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Final Research Paper

**Fighting to Save a Nation:
Volunteerism and London's Auxiliary
Fire Service in the Blitz**

British Society and Culture, 1914-45, Dr. Richard Grace

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By 1936, a mere three years after his appointment as Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler had remilitarized parts of Western Germany in defiance of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. That same year, the Rome-Berlin Axis was formed between Hitler's Nazi Germany and Mussolini's fascist Italy. The ominous specter of another world war lingered over the British Isles during the late 1930s and by June of 1940 France had quickly fallen under Nazi occupation. With war on the horizon, the British government began preparing its civilians for possible air strikes and chemical attacks. Along with the Air Raid Wardens Service, the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) was set up in 1938 as a part of the London's Air Raid Precautions (ARPs) and Civil Defense Service. Unlike the gas masks and air raid shelters, the AFS served as a unique task force of both male and female citizens dedicated to preventing massive fires from sweeping through London's tight network of neighborhoods.¹ The unique trait shared by many of these volunteers was that nearly 90% had no previous experience with firefighting.² When London was hammered by the Blitz, the bravery and dedication of these men and women outweighed their inexperience fighting fires. With each passing night of bombing, the AFS matured into a well-orchestrated and gritty group of men and women unified by the common cause of saving their city. Ultimately, the AFS was one of the major reasons that London survived the near crushing blow of the Blitz, as Churchill's "heroes with grimy faces" bloomed into an integral part of preserving the morale of Britain as it teetered on the brink of a devastating defeat.³

Two months after France crumbled under Hitler's expanding empire, German bombers entered British airspace with London in their crosshairs. As Londoners enjoyed their afternoon tea on September 7, 1940, a 20 mile wide German fleet ominously approached Britain in

¹ Bruce Robinson, "London's Burning: The Great Fire," The BBC
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/civil_war_revolution/great_fire_01.shtml

² <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/fire-brigade-during-the-second-world-war.asp>

³ Peter Doyle, *ARP and Civil Defense in the Second World War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 29.

advance of a 12 hour barrage that would shake Britain to its core. Unlike the strafe bombing used in the destruction of Guernica in 1937, the Blitz was an extremely calculated attack that sought to crush Britain by draining the proud nation of its boisterous morale.⁴ From the German incendiary bombs and nighttime raids to the use of tidal trends, Hitler's hope was that the combination of sheer force with careful planning and execution of the Blitz would lead to a quick surrender by Britain. The idea of Blitzkrieg was that a controlled chaos, when repeatedly unleashed, would simply overwhelm Britain; however, Hitler underestimated one major resource that may have saved London: the willpower of the British citizens.

Willpower, though certainly a sizeable factor, was not the only reason London endured the Blitz. The British government had implemented a series of Air Raid Precautions (ARPs) with the initiation of its Civil Defense Service (CDS). Above the city, the Royal Air Force (RAF) was tasked with scrambling and fending off the massive German fleets (Luftwaffe) that constantly bombarded the British mainland. Surprisingly, the RAF successfully deterred the Luftwaffe and took control of the skies during the day.⁵ Additionally, the RAF carried out a series of successful raids on Berlin; however, these victories were short-lived as the Luftwaffe began implementing a series of devastating night raids. When speaking with regards to British retaliation, Hitler declared that he would drop "400,000 kilos (of bombs) more in one night."⁶

After the first week of bombing, it was clear that Britain's smaller fighter planes were capable of controlling the daytime skies, despite occasionally being outnumbered by three to one. In fact, after the RAF's success on September 15, 1940, Germany initiated a new campaign of nighttime terror bombings with the hope that their superior radar systems and sheer numbers

⁴ Peter Stansky, *The First Day of the Blitz: September 7, 1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 4.

⁵ Stansky, Introduction vii.

