

Introduction

Mr C G Vernon M.A. (Cantab), B.Sc., headmaster of Southall County School alluded in his introductory passage in the school magazine of 1934 to '*unrest and rumours of wars*' and the need for his pupils to '*prepare for something much bigger*'. He posed the question - '*You want a life worth living, a complete and satisfying life?*' and exhorted that '*Human life is such a short thing that we should all try to live it all at the highest level of which we are capable*'.

The youth of 1934, the generation born to those who had suffered the horrors of the 'Great War' now faced the prospect of another bloody war, and just as their forbears they would answer the call to arms. Young men, youths, boys - naively principled, keen and adventurous, postponed their everyday lives and budding careers to enter military service. They volunteered to fly aeroplanes, to command tanks, to fire machine-guns and to operate radio equipment. Young women too joined the armed services and vitally filled vacancies left in every walk of life to keep the country functioning throughout the war years.

The expectation that war was on its way and that bombing attacks would be made by aeroplanes is demonstrated by the 1939 issue of 'Specification' - the architect's guide to building design data and materials. Included in the section devoted to 'Fire-resisting Constructor' was a sub-section on air raid protection, written by C W Glover, M.Inst.C.E., M.Inst.Struct.E., M.Inst.R.A*, which set out the perceived threat from aerial bombing and captures the tone of the time.

* (also the author of a widely distributed booklet 'Civil Defence', published in 1938).

Six 30th January anniversary Hitler's speechmaking, war approaches.

The anniversary of Hitler becoming German Chancellor on 30th January in 1933 gave the date particular significance as a regular occasion for their Leader to address the German people. What Adolf Hitler said, demanded and did would affect the lives of many millions of people across the world, including school children studying for their School Certificate in Southall, Middlesex.

The subject matter of Hitler's anniversary speeches tended to follow a set formula. There would be a justification for the National Socialist revolution, a statement of progress made in solving the problems inherited from the previous democratic regime, followed by an outline of future plans. Year on year the speeches reflected changes in European political events but Germany was consistently portrayed by Hitler as a wronged nation which various enemies were seeking to annihilate, a picture which appealed to and sought to incite nationalistic fervour.

Hitler inextricably linked Jews and Bolshevism, he railed against and abused both. He publicly blamed them for not only Germany's problems but those of the world. Hitler held that Jews were the driving force behind Communism and that all Bolsheviks were Jews.

On the fourth anniversary of his rise to power, Saturday 30th January 1937, Adolf Hitler made an address to the Reichstag which demonstrated his bitter resentment of the defeat of Germany in the Great War and the treatment of his country thereafter. Harking back nearly twenty years he berated the weakness of the German Government which signed the Treaty of Versailles and accepted the settlement and reparations enshrined in the Treaty which resulted in the loss of Germany's national honour.

Does life hold any more in store?

Hitler's speech highlighted a hatred of Bolshevism and Jews but the over-riding message this year was Adolph Hitler's current priority - the German Nation - '*The people—the race—is the primary thing. Party, State, Army, the national economic structure, Justice etc, all these are only secondary.... They are only the means to the end and the end is the preservation of this nation.*'

The Treaty of Versailles had been signed in June 1919 but it surely held the key to events leading up to the Second World War. Under the terms of the treaty Germany was required to admit full responsibility for starting the Great War and to give up various territories: Alsace-Lorraine was ceded to France, Eupen and Malmedy to Belgium, North Schleswig to Denmark, Hultschin to Czechoslovakia, West Prussia, Posen and Upper Silesia to Poland, with The Saar, Danzig and Memel being taken under the jurisdiction of the League of Nations. The west of the Rhineland and 50kms east of the river Rhine was to be a demilitarised zone where no German soldiers or weapons were allowed. The Allies were to keep an occupying army on the west bank of the Rhine for 15 years. Germany was forbidden to unite with Austria.

Germany's armed forces were limited by the treaty to an army of 100,000 men, a navy having no more than six capital ships and no submarines and Germany was to have no air force. Germany had to pay reparations to the Allies, the amount was to be determined at a later date, which would be set subsequently at a figure of £6,600million. The League of Nations was established to keep world peace.

