

## WWII Air Raid Casualties in Battersea and Wandsworth

Sixty years after the Victory Celebrations of 1946, *Jim Slade* assesses the wartime toll on the Borough's civilian population.

### Introduction

The present London Borough of Wandsworth was established in 1965 by the amalgamation of the Metropolitan Borough of Wandsworth (minus Clapham and Streatham, which became part of the new London Borough of Lambeth) with the Metropolitan Borough of Battersea. This article deals with the casualties in the two pre-1965 metropolitan boroughs, whose populations at the beginning of the air raids were very roughly: Battersea 132,000 and Wandsworth 343,000. The two metropolitan boroughs were in the County of London, which was administered by the London County Council (LCC).

It is over sixty years since the end of the Second World War, the war in Europe lasting from 3rd September 1939 to 8th May 1945 (VE Day), and to most people alive today, the war, together with the bombing of London, is now just a part of a chapter in our nation's long history. With nearly all of the vestiges of the bombing long since gone, the places damaged or destroyed in the air raids, where many people were killed and even more injured, are now impossible for most people to recognise. In April 1940, a new Branch of the Metropolitan Police called the Central Casualty Bureau was set up by the Government to record the numbers of dead and injured caused by air raids in London. The sources of these numbers were hospitals and mortuaries, which transmitted the information to the bureau through their local authorities. The first casualties recorded were on 27th July 1940. The Bureau was closed in October 1945, and its records are now deposited in The National Archives at Kew.

It is not known exactly how many people were killed and injured in the air raids on the two boroughs, but from the information available from several sources, it is safe to accept that about 1,800 died and about 8,900 were injured. The records do not wholly reflect the total number of residents killed in the two boroughs, since they include a small number of people resident elsewhere but killed in air raids when visiting Battersea or Wandsworth, and exclude a small number of residents who died in air raids whilst out of the boroughs. Included also are a few people who were injured in air raids elsewhere and brought to hospitals in the boroughs, where they subsequently died of their injuries, and excluded also are some who were injured in the boroughs, taken to hospitals elsewhere and died. Nevertheless, most of those recorded as killed were people who resided in the two boroughs. Whilst we have comprehensive details about those killed, we do not have similar information about those injured. From the total number injured of 8,868, estimates have been made using the types and numbers of air delivered weapons, Metropolitan Police figures and details from a number of recorded incidents, both in the two boroughs and elsewhere, in order to produce a guide to the numbers probably injured in particular bombing periods and geographic areas. The numbers of injured, where known in a variety of recorded incidents, have been taken into account when making the estimates. Casualties under 16 years old are defined as children (boys and girls). This article does not deal with any air raids other than those that caused deaths and injuries. The following abbreviations have been used: '**B.**' the Metropolitan Borough of Battersea, '**W.**' the Metropolitan Borough of Wandsworth and '**e.**' estimate.

### The air raids

From 27th July 1940 to 26th April 1944 there were 101 daylight and 253 night raids on London by piloted aircraft. During that time, 2,729 high explosive bombs and parachute mines together with about 50,000 incendiary bombs were dropped on the two boroughs. The incendiary bombs caused many serious fires but caused hardly any casualties, virtually all deaths and injuries from fire were the result of fires started by explosive weapons. From the night of the 17th June 1944 to the 6th March 1945, 160 flying bombs fell on the two boroughs. Also, during that time, eight V2 rockets fell on the boroughs from the 8th September 1944 to the 6th March 1945. There were two main periods when London was bombed, broken by a period of few raids:

### Period 1 – 1940-41:

17th August 1940 to 23rd August 1940 (mainly daylight raids, some heavy).

24th August 1940 to 10th May 1941 (night raids called the Blitz, mostly heavy).

11th May 1941 to 28th July 1941 (light night raids).

### Period 2 – 1941-43:

29th July 1941 to 20th October 1943 (a small number of irregular light night raids).

### Period 3 – 1943-45:

21st October 1943 to 18th February 1944 (light night raids).

19th February 1944 to 24th February (heavy night raids, the 'little Blitz').

25th February to 12th June 1944 (light night raids).