⁶ Margaret Gaskin, *Blitz: The Story of December 29, 1940* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 27.

would help the Luftwaffe take back control of the skies.⁷ Churchill had warned that “once darkness fell, the skies pretty much belonged to the Luftwaffe.”⁸ Despite heavy fire from anti-air guns and a government enforced blackout to take Britain off the map, the German bombers kept mercilessly pounding the city into submission.⁹

To understand both the careful calculations taken by Hitler and the devastating results the Blitz had on the city, one must first examine a general layout of London. When examining London’s Square Mile, it is easy to notice the tight network of The City’s streets and boroughs.¹⁰ Additionally, the typical limit on building height was about 100 feet around 1940 because the soil was determined to be too soft to support large skyscrapers.¹¹ When taking the loamy soil into account, it makes sense that London was made up of tightly packed boroughs because the architects and engineers, realizing they could not take advantage of vertical space, needed to compromise and maximize horizontal capacity. Unfortunately, with buildings close to one another, the city’s layout made it easy for one fire to spread to nearby structures or combine with neighboring fires to form a massive inferno. Similarly, the network of tight streets provided streamline avenues of oxygen that stoked each fire set during the Blitz like a campfire in the middle of summer. To make matters worse, the Luftwaffe’s use of thousands of incendiary bombs (IBs) filled with thermite¹² meant the sky would literally be raining fire down over the city. Burning at 2000 degrees Fahrenheit, the incendiary bombs would lodge themselves in building roofs and burn through wood, brick, and even steel. The IBs were strategically designed to blanket London with a firestorm that consumed the city faster than fire brigades

⁷ Gaskin, 162, 165-66.

⁸ Gaskin, 157.

⁹ Gaskin, 99.

¹⁰ Gaskin, image: “The Square Mile before the bombing of December 29, 1940”

¹¹ Gaskin, 73.

¹² Louise Osmond, “The Blitz: London’s Longest Night” (London: Darlow Smithson Productions 2006), pt.1.

could handle given their limited water supply and resources. Though German air raids were expected, the purpose of the Blitz was to overwhelm Britain regardless of any pre-Blitz precautions and preparations. Perhaps the clearest illustration of Hitler's merciless onslaught of London took place just a few days after Christmas.

After nearly four months of bombing the city of London, the German Luftwaffe prepared to deliver a decisive blow to Britain on the night of December 29, 1940. The British air defenses were some of the best in the world, but they were still buckling under the pressure of the massive Luftwaffe. The raid on December 29 was one of the most ferocious air raids carried out by the Luftwaffe and served as the ultimate test of London's resources and overall morale. Unlike many of the previous raids, the night raid of December 29 was meant to demonstrate one of Hitler's newest, carefully calculated terror-bombing strategies. As was the case with the raid of October 15, 1940, Hitler chose to scale up his fleet of bombers with a full moon in the sky. With the tides at their lowest, the Thames River was rendered a useless pool of mud.¹³ Consequently, any hope of utilizing the river's water in an emergency situation was quickly jettisoned. While the raids up until this point certainly took a toll on London (there were actually more casualties in September than December)¹⁴, it was the raid of December 29 that both pushed Britain to the edge of surrender and united the nation against the imposing German bombers. In a sense, December 29 was a true test of the government's resolution, its resources, and the Londoners' morale.

In order to fully appreciate the unwavering morale of the Londoners, it is important to examine the concept of total war with regards to the Blitz. The idea of implementing total war

¹³ Frank and Joan Shaw, *We Remember the Blitz* (London: Ebury Press 2012), 83.

¹⁴ Shaw, Introduction xii-xv.

has been up for debate largely because the direct targeting of citizens during a conflict means that innocent bystanders become embroiled in the already unnecessary mass of fatalities. Before examining the ethics of total war and terror bombing, though, we must also take a moment to understand the implications that total war may have on the citizens who have been drawn into the conflict. As in the case of a natural disaster, Londoners during the Blitz illustrated how citizens willingly lent help to those who were in desperate need of relief. Whether it was as part of a night watch at St. Paul's Cathedral, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, rescue parties, or the Auxiliary Fire Service, the citizens of London fought to save each other and their city from the Luftwaffe's endless barrage.

Though no citizen wanted to be involved in the war, the people of London knew that they had to choose whether they would fight or watch London burn to the ground. On December 29, the Luftwaffe continued to exercise the notion of total war during a raid that was literally intended to burn the Londoners' hope for survival to the ground with their city. Indeed the military capabilities of those involved in total war, and the implications or objectives therein would form the root of the conflict.¹⁵ For example, when considering the city of London during the Blitz as an environment of total war, it is important to realize that both the British and Germans participated in terror bombing. For the sake of this paper, the topic of German terror bombing and its implications on the citizens of London will be the primary focus; however, it is essential to note that the British, though with less frequency, did carry out terror raids on German cities in retaliation for the Blitz. Though the German military was by in large superior to the British military, the military capabilities of both sides were great enough to inflict severe harm on the citizens of each nation. It is clear that the stakes were high for both the Germans and the

¹⁵ John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 4.