On coming to power Hitler's resolution of the perceived iniquities of the Versailles settlement had simply been to declare a withdrawal from the treaty. Hitler had also pulled Germany out of the League of Nations in October 1933 so, as far as the Führer was concerned, releasing Germany from international controls on rearmament.

In 1936 Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, had attempted to address some of Hitler's grievances by negotiation. Having sought Germany's return to the League of Nations, Eden also proposed that Germany should renounce European territorial claims and accept arms limitation. In return Eden hoped to secure agreement by offering re-militarisation of the Rhineland, the return of Germany's African colonies,

Twenty Six 'Black Thursday'.

The night of 16th/17th December was to become known as 'Black Thursday'. Although fortunate not to have been operating, Jim Ives, and a 100 Squadron crew - Ken Dunckley, Denis Cornes, 'Bud' Ruppel, Bob Fenton, Harold Johnson and Derrick Sissons, would find their collective future (except Dunckley) was to be shaped by the happenings of that night.

The evening was the first of the new dark night bombing period. The preceding main force raid had been against Leipzig on 3rd/4th December and had been followed by a period of twelve days when minor operations only were flown with but three losses. On the 16th the target for the main force of 483 Lancasters, augmented by 10 Mosquitoes was once again Berlin - 'The Big City'.

25 Lancasters were lost over enemy territory during the operation. On return to England the weather conditions were found to be appalling in the extreme. Thick low cloud formed a cloak of fog over many Bomber Command bases which led to 29 Lancasters and a Stirling which had undertaken a mine laying operation, to either crash or to be abandoned. The heaviest losses were sustained by 1 Group who lost 13 aircraft:-

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|-------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 12 Squadron | lost 1 aircraft | 166 Squadron | lost 3 aircraft |
| 100 " | lost 4 aircraft | 460 " | lost 3 aircraft |
| 101 " | lost 4 aircraft | 576 " | lost 2 aircraft |
| 103 " | lost 2 aircraft | 625 " | lost 2 aircraft |

148 men were killed in crashes, 39 were injured and 6 were thought to have been lost in the sea.

Short of fuel, tired after a flight to Berlin and back, many pilots had difficulties locating their home bases and when they got there could not see the ground, let alone the runways. Many aircraft were stacked-up awaiting instructions to land and a lack of fuel forced captains to decide whether to bale-out or to try a crash-landing. In appalling visibility aircraft crashed into unseen hills, and on blind approaches to airfields other Lancasters succumbed to mid-air collisions.

Two 100 Squadron Lancasters flown by F/Sgt Allen Kevis and Sgt Gilbert Denman collided in the air about a mile and a half south of Waltham airfield. Both crews were killed outright except for one of the rear gunners, Sgt Clarence Wallace, who was rescued from the burning wreckage of JB678. He did not appear to have been badly injured but is reported to have died in hospital on January 8th 1944. Another Waltham Lancaster, F/O Robert Proudfoot's aircraft, crashed at Hatcliffe Top to the west of the aerodrome.

100 Squadron Commander, W/C David Holford, who had been the youngest to be appointed to the rank of Wing Commander in February 1943 at the age of twenty-two years and four days, crashed attempting to land at Kelstern. His aircraft was apparently badly damaged and in trying to land clipped a small hill on his run-in and crashed just short of the airfield. The Lancaster exploded and threw Holford clear of the cockpit, the impact reportedly breaking both his ankles. Sgt Mackay and F/Sgt Bolingbroke were also thrown clear and were badly injured, the remaining crew members were killed. W/C Holford was not found until the following morning, lying in the snow where he had died. His young wife was staying at The Ship Inn at Grimsby where she received the appalling news from fellow resident and friend of her husband Wing Commander Jimmy Bennett, who was Squadron Commander of 550 Squadron.

En route to Leconfield where he had been diverted, P/O Fawcett of 101 Sqn based at Ludford Magna, the neighbouring airfield to Kelstern, spotted airfield lights and let-down through the murk. They broke cloud at 250ft and 'lobbed down'....the final approach was lit by the glow of Holford's burning Lancaster. Holford had been chief instructor at Fawcett's Conversion unit 1662CU.