13th June 1944 to 29th March 1945 (V1 flying bombs).

8th September 1944 to 27th March 1945 (V2 rockets).

## The Casualties

### Period 1

In the night of 17th August 1940 the first bombs fell in the LCC area in Woolwich and Eltham, but it was not until about 5.00 p.m. on Saturday, 7th September that the first big daylight raid took place, causing immense damage to the London docks and surrounding areas. This was followed at about 8.00 p.m. by a second raid also causing further massive damage and casualties over a wide area. The first casualties in the two boroughs occurred during this night raid, causing 14 deaths (**B.** 11 and **W.** 3). Further night raids caused moderate casualties until the night of Monday, 14th October, when an unusually heavy raid killed 114 people (**B.** 18 and **W.** 96). This was the highest number of deaths in a single day throughout the war on Battersea and Wandsworth. Many of the deaths (57%) happened when a high explosive bomb hit the Balham High Road and penetrated the booking hall of Balham Underground Station, rupturing a large water main, sewers and other services beneath the road (fig. 1). Torrential water, mud, gravel and rubble poured down the stairs to the platforms where about 500 people were sheltering, killing 65. In other incidents that night, another 49 were killed (**B.** 18 and **W.** 31). This was followed by another heavy raid on the 15th October, killing 35 (**B.** 12 and **W.** 23).

During this period three fire stations in Wandsworth were hit, killing 31 firemen. They were 'Mitcham Lane', Streatham, 11 killed on 17th October 1940, 'Cavendish Road School', Balham, 14 killed on 6th November 1940 and 'West Hill', Wandsworth, six killed on 16th November 1940. Except for 2nd November, when the weather was bad, London was bombed every night from 7th September to



13th November, a total of 66 nights. The night raids continued, causing a fairly steady rate of casualties until the 16th April when 78 were killed (**B.** 15 and **W.** 63), and the 17th April when 54 were killed (**B.** 39 and **W.** 15). Even during the Blitz, people still went to pubs for a brief escape from the anxieties of the war, and the evening of Saturday, 19th April found 'The Castle' in Putney Bridge Road crowded with local people. Late in the evening it was hit by a high explosive bomb, destroying the building, killing 48 and injuring 141 (fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Balham High Road, the morning of 15 October 1940, with a no. 88 bus in the bomb crater. (Wandsworth Local History Service)

These three raids alone produced 180 killed and **e.** 400 injured. The 11th May saw the last heavy raid in the first period, which killed 45 (**B.** 19 and **W.** 26). From the 7th September 1940 to the 28th July 1941, there were 975 killed and **e.** 4,134 injured.

### Period 2

From the 29th July 1941 to the 20th October 1943, a period of two years and two months, there were 25 killed and **e.** 85 injured. There were no fatalities in 1942.

### Period 3

Since there had been very few raids in 1942 and throughout most of 1943, people had become more confident, perhaps even complacent, and took full advantage of what little entertainment was available.

This changed dramatically in the evening of Sunday, 7th November 1943 after the third period of air raids had started, when the worst incident of the war in the two boroughs occurred. An air raid warning was sounded at about 8.40 p.m., with few people going to air raid shelters. At 9.02 p.m. a lone aircraft released a single 500 kg Stabo high explosive bomb that hit No. 35 Putney High Street, which is opposite the end of Felsham Road, causing great damage on the east side of the high street including Rego the tailors on the corner of Putney Bridge Road. It also started a serious fire in Perrings bedding shop opposite, on the corner of Felsham Road. The Black and White Milk Bar was on the ground floor of No. 35, and upstairs over two shops, including Rego's, was the 'Cinderella Dance Club', at the time a very popular venue in Putney for young people. In addition to the many casualties in the dance hall and milk bar, there were a number of people killed and injured in the High Street, who had been walking or standing at bus stops. A total of 81 were killed, 46 females and 35 males, with 248 injured, many of them seriously. Among the casualties were 18 service personnel killed and 26 injured. The youngest killed was Edward Henry Smith, aged 14, of 196B Fulham Palace Road. This air raid brought great grief to many local families, since nearly two-thirds of the casualties were young people under 23 years of age (see table).