British. While the German objective was to force Britain to surrender, it seems likely that after months of pouring their resources into the aerial assault of London the morale of the Luftwaffe would be crushed without securing a victory.¹⁶ Clearly, there were greater implications for Hitler and Germany than simply conquering the British Isles. In a similar sense, the citizens of London were united by the lofty objective to save the city from burning to the ground; however, the greater implication of the Blitz on December 29 (also seen in other large raids) was the need to retain the morale and fighting spirit of Britain as a whole. If London burnt to the ground, the nation would likely crumble just as fast as their city under the pressure of the Luftwaffe. This pressure was a true test of a Londoner's character.

The Blitz was not only about dismantling a city, but also about dismantling the psyche of a nation. Every aspect of the Blitz was meant to demoralize. The Blitz started with the bombing of industrial locations to slow the British economy; however, the boundaries between industrial and civilian targets gradually disappeared as the barrage enveloped London.¹⁷ On December 29, the line between industrial and civilian targets was further blurred as Hitler continued to place his military agenda ahead of the lives of innocent bystanders. That night, the Luftwaffe delivered thousands of incendiary bombs to perhaps the most flammable district in the Square Mile. In the first 45 minutes of the raid, over 10,000 IBs had fallen on the region surrounding St. Paul's. This area, made up of a network of narrow streets, was like a giant tinder bundle and was home to the press, textile, and publishing industries. During phase two of the raid, the Luftwaffe

¹⁶ Gaskin, 159.

¹⁷ Osmond, pt.1.

strategically targeted this tinder bundle with the hopes that it would start an overwhelming firestorm in London's Square Mile.¹⁸

The concept of Hitler's firebombing was especially frightening to the volunteers fighting to save the city. Richard Holsgrove, then 17, was a volunteer firefighter during the December 29 raid. According to Holsgrove, "It really scared us because you knew the idea of an incendiary attack was like switching on a lightbulb. It lit everything up and then the bombers came in and pinpointed it (the target)."¹⁹ Once the fires spread, the government mandated blackout was rendered useless. Even though the city resembled a bright target for the Luftwaffe to drop their bombs, many Londoners were committed to saving both the city and people hanging on for survival. Ann Regan-Atherton remembered the bravery of her parents, Bill and Vi Regan, on the night of December 29. Speaking of her parents' willing return to the city, she said, "They were gutsy people. The city was on fire but they knew they had to get home, so that's what they were determined to do."²⁰ Both Bill and Vi realized that saving the city was more important than saving themselves. This thought process was the glue that held the city together during the Blitz.

Though some volunteers paid the ultimate price by sacrificing their lives for the sake of saving London, nearly every Londoner experienced the harrowing psychological effects associated with the Blitz. On December 29, it seemed as though some Londoners were pushed to their breaking point. Above the ground, Richard Holsgrove remembered the firebombing and recounted, "They (the buildings) started to burn, one by one, and it was frightening to see them (IBs) coming down because you knew the city all around us was all on fire."²¹ The helpless

¹⁸ Osmond, pt.1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

feeling of watching one's city burn to the ground is one that could not be forgotten. Similarly, the feeling of being trapped underground haunts survivors to this day. The "trapped and helpless" sensation of waiting underground for another barrage to hit would paralyze the cramped Londoners seeking shelter everywhere from Anderson shelters, basements, and the tube stations.²² Despite being underground, one could never be sure if the shelter would survive a direct hit from above that sent layers of overhead support crashing down upon those waiting in fear.

