

80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MAY BLITZ ON LIVERPOOL 1941

Liverpool was regularly blitzed (bombed) from 28th August 1940 to 10th January 1942. In just 7 days 1st to 8th May 1941, German planes dropped 870 tonnes of high explosives and 112,000 firebombs, both day and night. 1,741 people were killed, 1,154 seriously injured. On May 14th a mass funeral was held at Anfield Cemetery where 1,000 victims were buried in a common grave. 76,000 people were made homeless.



Liverpool City Centre was devastated, many buildings were bombed including St. Luke's Church, Lewis's, Liverpool Museum and Mill Road Maternity Hospital where 85 people died including new mothers and babies. During WW2 Liverpool was the second most bombed city after London.





MEMORIES OF THE MAY BLITZ

“My family lived in Hayward Street, Everton we went to the shelter underneath St. George’s Hall in Liverpool town centre, there were benches and camp beds. We met sailors and soldiers from foreign countries who were on leave. When we were there I thought it was like one big party. One day we came out of the shelter after a bombing raid and found that our house had been damaged. A house opposite had been bombed and the people, who had been sheltering under their stairs, were killed. The only survivor was their son who was asleep upstairs, he was blown out of the window and badly injured.”

Sheila

My Great Nana Sal Cleary told us about the May Blitz and what happened to her, she was 18: “Dad had been working at Tate & Lyle each day and as an ARP each night. On the 3rd night of the May Blitz, after working, Dad (James Farrell) had just got into bed when the sirens went off again. Dad said he was too tired to go to the shelter with us. We decided we’d stay too and have a night in our own beds instead of going to the dank, crowded shelter. Just then our neighbour said her little girl was frightened and crying and she needed help to get her daughter to the shelter. The little girl said she’d go if I came with her. I (Sal), my mother and sisters reluctantly put on our oldest coats and shoes and went with our neighbour and her little girl to the shelter. Shortly after our home in Aspinall Street took a direct hit, killing my father instantly. Added to this, the houses either side of our home collapsed onto our house.



It took 3 days to dig my father, James Farrell’s body out. My Mother was in shock and so it fell to me to try to find us somewhere to live, clothes to wear and food to eat. None of our belongings survived.” Nana Sal lived on, had 6 children, 12 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren and she died at the age of 92. *Molly Powner*

“My mum, Eileen, lived with her mum (my grandmother Caroline) and two sisters in a tenement flat, Great Richmond Street Dwellings, in Liverpool city centre. It was only a ten minute walk from Blackstock Street, Vauxhall where 200 people were killed on 21st December 1940 when the public shelter received a direct hit. They had to go to a public shelter whilst the air raids were on. Sometimes her mum, Caroline, wasn't well enough to go out so they sheltered under the solid kitchen table. Bombs dropped all around them, but they were lucky that their block of flats wasn't bombed although the windows blew out a few times. I was born in 1947 and when I was little in the 1950's we lived in this same flat and I remember playing nearby on what we called “bommies”. These were bomb sites and there were plenty of bricks lying around so we played at building houses. I also remember when we went shopping in Great Homer Street seeing the walls full of strafed machine gun holes which had come from German planes.”

Eileen Knott

“As a young woman living in the centre of Liverpool, I was walking home from work one evening when the sirens sounded. Almost immediately I saw German planes overhead and I saw the face of one pilot who was machine gunning the civilians in the street. I banged on the door of a nearby pub and eventually they opened the door and let me in. I felt this was a very narrow escape.”

Kathleen Gribbin.

“I remember May 1941 and looking at Liverpool burning. I live in one of the high parts of Wigan 20 miles away and from my door I could see Liverpool burning. The evenings of May 1941, the sky over Liverpool was all lit up bright orange. I felt so helpless because we could do nothing to help, only pray.”

Mrs. Ella Leary

“I was born in 1929 and when I was a schoolboy in Wigan, I heard planes overhead. I looked up and there was a German bomber coming over me and it was closely followed by a Spitfire. The planes were flying so low I could see the numbers on them. The German bomber was headed to Liverpool to bomb the city and the Spitfire trying to stop it.”

Ray Cursley

If you would like to read more, BETA's WW2 book, Lest We Forget, Remember and Respect is available free at www.betanetcafe.co.uk/welcome