

Armistice Day Transcript

29 Prince Wales Avenue
Millbrook, Southampton
11 November 1940

Dear Jim & Alice

Today is Armistice Day. I was out this morning and passed a cenotaph where I have stood for 15 years now at 11-0 AM, but no service there today. No bells rung. Nothing to remind us of the end of the last war, except Haig poppies were sold in the street for the benefit of the British Legion.

The sun was shining but it commenced to rain at noon and it has poured all day. A gale is now blowing off the Atlantic. We have been having this weather for a long time now.

I am posting this in time for you to receive it by Christmas, I hope.

According to newspaper reports, however, more ships are being sunk in the Atlantic by the U boats.

There is without any doubt, a great strain being put on our navy. The vessels crossing the Atlantic cannot be protected sufficiently.

My firm opinion is this country cannot carry on this great struggle on its own. The greatly increased sinkings of our ships in the Atlantic by plane and U boat is evidence of this.

But I try not to dwell too much on this war. It is best to carry on as cheerful as possible.

We are all at home here this winter's evening. Ethel is trying to teach our Keith his ABC. He is 6½ now, and does not yet know A B or C. Not enough schooling and when he is there it seems all play. He still attends ½ days and during that short time the raiders signal may sound twice, which causes the whole of them to troop to the Shelters. Lessons being finished.

We are all keeping quite well and thank goodness we have not had to endure any misfortunes of war yet.

I am on night duty at present and shall frequently be getting ready to go on. I do not look forward to going out this howling night. I have at different times been in the office, but I have had to get out on the streets again as inside work does not suit me. I very soon begin to get ill, so, although the wind may blow, I keep well. One's health is certainly of great importance. We have missed our day's outings to the seaside this year. Our small car is in the garage. I have jacked the wheels up and apparently it will have to stay there for duration. The military are buying a great number of good second-hand cars, from eight HP upwards. At the beginning of the war cars were being given away. but now their price is going up. More & more garages have closed down. But what we hope to do is to buy a bungalow at a seaside place near here eventually. We could let it enough to show a good return for our money and have the use of it ourselves.

We are still living in our front room, the other ground floor room we are using as a bedroom. I have been thinking of moving upstairs again as it may be safer now that winter is here. The air raids on this town are not so frequent now that the Germans have blown out the Supermarine sky high.

You see, the Supermarine is, or was, a fairly large aircraft factory on the east bank of one of the 2 rivers here, this river you passed on your left going out and I'm told that the best week's output from the factory was 52 Spitfires. This is the birthplace of the Spitfires and it was from this factory that the machines were turned out that won the Schneider Trophy. It was of some importance and apparently warranted attention from the enemy. Minor raids have occurred in different parts of this town but none with such intensity as the Germans have put up to stop production from this place.

About a month ago one heavy raid occurred on a Sunday evening. The enemy approaching from the east. Their object undoubtedly being this factory. A great number of bombs were dropped in the vicinity but not one on the factory. On the Tuesday following I was sent over there on account of the damage done and at 1.45 in the afternoon, I was on duty near this factory when a gun fired. I looked up and saw approaching from the East about 12 large black planes. They had glided down. Everyone dived for cover. After seeing the last person in the shelter I took cover myself. By this time the din was terrific. Beauforts, AA guns, machine guns, bombs and sirens. People stood up in the shelter, too scared to sit, pieces fell off the roof above, the ground shook.

Well, the planes passed over and after seeing one girl home that was stiff with fright I went to my "post". A direct hit had been scored on a Supermarine workers shelter and I believe 100 dead, men and women, were taken out. Still the factory intact. I remained at my "post" for 2 hours, when again planes were heard and looking up I saw them, how many I don't know, but I saw falling towards me 2 large bombs. They seemed the size of a man. I dived flat on my stomach and shut my eyes. The public taking cover similar, covering their heads up. The bombs screeched over me and fell near the river. There was one violent explosion. The ground heaved up then down. I felt the blast and smelt the fumes.

The raiders passed. Finding I was still alive, I did not expect to be, I got up and having open my eyes found the air was filled with dust. The roads were littered with debris, bricks, slates, earth, glass, and dust everywhere. Maybe 40 bombs were dropped. Many more houses had been demolished. I saw two ambulances arriving, assisting to get people out of damaged houses, digging them out, bandaging them up, laying them on the roadside on stretchers to be picked up by the ambulances. My greatest difficulty was to find a phone intact. By the time I had finished with the with this "incident" it was 8-0 PM. (17 hours on duty this day) Still the factory intact. The guns and balloons had kept them too high for accurate bombing and I knew they had approached their object from the wrong direction.

