

What An American Editor Saw

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sidering all things, any unreasonable amount of news had been withheld. The news that we don't get is contemporary news of military operations or military or civilian damage in England. I use the word "contemporary" because it appears the British policy to confirm any bad news several days later. . . . I admit to having been suspicious of the vagueness in which cables about damage to London were worded—suspicious that detail was omitted to conceal more extensive damage than was acknowledged. Having been in London I now admit that I would not alter or circumvent the censorship in this respect even if I could. . . . After I had been in London a few days I asked a dozen American correspondents to lunch and we discussed the censorship with no English present. Not one of the journalists there but had his or her inventory of gripes or complaints about this or that stupidity. A damn fool in Dover refused to let Robertson report a battle he saw in which two British 'planes were shot down and seven Germans. Another in London bottled the news that the King's former resident had been hit and that the King had said, "Well, now I'm a real Londoner." Things like that.

As one of the things I wanted to find out was how much news they—who knew infinitely more than I—had been unable to transmit to America, I did my best to egg them on. But instead of getting any startling revelations I got, believe it or not, a defence of the English censorship from the Americans who fought with it every day. It was the Americans who explained to me that to tell what bombs were falling at what addresses at what time might very conceivably improve the accuracy of the bombing of London—the last thing that anyone in that room wanted to be party to.

The fact that there's a censorship at all, and that it's composed of so many individuals bright and dull, helpful and irritable, wise and foolish—and that any censor in doubt will prefer to censor too much rather than too little—has the



WINSTON CHURCHILL

"... the right man in the right job at the right time"

cumulative effect of dampening and flattening out copy — and undoubtedly conceals more than it means to. I did not write when I was in England, not because I wanted to put one over on the censor by waiting until I came back, but at least partially because I knew that I would have to argue about and justify a lot that I wrote and it all seemed like too much work. The correspondents who write to the American newspaper readers every day do have to argue and justify, often lose the best phrases in their copy because a stupid man does not understand them. But the moral of all this is that the censorship that is at work to-day is really more of a chronic nuisance than a menace to truth and accuracy in news.

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SHOCK

WHEN the bombing began, Dr. Glover told me, he and some other psychiatrists had organised a clinic to be opened three days a week to receive from shelters and hospitals those individuals who were being broken down emotionally by the terror. He said that they thought they would begin with three days a week to see what happened. They thought it might be quite bad.

"And was it?" I asked.

Dr. Glover shrugged his shoulders. "It's hard to believe," he said. "We closed it down because we had no patients."

I asked him how he accounted for it. He said, "It is a very interesting thing. One can only speculate. But I believe it is because the experience of being bombed is so universal."

I said I didn't quite understand.

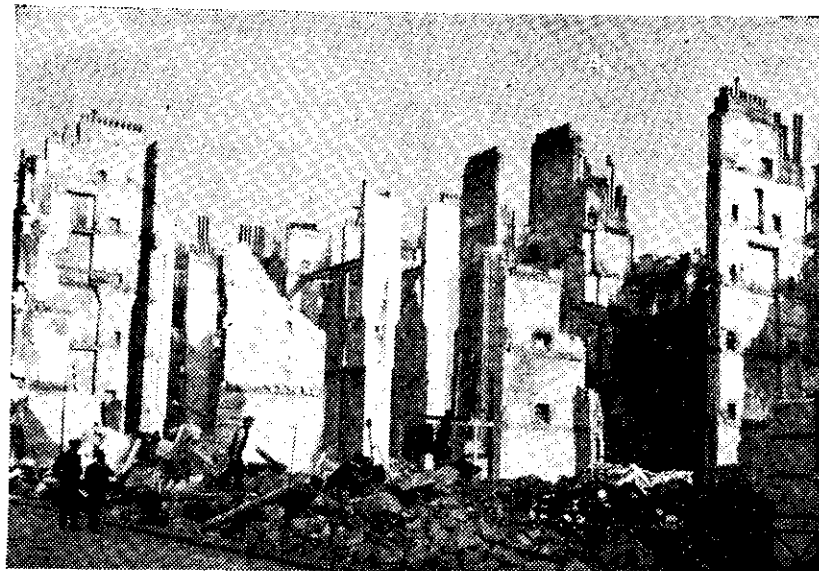
He said, "Well, I will put it this way. In the last war when men were in the trenches in France and they had only a little rest behind the lines between bombardments, there was always far away behind them the peaceful countryside in France or England—if anything happened to them they knew that that was where they would go. So when it got too much for them things happened. A trigger finger became paralysed. A man lost his sight. But now these people in London, for instance, each day read that Scotland and the Midlands have been bombed. There are no green fields for them to go to in their imagination. Since there is no escape they accept reality and when they accept it they get used to it.