In addition to the fear of death from above, the circumstances surrounding and during the Blitz were far from comfortable, which only added to the stress building in all of the Londoners. Aside from not knowing when the next bomb would hit, each air raid shelter was packed with people like a can of sardines. In fact, most shelters were filled over the maximum capacity.²³ To make matters worse, many Londoners had been "feeling the pinch" of wartime taxes and rations that were constantly being cut. Thus the Blitz again served to weaken the morale of the citizens by forcing bleak living conditions upon a city that was typically accustomed to high standards of life. Rations meant Londoners familiarized themselves with the metallic taste of canned foods. Some Londoners even recall learning to live without fresh fruits.²⁴ The mental toll of learning to accept a new way of life, on top of being bombarded by the Luftwaffe each night, certainly tested the Londoners' tenacity; however, the dire circumstances also united the city against Hitler's imposing terror tactics. The unification of Londoners during the Blitz was evident in both the spirited volunteerism and comradery of the citizens. Joan Adams, a factory worker who lived through the Blitz, says her clearest memory of the terror bombings is of how close

²² Gaskin, 85.

²³ Osmond, pt.1.

²⁴ Gaskin, 111, 125.

everyone would become as a result of the Blitz. Adams relays that “There was the kindness and help of people you didn’t even know. Help and assistance given whenever you needed it without any thought for reward.”²⁵ Despite such a bleak situation, the Londoners remained steadfast to one another with the hope that their unification would help deter Hitler’s attempts at dismantling their city. Perhaps one of the best examples of a unified force fighting back against the Luftwaffe was not the British military; rather, it was the group of volunteers fighting the fires every night during the Blitz. For the British Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS), each night of the Blitz was a call to arms to defend the city from the constant firebombing. On December 29, 1940, the AFS realized that they were in for a true trial by fire.

One could argue that the members of the Auxiliary Fire Service were the foot soldiers defending the city from the Luftwaffe. This ragtag group of men and women was a volunteer organization of ordinary citizens that were either too old or too young to serve in the military. Some members of the AFS had less than a month of training and no firefighting experience until the firebombing during the Blitz. Many of the new recruits were artists, writers, literary critics and other pacifists who volunteered to help on the home front.²⁶ The inexperience of many members was noticeable from the onset of the Blitz; however, the courage of these men and women was unparalleled. On top of fighting immense fires throughout the city, the AFS were at the heart of the Luftwaffe’s bombing. Members of the AFS had to concentrate on the fires until a watchman shouted to take cover from the next wave of IBs or even a high-explosive bomb.²⁷ With each passing night, the inexperience of the AFS gave way to the group’s indescribable bravery. George Wheeler, an 18 year old member of the AFS during the Blitz, remembers the

²⁵ Shaw, 4.

²⁶ Osmond, pt.1; Gaskin, 249-50.

²⁷ Gaskin, 248.

difficulty containing the fires that incessantly formed around the area of St. Paul's Cathedral. Wheeler recalled, "You heard the bombers and you looked up and you could see them... There were a hundred times more small fires than usual. You've got to concentrate on putting those fires out, but there were so many that you couldn't deal with them all at once."²⁸ While it was an uphill battle that at times seemed unwinnable, the unwavering determination and courage of the AFS was a major reason that London survived what became known as the "second great fire of London."²⁹

Courage was not the sole reason that the AFS managed to contain the firestorm enveloping London. The dynamics of the AFS were a large factor in determining its success in slowing the onslaught of the Luftwaffe. By December 29, 1940, the AFS had become an efficient organization of over 200,000 active men and women volunteers working in unison to save the city.³⁰ In order to comprehend the impressive stand made by the AFS against the firestorm, it is necessary to examine both the men and women volunteers of this gritty organization.

Before heading to the front lines and looking at the hands-on firefighting carried out mostly by male members of the AFS, we should investigate the roles of the volunteers working behind the scenes. These volunteers, mostly women, played an integral part in coordinating the consolidated efforts of the AFS during the Blitz. While few women actively fought fires, they filled volunteer positions including communication staffers, control operators, dispatch riders, firewatchers, and water canteen drivers.³¹ In a sense, the women provided the brains and tactical

²⁸ Osmond, pt.1.