There were 10 (**B.**) more killed in November, but no casualties in December 1943 and January 1944. Raids started again on 13th February, 103 (**B.** 29 and **W.** 74) being killed and **e.** 450 injured over six days (the 'little Blitz'), from 19th to 24th February.

The raids by V1 flying bombs on London started in the night of the 13th June when a single V1 exploded in Bow. The real assault commenced in the night of 15th/16th June, and the first three deaths occurred in Battersea on Saturday, 17th June. On Sunday, 18th June the boroughs suffered 101 killed (**B.** 24 and **W.** 77) and **e.** 595 injured. This was the second highest number of deaths in a single day throughout the war on Battersea and Wandsworth. At about 9.15 a.m., a V1 damaged by anti-aircraft fire, crashed and exploded at the junction of the Upper Richmond Road and Charlwood Road, Putney, killing 36 and injuring 25. (From the writer's own recollection of this particular incident, together with the very high number of injured to killed usually produced by V1s, this number appears to be greatly understated.) This specific incident was responsible for the highest number of deaths caused by a single V weapon in the boroughs, in period 3. The raids continued through June and July, declining by the end of August. Although the number of raids was falling, 29 were killed on Monday, 17th August at



Fig. 2. 'The Castle', Putney Bridge Road, after the incident of 19 April 1941. (Jon Mills Collection)

| Casualty percentage | Age span       | Killed    | Injured       |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| 62%                 | 14 to 22 years | 50        | <b>e.</b> 154 |
| 17%                 | 23 to 39 years | 14        | <b>e.</b> 42  |
| 21%                 | 40 to 58 years | 17        | <b>e.</b> 52  |
| <b>Totals</b>       |                | <b>81</b> | <b>248</b>    |

Lavender Hill. From 17th June to 31st August, V1s killed 503 (**B.** 163 and **W.** 340) and injured **e.** 1,826.

At 6.40 p.m. on 8th September the first V2 exploded in Chiswick. Between this date and 27th March 1945, 513 V2s fell on London, only eight exploding in the two boroughs. The final serious incident of the war was caused by a V2 at 8.30 a.m. on Sunday, 19th November at Hazlehurst Road, where 28 were killed and 83 injured. This event caused the highest number of deaths by a V2 in the boroughs in period 3. From the 7th November 1943 to the 6th March 1945, there were 832 killed and **e.** 4,649 injured.

The first person killed in Battersea was Ernest Clark, aged 41, at 28 Rawson Street on 7th September 1940, and the last was Benjamin George Beasley, aged 81, at 53 Petergate on 30th January 1945. The youngest killed was Mary Barbara Carpenter, aged 3 weeks, on 16th October 1940 at 146 Meyrick Road, and the oldest was Fanny Willett Cooter, aged 88, on 29th October 1940 at 3 Howie Street. In Wandsworth, the first person killed was Margaret Anna Kennedy, aged 17, of 70 Bowland Road who was killed at 26 Nelson's Row on 7th September 1940 and the last was John William Wallis, aged 3, at Nutwell Street on 6th March 1945. The youngest killed was David Alan Harding, aged 4 weeks, on 25th March 1944 at 50 Churchmore Road, and the oldest was Harry Ogilvie, aged 92, on 19th November 1944 at 30 Hazlehurst Road. By chance, the incidents having the highest number of casualties caused by each type of weapon all happened on a Sunday! On Sunday, 7th November 1943, a high explosive bomb at Putney High Street killed 81, on Sunday, 18th June 1944 a V1 at Upper Richmond Road, Putney killed 36, and on Sunday, 19th November 1944 a V2 killed 28 at Hazlehurst Road in Wandsworth.

