



St Bartholomew's Hospital

26
Communiqués
written during the
London blitz
August 1940 to March 1941

by
Paul Rowntree

to his parents.



Liverpool Street underground Station

An addendum to the booklet
Aspects of the Life of Paul Rowntree



St Paul's Cathedral
on 29/30 December 1940

Communiqués by Paul



Damage to St Bartholomews Hospital



Collated by Raoul Guise
March 2017

during the first Blitz of WW2 in London

August 1940 to March 1941

An addendum to the booklet **Aspects of the Life of Paul Rowntree**

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March 2017

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Gwen's notes on the bombs dropped, deaths and damage, during the blitz

Introduction

List of Terms etc used throughout the Communiqués

F.A.U.	Friend's Ambulance Unit (Quakers)
MOPs	Medical Out Patients
O.P.s	Outpatients
SOPs	Surgical Out Patients
ENTS	Ear Nose and Throat Clinic
BID's	Brought in Dead
Ach-ach	refers to anti-aircraft guns that made the sound ach-ach
Gt. St. Helens	Great Saint Helens was the location of the First Aid Post in which Paul worked
GPO	General Post Office
CTO	Central Telegraph Office
Barts	St. Bartholomew's Hospital where Paul trained
MI – M of I	Ministry of Information
A.T.S.	Anti Tetanus Serum
A.R.P.	Air Raid Precaution
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
AFS	Auxiliary Fire Service
P.C.	Police Constable or Post card
The Vicarage	A Barts Club room
Mrs and Joan Winn	Mother and sister of Sybil, Michael Rowntrees wife
M & S	Michael and Sybil
Girling Ball	Dean of St Batholemew's Hospital
LPTB	London Passenger Transport Board
[---]	Editorial additions

A handful of individual word edits have been applied to the original documents in an endeavour to help the flow of the storyline.

On 27th August 1940, the 20 years old medical student, Paul Rowntree, was returning from his parents home in York, back to St Bartholomew's Hospital in London. The Second World War had been raging for a year. The disaster, or success, of Dunkirk had occurred a few months earlier at the end of May 1940. Hitler had been bombing airfields for some time and had been incorrectly informed that the RAF was defeated and so turned his attention to London and other major cities of England. Recognised history suggests that this started on 7th September 1940, however Paul's return to London on that late August evening was greeted with bombing searchlight and Ach-Ach fire. After going to St Bartholomew's, he struggled to get to his First Aid Post at Gt. St. Helens where he was due to spend the night either sleeping or working.

For whatever reason, Paul started the first of a series of 26 Communiqués to his parents giving a detailed account of his experiences during the Blitz. These Communiqués give us considerable insight of what was happening at the time as seen through the eyes of an enthusiast trainee Doctor, excited to be there and planning to join the Royal Navy when he qualified. We are given reports of the bombing as well as some lurid details of his medical experiences in addition to reports of the normal day to day activities of healthy medical students of the day. The early Communiqués give considerable details of the bombing including his return to the city from a day out at Hill End Hospital on the 7th September 1940.

The 14th Communiqué is interesting in that it is the first written after a two week break in York, having spent two months working in blitzed London. The tone of this letter changes radically, referring to London as his home, which he is delighted to return to. His mood, sensitivities and observations of that which was around him are notable and are best understood in the light of three letters he wrote from York to Gwen Marshall who

was, within two years, to be his wife. Gwen worked in the same First Aid Post as Paul. It is unlikely that Paul met Gwen before August 1940. This presumption is based on the fact that Paul was at St Albans until about August of that year and that Gt. St. Helens First Aid Post where Paul and Gwen met would not have been needed until the first bombs were dropped on London on 24th August.

Paul once mentioned that he did not enter medicine because of a passionate desire to help or cure people but because he was fascinated by how the human body worked. This fascination extended to an interest into their minds and how people operated as a whole. This is clearly shown in his observations of the numerous people around him during the time that these Communiqués were written. But also, we see that this observational quality was flavoured by the pointers to his attitude to injustice and suffering of others and his anger at inadequate application of medicine by those that should know better. These aspects of his nature were going to be the hallmark of his professional life.

As an aside, it is worth mentioning that during this period while Paul was in London, other members and future members of his family were in the area. His father in law to be, Alfred Marshall, who lived in Mitcham, was working at the Central Post Office and doing fire watch in the St Paul's area. The future mother in law, Joan Dibdin, of his daughter to be (born 1943) was working at a First Aid Post at St Marylebone and unknown to most of us until after her death, his cousin Betsy was working at Bletchley Park. Paul's father Colin who had worked for Friends Ambulance and the War Graves in WW1, was later on active service, during WW2, in Leeds while his mother, Mary, was active in York and Hull working for bomb relief.