²⁹ Fact File: Fire Duty, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/timeline/factfiles/nonflash/a6651344.shtml>

³⁰ Fact File: Fire Duty, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/timeline/factfiles/nonflash/a6651344.shtml>

³¹ Amy Helen Bell, *London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz* (London: I.B.Tauris, Jun 15, 2011), 96.

skills needed to help synchronize the efforts of the men fighting the blaze. Despite their limited involvement with actual firefighting, the courage and commitment of the women volunteers were certainly valuable resources of the AFS. Outside of the communications offices, women drove firemen, food, water, messages, and even petrol cans to the front lines for the men fighting the fires. Behind the scenes, women staffed the watch rooms in charge of relaying the positions of new and growing fires to the men at the front. Additionally, women were in charge of phone rooms that were flooded with calls informing the AFS that reinforcements were needed all across London's Square Mile.³² While the men fighting the fires remained the arms and legs of the AFS, the women became the eyes and ears that oversaw both the well-being of the firefighters and the city. The nurturing aspect of women, one similar to that of a mother overseeing her children playing at a park, was in full effect in each of these control rooms; however, the women were now tasked with overseeing the entire city and men fighting to save it. Though given an immense responsibility behind the scenes, the women volunteers constructed an efficient network of communications as quickly as the Luftwaffe turned up the heat on the night of December 29, 1940.

In stark contrast to the women of the AFS, the men who volunteered formed a band of gritty foot soldiers that fought the fires threatening to overtake the city. The men, bound by the comradery of British nationalism, strong senses of humor, and the occasional game of cricket during the day, were not as quick to grow into their roles as the women.³³ While the inexperience was shared between both genders, the hands-on requirements of the men fighting fires proved to be a bit cumbersome for many of the novice volunteers. The inexperience of the male members of the AFS often put the volunteers in grave danger. Frank Hurd, a member of

³² Gaskin, 37,222; Neil Wallington, *Firemen at War* (West Yorkshire: Jeremy Mills Publishing 2007), 91-92.

³³ Gaskin, 103, 121.

the AFS present during the December 29 raid, recalled not knowing how to shut off a ruptured gas line.³⁴ Clearly, the efforts of the novice AFS members came during a time of trial by fire; however, as time progressed, the men became more familiar with tackling each new fire set off by German incendiary bombs. In the end, true struggle of the AFS was simply a lack of readily available resources. For example, Leonard Rosoman, a member of the AFS, wrote about the struggles of having the resources stretched beyond their limits. Taxis were used as vehicles to bring hoses and pumps to the fires, and when the water ran out the men had to wait until more was delivered. As the men waited, the buildings continued to burn and spread fires to neighboring structures.³⁵ The lack of pumps, water, and long enough hoses was constantly a problem for the men attempting to keep the fires at bay. In addition to the stress of lacking proper resources, the AFS faced a constant physical and psychological barrage during their time at the heart of the Blitz. Citizens hunkering down in shelters were not the only people facing psychologically taxing situations. One of Rosoman's most terrifying experiences was hearing the sound of brick and metal bending and buckling from the intense heat. Outside the buildings, other firefighters heard the drone of the bombers as they ominously flew through the dark skies ready to mercilessly unleash more high explosive and incendiary bombs. Richard Holsgrove, who was fighting fires just a few blocks away from Rosoman, remembers the sick feeling that overcame the firefighters when they heard the whistle of the bombs being dropped overhead.³⁶ With each bomb, the men were pushed to the breaking point; however, they remained steadfast and committed to their objective. Without their commitment, the fires would have simply torched London in an unforgiving firestorm.

³⁴ Gaskin, 102.

³⁵ Osmond, pt.1.

³⁶ Osmond, pt.1.

It took an intense commitment for the men of the AFS to continue pooling their efforts throughout the night of December 29. Men, like Leonard Rosoman, even watched their friends sacrifice their lives to save both their fellow volunteers and the city. In less than 15 minutes, the area around Fleet Street was immersed in flames and Rosoman's unit was surrounded by fire. Rosoman's experience illustrates the "shocking and powerful fear" experienced by nearly every AFS fireman during the Blitz; however, the writings of his friend William Samson, a fellow AFS member, described the necessary courage it took to withstand the dire circumstances. Samson wrote, "After the first few hours, you don't think of anything at all."³⁷ Despite being crippled with fear as the brick of each building was heated to the point of combustion, the men of the AFS did not panic and remained focused solely on putting out the fires and moving on to the next task until receiving the notification to withdraw. This commitment to London would ultimately prove to be fatal for many members of the AFS.