## Conclusion

Because of the high building density in the two boroughs and Wandsworth receiving more V1s than any other borough in London, the casualties, particularly injuries, were higher than those suffered in some other boroughs in London. During period 1, because a majority of the air raids took place at night, most workplaces were unoccupied, venues for entertainment very restricted and many people took shelter, the number of casualties was minimised. The early part of period 2 saw a relaxation of attitude and venue restrictions, which was reflected in the large numbers of killed and injured at Putney High Street on Sunday the 7th November 1943. When the V1 flying bomb and subsequent V2 rocket raids started, the casualty rates greatly increased. This was because the raids took place during the day and night and consequently many people, particularly during the day, were often at work or shopping, and so did not take shelter as had been the case during the Blitz of 1940-41. Since the V1 warhead contained 848 kg (1,870 lbs) of high explosive and exploded on impact, the area of damage was considerable, and therefore the casualty rate was very much higher than before. The V2 had a slightly smaller warhead than the V1 and also produced many casualties, but generally not as many as caused by V1s. The skills and very often the bravery of the rescue and medical services meant that an overwhelming majority of those seriously injured and taken to hospital later recovered; nearly all deaths occurred at the site of an incident.

Battersea received fewer high explosive bombs, mines and V weapons than Wandsworth, but suffered more casualties per air delivered weapon than Wandsworth did. For every high explosive or mine death in Wandsworth, there were 4.74 deaths in Battersea (i.e.  $1.65 \div 0.35$ ). Similarly for each V weapon death in Wandsworth, there were 1.65 deaths in Battersea (i.e.  $5.21 \div 3.16$ ) (see the table 'Numbers Killed and Injured per Air Delivered Weapon').

## Bibliography and sources

Commonwealth War Graves Commission *Roll of Honour*.

Loobey, Patrick & Mills, Jon *The Boroughs of Wandsworth & Battersea at War* (1996).

The Metropolitan Police.

Wandsworth Museum *Incident Map of District B, Putney/Wandsworth* (compiled by Geoffrey Haines, Deputy District Warden, c.1945).

Wandsworth Museum *Where The Bombs Fell* (map).

Ziegler, Philip *London at War* (1995).

## Appendices

### Air Delivered Weapons

|                                                                                                                          | Battersea       | Wandsworth       | Total            | LCC Area Comparison |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Type</b>                                                                                                              |                 |                  |                  |                     |
| High Explosive Bombs and Mines.                                                                                          | 201             | 2,528            | 2,729            | 45,350              |
| Flying Bombs (V1s).                                                                                                      | 36              | 124*             | 160              | 2,341               |
| Rockets (V2s).                                                                                                           | 2               | 6                | 8                | 513                 |
|                                                                                                                          | 239             | 2,658            | 2,897            | 48,204              |
| Incendiaries.                                                                                                            | <b>e. 3,700</b> | <b>e. 46,300</b> | <b>e. 50,000</b> | <b>e. 830,000</b>   |
| Total all types                                                                                                          | 3,939           | 48,958           | 52,897           | 878,204             |
|                                                                                                                          | 7.4%            | 92.6%            | 100.0%           |                     |
| *The number exploding in Wandsworth of 124, was exceeded only by Croydon in Surrey, which had the highest number of 142. |                 |                  |                  |                     |

### Killed 1940 to 1945

|            | Men   | Boys | Women | Girls | Total | %      |
|------------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Battersea  | 218   | 42   | 239   | 32    | 531   | 29.0   |
| Wandsworth | 540   | 81   | 636   | 44    | 1,301 | 71.0   |
| Total      | 758   | 123  | 875   | 76    | 1,832 |        |
|            | 41.4% | 6.7% | 47.8% | 4.1%  |       | 100.0% |
|            | 48.1% |      | 51.9% |       |       |        |

### Ages of Those Killed

|       | Battersea |        | Wandsworth |        | Totals |        | Total |       |
|-------|-----------|--------|------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
|       | Male      | Female | Male       | Female | Male   | Female | Total | %     |
| 66-92 | 28        | 39     | 74         | 123    | 102    | 11.6   | 162   | 17.0  |
| 51-65 | 63        | 59     | 135        | 144    | 198    | 22.5   | 203   | 21.3  |
| 36-50 | 71        | 72     | 169        | 164    | 240    | 27.3   | 236   | 24.8  |
| 22-35 | 36        | 47     | 110        | 142    | 146    | 16.6   | 189   | 19.9  |
| 16-21 | 19        | 23     | 44         | 57     | 63     | 7.1    | 80    | 8.4   |
| 9-15  | 19        | 15     | 37         | 30     | 56     | 6.4    | 45    | 4.7   |
| 0-8   | 23        | 17     | 52         | 20     | 75     | 8.5    | 37    | 3.9   |
| Total | 259       | 272    | 621        | 680    | 880    | 100.0  | 952   | 100.0 |

