

## November 1941 – The Bristol Blitzes

Although we'd got used to the sporadic bombing raids, up until now London had been the main place to get the full fury of the Luftwaffe's intensive raids, but now it was the turn of the other big cities. Plymouth, Coventry, Manchester and Birmingham all got it roughly the same as Bristol.

Our Blitz started with the heavy bombers, usually Heinkels – apparently they started with the Docks at Avonmouth and simply followed the River Avon up. First they dropped thousands of incendiary bombs, which exploded with an unearthly green magnesium fire, then they simply dropped the heavy bombs into the blazing areas.

Searchlights swept the skies and ack-ack guns opened up from the emplacements on every bit of high ground around the city, but the relentless bombing attack put all the emergency services at full stretch.

These blitzes went on all through the winter and spring and a particularly fierce winter it was, too. At one time, in January, the water froze in the firemen's pipes and huge icicles hung on smoking ruins. During the first blitz, the next event was to be stamped indelibly on my mind for ever.

The 'all clear' had gone after the particularly long heavy raid. I don't think we'd got much sleep that night. Dad came in from fire-watching and said, 'Come and have a look at this – you'll never believe what you'll see.' I couldn't get out quickly enough but Mum refused to budge and made herself a cup of tea and got back under the stairs (no doubt with a tapped ok to Mrs Upton next door).

Several of my friends were out in the street with their dads and we made our way with much excitement to Devon Road Bridge, where the sight that met our eyes was unbelievable. From that vantage point we could see the whole of Down Town and it was ablaze with huge fires as far as the horizon. Whole buildings were going up like torches, with a huge pall of smoke overhead. There was still the sound of odd bombs

exploding together with the crash as buildings collapsed. Searchlights still raked the sky and the smell of burning was everywhere.

The most remarkable and memorable sight for me were the railway lines, all going into the city, the goods yards and the stations. In the reflected glow of the fires, they all looked like scarlet ribbons, some tangled, some straight, but all shining red.

The group of kids and their fathers simply could not believe the sight. Then the sirens went again. I've never moved so fast in all my life: as one, we took to our heels and fled home to the safety of the cupboards under the stairs. Dad, of course and the other men stayed on fire duty.

Mum was anxiously awaiting my return with all the incredible details. Hardly able to take in that Down Town was gone, all she could say was, 'If they'd known this was going to happen they would have given those dresses away.'

The bombers returned to finish the night's work and continued dropping more bombs into the inferno. It was a long night.

One night, during the blitzes, we found that an unexpected incendiary bomb had landed in our garden, breaking a bit of trellis en route. I shall never forget Mum's fury: there she was in her long green dressing gown, hair done up in the ubiquitous 'Dinkie' curlers, arms firmly across chest, roundly cursing the uninvited guest.

'You dirty, bloody thing,' she was saying, 'how dare you come into my garden, with your dirty bloody German writing all over you, and break my trellis, too.'

The A.R.P came and removed the offending article.

**Doreen Govan ('Bristol Girl')**

**Shenagh Govan**