

T H E T R A G E D Y O F A L B E R T R O A D

On September 3rd 1940, Portishead suffered its most tragic raid of the war. On that day there had been heavy gunfire during an afternoon raid, and when the sirens sounded that night, all we expected was the usual monotonous droning of aircraft and thundering of the barrage, now near, now far away in the distance. From the beginning, however, this raid seemed different from all the others.

Directly the warning had been given, the guns opened up, and the shell bursts seemed to be immediately overhead. Quite early in the raid a search light picked out a plane, and others quickly focussed on it until the unfortunate craft was held in a strong cone of lights. As soon as this happened, every gun in the district fired at it, and shells burst all round. Suddenly the aircraft was seen to glow; the glow grew brighter until the plane was blazing fiercely. Meanwhile, the gunner was firing down the beam of light to try to extinguish it; but his efforts were to no avail. When it was seen that the aircraft had little hope of reaching its base, the whole population of Portishead cheered enthusiastically, until the blazing plane disappeared in the distance, still desperately endeavouring to extinguish the pitiless search lights which had been the cause of its downfall.

Everyone was making so much noise that nobody noticed a raider sneaking in from the West. The first inkling we had that another Jerry was about was the whine of bombs, as the raider dropped two, and sped swiftly out of harms way. These two bombs fell in such an unfortunate way that on landing in Albert Road, they demolished or very badly damaged some sixteen or more houses, slightly damaged several others, and broke windows over a considerable area. Four well known figures of Portishead fell victims to this savage attack, bringing home to us in no uncertain manner the savagery of this new fangled air-warfare. The four unfortunate people were Mr and Mrs Leslie Tripp, Mr Bill Hedger, and Mr Dolman. Mr Hedger and Mr Dolman were standing in the road chatting, and my Uncle, who was a Warden, was about to walk down the road to advise them to take shelter. He paused for a moment to watch the burning plane, however, and the bombs landed before he could carry out his intention. This momentary pause probably saved his life.

My brother was also near the scene of the incident, and he gave a thrilling account of the episode when he arrived home. It appears that he was standing with a friend at the junction of Albert Road and High Street, discussing with great enthusiasm the inglorious end of the murderous Hun, when without warning they heard the whistle of a bomb! They both ran for cover, Dennis throwing himself flat beside an electric fuse box, the bombs exploding as he did so. The second bomb exploded almost

immediately, then all was quiet. The boys picked themselves up and were very relieved to find each other unhurt. They lost no time in heading for home.

This was not the end of the excitement, for soon afterwards another plane came and dropped two HEs and a petrol bomb behind Kew Villas, Bristol Road, badly damaging many of the houses, and killing a whole flock of sheep which were in the field. That night Jerry seemed properly after Portishead's blood, for later on two more bombs were dropped. These caused considerable damage to the Council School and broke hundreds of windows in the vicinity. These three lots of bombs fell in such a way that few houses in the actual town escaped with all their windows intact. We lost only one, but our front door was blown open, and next morning we found the lock at the far end of the passage. The strange thing about this affair was that, whereas our glass and curtains were all sucked outside by the blast, our next door neighbour, whose window is only a few yards away from ours, found, much to her dismay, that what was left of her window was strewn all over the room. Other bombs fell during the night, but they landed on the moors and the wharf, and caused little damage. One small fire resulted, but it was quickly extinguished.

THE CAUSE OF ITS DOWNFALL.