## Killed and Injured 1940 to 1945

|                           | Battersea |          | Wandsworth |          | Killed | Total   |          |       |
|---------------------------|-----------|----------|------------|----------|--------|---------|----------|-------|
|                           | Killed    | Injured  | Killed     | Injured  |        | Injured |          | %     |
| High Explosives and Mines | 333       | e. 390   | 890        | e. 4,892 | 1,223  | 66.8    | e. 5,282 | 59.6  |
| V1s and V2s               | 198       | e. 811   | 411        | e. 2,775 | 609    | 33.2    | e. 3,586 | 40.4  |
| Total                     | 531       | e. 1,201 | 1,301      | e. 7,667 | 1,832  | 100.0   | 8,868    | 100.0 |

## Killed and Injured per Year

|       | Battersea |          | Wandsworth |          | Killed | Total   |          |       |
|-------|-----------|----------|------------|----------|--------|---------|----------|-------|
|       | Killed    | Injured  | Killed     | Injured  |        | Injured |          |       |
|       |           |          |            |          |        |         | %        | %     |
| 1940  | 186       | e. 218   | 468        | e. 2,577 | 654    | 35.7    | e. 2,795 | 31.5  |
| 1941  | 97        | e. 113   | 227        | e. 1,246 | 324    | 17.7    | e. 1,359 | 15.3  |
| 1942  | -         | -        | -          | -        | -      | -       | -        | -     |
| 1943  | 17        | e. 33    | 98         | e. 538   | 115    | 6.3     | e. 571   | 6.4   |
| 1944  | 209       | e. 749   | 499        | e. 3,245 | 708    | 38.6    | e. 3,994 | 45.1  |
| 1945  | 22        | e. 88    | 9          | e. 61    | 31     | 1.7     | e. 149   | 1.7   |
| Total | 531       | e. 1,201 | 1,301      | e. 7,667 | 1,832  | 100.0   | 8,868    | 100.0 |

## Numbers Killed and Injured per Period

| Period                 | Battersea |          | Wandsworth |          | Total  |         |          |       |
|------------------------|-----------|----------|------------|----------|--------|---------|----------|-------|
|                        | Killed    | Injured  | Killed     | Injured  | Killed | Injured |          |       |
|                        |           |          |            |          |        | %       |          | %     |
| 1: 27/7/40 to 28/7/41  | 282       | e. 330   | 693        | e. 3,804 | 975    | 53.2    | e. 4,134 | 46.6  |
| 2: 29/7/41 to 20/10/43 | 12        | e. 14    | 13         | e. 71    | 25     | 1.4     | e. 85    | 1.0   |
| 3: 21/10/43 to 27/3/45 | 237       | e. 857   | 59         | e. 3,792 | 832    | 45.4    | e. 4,649 | 52.4  |
| Total                  | 531       | e. 1,201 | 1,301      | e. 7,667 | 1,832  | 100.0   | 8,868    | 100.0 |

## Numbers Killed and Injured per Air Delivered Weapon.

|                              | Battersea | Wandsworth | Total    | LCC Area Comparison |
|------------------------------|-----------|------------|----------|---------------------|
| <b>Killed</b>                |           |            |          |                     |
| By High Explosive Bombs etc. | 1.65      | 0.35       | 0.45     | 0.48                |
| By V1s and V2s               | 5.21      | 3.16       | 3.63     | 2.80                |
| Total                        | 2.22      | 0.49       | 0.63     | 0.62                |
| <b>Injured</b>               |           |            |          |                     |
| By High Explosive Bombs etc. | e. n/a    | e. n/a     | e. 1.94  | 1.31                |
| By V1s and V2s               | e. n/a    | e. n/a     | e. 21.35 | 12.96               |
| Total                        | e. 5.03   | e. 2.88    | 3.06     | 2.08                |