For the remainder of the night, the AFS fought an uphill battle against the persistent Luftwaffe. As the psychological effects associated with watching both their friends and their city burn continued to test the morale of the volunteers, the AFS faced a seemingly endless string of worst-case scenarios. George Wheeler's account of when a German bomb fractured the water main was just one of the harrowing experiences of the AFS during the night of December 29.³⁸ With the water main ruptured, the AFS could not utilize the hydrants and pumps that were the staples of their arsenal to combat the growing firestorm. Additionally, the tides of the Thames at the time of the raid rendered the river a useless pool of mud. The AFS used all of its resources to coordinate an effort to bring in water from outside the fire zone; however, during this effort the

³⁷ Osmond, pt.1.

³⁸ Osmond, pt.2.

fires continued to grow stronger.³⁹ In the face of jammed gas lines, ruptured water mains, and collapsing buildings, the AFS continued to work like a well-oiled machine dedicated to stopping the flames from spreading. While the AFS lacked sufficient resources, the men and women worked diligently and cohesively to stop the fires at all costs. As the AFS was stretched to its limits, the brave men and women illustrated how the strength of will-power can be vital to achieving even the most unimaginable goals. Utilizing the multitude of truck stations lining the districts of London, the AFS rushed through the streets and risked their lives in a desperate attempt to save the city from burning to the ground.⁴⁰ Eventually, the AFS utilized every last resource they had and began to control the fires engulfing London after over 20,000 incendiary bombs were dropped by the Luftwaffe. As the last phase of the raid was called off due to severe weather warnings⁴¹, the AFS gradually quenched the fires and helped bring the city back from the brink of destruction.

It is difficult to say what may have been the fate of London without the AFS during the Blitz. When examining the night raid of December 29, 1940, it is clear that the AFS played a large role in keeping the fires at bay. Additionally, the loss of nearly 1,000 AFS members⁴² during the Blitz certainly illustrated that the fighting spirit of London was just as tough to burn to the ground as St. Paul's Cathedral. Though there were many volunteer organizations that played a part in saving London, the combined efforts of the men and women of the AFS led to Winston Churchill's declaration that these volunteers were "heroes with grimy faces."⁴³

³⁹ Osmond, pt.2.

⁴⁰ Gaskin, 100.

⁴¹ Gaskin, 160-61; Osmond, pt.2.

⁴² Fact File: Fire Duty <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/timeline/factfiles/nonflash/a6651344.shtml>

⁴³ <http://www.wiifire.co.uk/history.htm>

It is hard to argue against the importance of the AFS, but one must still wonder whether their efforts would have been rendered useless in the face of another wave of bombers. If the last phase of the raid had not been canceled, December 29, 1940 might be known today as the last day in London's history. The resources were already stretched to their limits that night and it seems plausible that the Luftwaffe could have delivered a decisive blow had the weather not interfered with Hitler's onslaught of London.⁴⁴ Even if London had fallen, it is difficult to predict the success of Hitler's quest for world domination.

While Hitler did continue to bomb London until May 1941, it was clear that the momentum had shifted back to the Allies' retaliation efforts. After failing to siege London, the Luftwaffe had endured a taxing campaign of constant bombings without anything to show for their incessant efforts. If London had fallen, the Luftwaffe might have had enough energy to take the battle across the Atlantic to America. The British Isles were only a short flight from German occupied France, and it seems like an invasion of America would be exponentially more difficult to accomplish after Germany invested so many resources in the Blitzkrieg. On the surface it seems like a successful Blitz would have shifted the momentum to the Germans; however, the morale of the Luftwaffe had already been stretched quite a bit over the course of its most recent bombing campaign.⁴⁵ Whether the Luftwaffe would have packed the same punch if they had been ordered to attack America shortly after Britain is open to speculation.

While speculation about "what may have been" is interesting, it is clear that the AFS played a major role in saving the city of London. Although the inexperience of many members was a cause for alarm at the onset of the Blitz, the volunteers' bravery and ability to learn on the

⁴⁴ Gaskin, 160.

⁴⁵ Gaskin, 159.

fly helped the AFS snuff out Hitler's hope of reducing London to a pile of ashes. Throughout history, there have not been many other groups that willingly endured as physically and psychologically taxing situations as the AFS. After surviving Hitler's terror bombing, London's morale was rekindled as quickly as the firestorms of the Blitz had started.

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