Devereux whose house is next door to the seven bomb holes escaped very lightly. Two tremendous lumps came through his dining room window and took a big piece out of the walls and of course he had plenty of windows out. However all he seemed worried about was the garden roller which had lost a big lump and he had only had three months wear out of it having bought it second hand at Foot's sale for 25/-*

*As we drove down the High Street, Joan suddenly cried "My Mother- She was shopping at about six o'clock." I tried to comfort her but when we got home we found the worst had happened, both her mother and Aunt had been out shopping together and were just about to enter Boots Shop when they had both been killed. It was a terrible blow to her.*

*[Believed to be Mrs Ivy Edina Eagle and Mrs Dorothy Gladys Pickering]*



*Today Station Road is still barricaded off, but things are getting a little straighter. The death roll [sic] is now 26 and goodness knows how many have been wounded. There is still plenty of hammering going on but most of the shattered windows have now been boarded up.*

*This morning I took all of the kids (5 of them) fishing for ages to get them out of the way for a bit.*

*This morning I also made a tour of inspection of the house. For a time I could not get into the workroom as the blast had blown the catch off the lock but finally I got inside and found part of the ceiling had come down.*

*The catch was also blown off the back door and chunk was blown out of the Seaton catch as well.*

*Wesley had also come off his bicycle this morning and then went to Milford Hospital to see his daughter who caught a machine gun bullet in the arm.*

*From different reports it seems that the raider came in very low and circled over Bashley and then came back again and dropped his whole cargo in about twenty seconds. I'm glad to say he didn't get away and was brought down alright. [Post war research suggests that the HE 111 bomber of KG55 made good its escape back to France. The crew reported bombing a railway station east of Christchurch]*

*The ARP and AFD and LDV are all importantly standing on duty.*

Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1940.

*The death roll [sic] is now 28 and considering the damage done I'm surprised it's not greater. Yesterday I discovered the power cable to the house had been torn through hence the reason why we have no electricity.*

*Last night there was a big blaze to the west and in the distance one could see the repeated flash of bombs and the red glows when the AA shells burst in the sky. I should think it was over Wareham way.*

Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1940.

*Now the stories are beginning to come in of hairs-breadth escapes. People talking to others who were blown to bits a few moments later. The force of the shrapnel is surprising as some of it has gone through two thicknesses of bricks and even so a good many people saved themselves by diving under counters and getting under tables. Mrs Goulding's house next door to the bank is an absolute shambles, hardly a piece of furniture isn't wrecked or smashed.*

*Last night planes were continually flying overhead but although some bombs were dropped, one of which was a whistler, I don't think any were nearer than half a mile. The electricity failed at about 1.30 a.m.*

*The approaches to the beach are all closed but one and that one is guarded with trenches and sandbags, while just below the cliff on the slope are barbed wire entanglements. On the cliff top are concrete octagonal pill boxes, while even the old water tower is now being hidden under boughs cut from the Council office garden.*

*The Grand Marine Hotel is no longer a Hotel but is full of soldiers, with sentries at the gates and khaki figures half out of the windows.*

*Last night the jerries were continually overhead, but they seem to have changed their tactics and now come over singly. Some bombs were dropped fairly close so that the windows rattled and the house shook and one whistled as it came down.*

**The photographs included in this article were all taken by the editor of the New Milton Advertiser, Mr Charles Curry. I am grateful to the present chairman Mr Eddie Curry for permission to reproduce them.**

**Nick Saunders**

**Chairman**

**Milton Heritage Society**

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