"But," he added, "I'm not really sure that's right. It is simply extraordinary but it is quite real. People are not made depressed or ill by being bombed."

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

BUSINESS as usual in London means just what it says. By day. Not by night, but by day. The night is something else again. But by day it's business as usual. It really is. How can I make it clear? There is a sense of frustration about trying to convey something so commonplace. I know no better way than to reprint a letter—a business communication on the well-known letterhead of Selfridge and Co., Ltd. Those



GERMAN BOMBING . . . "is surprisingly, astonishingly, amazingly inaccurate." A sample of the "military" objectives bombed in the London area.

who care to may call it a masterpiece of British understatement, of faultless commercial calm. Whatever it is, it is one of the few exhibits I have from London about which I can honestly and genuinely and without qualification say the word "Typical." The letter:

Dear Madam:

As you have doubtless read in the Press, on the night of the 18th inst. we were selected by enemy raiders as a "military objective," but fortunately the Store only received slight damage and had it not been for the delayed action bombs in the neighbourhood we should have opened as usual the following morning.

The fact that the authorities prevented us from opening caused a certain amount of inconvenience to our customers, which is much regretted, although in co-operation with our associate House, William Whiteley, we endeavoured to fulfil all provision orders and to deliver on time all rationed foodstuffs.

If by any chance you were put to any inconvenience we feel sure you will appreciate that the circumstances were entirely beyond our control, but we are happy to inform you that every department in the Store (including the Provision Section) is now functioning quite normally.

With compliments,

Yours faithfully,

SELFRIDGE & CO., LTD.

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WINSTON CHURCHILL

MY first impression was that Winston Churchill was smaller, rounder, neater and redder than I imagined from his pictures. His eyebrows, his rusty hair, are thin red. I am quite tall myself, so that people sometimes look small to me who do not look small to other people. The Prime Minister looked very small to me. I found his voice and conversation milder than I had anticipated. He sat down with his back to the fire and I sat alongside of him.

One of the things I wanted most to bring from England was a first-hand message from the Prime Minister to the American people. And after all I am a journalist and there would be news in such a statement. I wasn't to have my cake. As soon as I began asking him

questions, the Prime Minister said that this message must be a "private conversation." I tried to argue with him. Prime Ministers don't argue with well!

He turned me down gracefully but definitely, remarking reasonably that expressing oneself accurately was difficult and that when he had something to say publicly he liked to think a great deal about it and work it out in his own way. So we talked as one must talk with the President of the U.S., "not for publication." We talked for half an hour.

I waited some minutes, chatting with his secretary. He was a dark, slim, young man in his middle thirties who said he had been secretary to Mr. Chamberlain before he was secretary to Mr. Churchill. I said Mr. Chamberlain wasn't popular in America, and he said, "Ah, that's a pity. I think he was very much misunderstood."

I turned the conversation back to Mr. Churchill. I asked the secretary if he would tell me Mr. Churchill's routine because I said I was interested in how a man ran a war. The secretary said, "He has an enormous amount of energy, you know. I think the thing about Mr. Churchill that has not been emphasised enough is his military knowledge and experience. It is very rare, you know, that a Prime Minister can talk to his generals on a basis of equality. Mr. Churchill has them in here and he knows what they are talking about."

I asked if they ever talked back and argued with him. He said: "Oh, my heavens, yes!"

Everywhere I went in London people admired his energy, his courage, his singleness of purpose. People said they "didn't know what Britain would do without him." He was obviously respected. But few felt he would be Prime Minister after the war. He was simply the right man in the right job at the right time: the time of a desperate war with Britain's enemies. Everyone remarked that he loved his job and that he had risen to his terrific responsibilities brilliantly.

[REPORT ON ENGLAND. By Ralph Ingersoll, John Lane at the Bodley Head. Through Whitcombe & Tombs.]