But 2 days later, about 100 planes in 3 waves approached this place following the course of the river. I stood and watched them and saw they meant business. Irrespective of gunfire. They kept low and these large black planes slowly approached their object, the Supermarine. Hundreds of HE bombs were dropped, and 3 of them fell on the Supermarine. Hundred of HE bombs and 3 of them fell on the Supermarine. It is now a tangled wreckage. Production has seized. The gas works were hit too and we were without gas for a week. People here were trying to cook their Sunday joint outside on open fires. A bomb also fell near the railway station you came into.

Some of these bombs which make a crater that 2 of our houses could be put into are stated to be 500 and 1000 lb bombs. Streets of houses are vacant, windowless, doors off, slates off, ceilings down. As I walk through these streets curtains slap at me though broken windows, a solitary cat will perhaps run out to meet me. Utter desolation. Some time ago 2000 houses were slated to be uninhabitable, and the number must be far greater now. Lots of time bombs fall and I saw one dugout and obtained some of the explosive substance

from it. But now that the damage has been done about 12 spitfires patrol round. Fighting often occurs high up, so high that they cannot be seen or heard, but their course can often be followed on account of the gasses from their exhaust being turned into white smoke by the atmosphere.

The recent loss of 13 out of 15 of the Italian bedsteads that came over to attack us is very heartening.

But nothing more heartening than anything is the fact of Roosevelt being elected again. Great prominence is given to it here and I am of the opinion myself that your people are very wise in returning him. There is no change over to hinder production. Armies do not seem to count much these days, it is the production of machines. With the States making machines for our empire it is possible providing this empire can train the pilots, even now for us to beat Germany in the air. An announcement in our papers inform us that the States may send material to this country in their ships. I am glad to see how the States mean business, but I have no doubt that if this country is going to fight this war to a finish great and intensive damage is going to be done to our towns and cities.

Preparations are still being made here for the invasion and I'm of the opinion it will be attempted on a large scale. It is Hitler's only hope of success. For the Germans to win it will be necessary for them to march into this country.

Whilst nothing has appeared in the papers there are strong rumors here that an invasion was attempted some time ago. Great numbers of dead Germans were seen in the sea. It may have only been a test on Hitler's part. But this town, apart from a few seen in the schools, is absolutely empty of soldiers. A few visit the town from the near by gun positions in the country. This country realizes that it is the Air Force that counts which reminds me of a recent raid on the town's airport by a solitary plane. It flew so low that its bombs fell and slithered along the ground without exploding.

About a week ago now enemy planes again raided this town. Three bombs were dropped on our Civic Centre and about 6 in other parts of the town. Other than the aircraft place no other Military Object in this town has ever been bombed. It has been the civilian population every time. Churches & Public Houses especially seem to have suffered a lot. But no hospitals. Our Prime Minister announces that 4,000 civilians have been killed in air raids, about 250 military. Every night in London between 100 and 300 are killed.

Friday

Well, last night we went to the Theatre. Ethel's mother minded our children. It was announced from the stage that a "warning" was on but everyone sat still. That warning kept on from 7.30 until 6-0 AM the next morning. It seems to me that Italian planes are coming over now as the noise from the engine is entirely different than what we've heard in the past. Our guns were firing all night, and to night the papers describe what a terrible bombing Coventry had. There being 1000 casualties. The Cathedral and center of the town is one mass of smoking ruins. Daylight raids are very scarce now, as the enemy suffer such losses. The day raids are always escorted by fighter planes, on account being given of 6 bombers being escorted by 60 fighters. The night raids are being intensified.

We were very glad to receive your Air mail letter dated 12 Sept. We received it the 2 Oct. About 12 days sooner. We were glad you mention about the children coming over, it is very good of you but we would rather have them with us.

Mentioning onions in your letter reminds me that they were 1d per lb, used to be 2 pence, but the government have now fixed the price at 4½ pence and there is not one to be found. The price of food is being kept down but we cannot buy it. There is no queuing up as in the last war, coupons for everything. We get ½ lb of butter per week for the 4 of us but as we mix it with equal parts of margarine, we can manage. Eggs are 4 pence each, of which we got two this week. No eggs in cakes now. No condensed milk of any kind. There is going to be a shortage of ordinary milk. Sugar – ½ lb per person per week at five pence, used to be 1½ pence. Cheese is not rationed but it might as well be, the person's lucky that gets it. Chocolate cannot be bought. Biscuits are scarce and it is only by a little kindness of a friend that we have a whole tin at eight lb, used to be six pence. You are lucky to have so much fruit, we have to pay nine pence lb here for apples.

But I am afraid Alice, (mentioning about Jim and the business and remembering that you intended to come over here again) that you never will. I had that feeling when your ship disappeared down Channel and have had it ever since. This war is not over yet and no sign of it, and then, for years after trade will be had. Accounts are being given of Molotov visiting Berlin which proves Germany is in a bad way and providing Germany and Italy get no more friends to help them, we shall beat them even now, in time.

I must close now, and hope that you will all have a Happy Christmas.
Best love to all from David & Ethel.
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Your last letter was opened by the censors, but nothing deleted.