The last date mentioned in the Communiqués is 31st March 1941 and this was probably a marker for the end of the first blitz in London. Considerable bombing did occur throughout England in the next few years and London was hit again with devastating results in 1944-45. This was a period of considerable evacuation particularly of children because of the impact of the V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets.

By this time, Paul was either working in Enfield or York in General Practice. His dream of joining the Navy was wrecked by illness in 1943.

The sequencing of Communiqué 19A and B is a little confusing. It seems that Paul may have been writing Communiqué 19, to be called 19B, progressively and had not finished when he felt that he needed to send a quick letter on 20 Dec 40, the day after a very bad raid. This letter, he called Communiqué 19A and then finished Communiqué 19B in detail later. The story of 29th Dec 1940 continues in Communiqué 20 which is of significant interest historically, as it is a detailed report of Paul's observation of the state of the City after the raid of 29th December 1940. London was plastered with incendiaries and much of the city was on fire. Paul and his student colleague roamed the streets through the fire hoses and rubble and noted in great clarity the state of the buildings.

Photographs from the time taken from internet sources are included to enhance much of Paul's details. A map of the area showing key place referred to, is also included. This Communiqué No. 20. continues to give fine detail of the devastation of Saturday 11th January when a bomb went through the road into the ticket office of the Bank Underground Station and Liverpool St. Station was hit twice. Paul was left in charge at his 1st aid post, without access to all his resources and had to apply himself to "battlefield surgery" knowing that the hospitals would be overloaded.

This Communiqué No. 20 stands out as it shows, in one article, the comparison between the enthusiastic youngster enjoying the excitement of the fires and bombing, almost to a callous degree and the skilled doctor in waiting, taking immense responsibility and showing compassion and respect for his injured patients. One gets the impression that this repeated itself amongst many of Paul's student colleagues.

To help put these Communiqués in context it is worth remembering that Paul's father, Colin Rowntree, worked near the Western front for the duration of the First World War. For two years he was with the Friends Ambulance dealing with injury, illness and the transportation of refugees from the Ypres area and then for the second two years he was a 2nd Lieutenant in Royal Engineers working exclusively on war grave work, managing the digging up and burying of the dead every day. He must have felt very proud and supportive of his son's work.

The last communiqué was posted on 31st March 1941. The first Blitz is considered to have ended by mid May and by this time Paul was working a Redhill Hospital doing maternity work, He delivered his first baby on 7th May 1941.

From photographs taken during that month it can be deduced that Paul and Gwen had developed quite a relationship.

The second blitz in London that created havoc with the flying bombs that started on 13 June 1944 and the V2 rockets that started on 8 September 1944, the first landing in Staveley Road in Chiswick.

In the archive with the Communiqués were detailed notes made by Gwen. They include a detailed summary of the planes and bombs dropped on London during this first blitz and some additional notes regarding casualties. This work can be seen in the appendix.

While reading these Communiqués, it is worth considering the lives of the recipients. Paul's parents, Colin and Mary, had got married on 30th Oct 1914, the very day that Colin left for France to work with the Friend's Ambulance Unit on the front line of WW1.

After two years he left and join the Royal Engineers and worked for the rest of the war on war graves work as a Second Lieutenant.

At this time Mary was setting up house in Chiswick with the help of her father in law, Fred Rowntree, and architect, whose contribution to the world effort at that time included caring for and employing Belgian Refugees and designing prefabricated houses to be build in Holland, for assembly in Belgian after the war.

Paul's Communiqués written to his parents, living in Stonegate, York, with details of death and destruction in London would be of interest to Colin but one would expect did nothing but worry Mary.

Their elder son, Michael, was working in South Africa initially as an engineer on bakery machinery but later in munitions for the British Government.

During the Second World War it is unclear exactly what Colin was doing during this period. In November 1939 he had received a letter from the military as follows:

Colin had a letter marked secret definitely offering him G.R.Unit No.4 (Graves Registration) to Proceed somewhere in Southern Command on Jan 15th and Cross to France about 1st Feb. There was a list of his Unit and we think it was a bit ominous that it says "Captain 1 bicycle 1 Subalterns 2 bicycles 2 ! But as he says he can probably snaffle a car as they had in the last war, on the spot. The Unit consists of about 38 people Officers 3 R& F 35 (Rank

and File) . I suppose the idea is to have them ready for the Spring Offensive.

But it is unlikely that he actually did any of this, although it is recorded that

Colin was in Aldershot in March 1940. Mary wrote to Paul on Victoria Hotel paper in July maybe 1940.

I seems that Colin was "on active service" judging for the remark by Paul in Communiqué 23 about wishing to know what a Captain's job would be.

It seems likely that after Aldershot, Colin then went to Leeds "On Active Service" and in May 1941, we have

Colin tries to get home to York for weekends but petrol rationing may cause a problem. Mary exhausted from work with WVS. She has been in charge of evacuation as well as two long and arduous days in Hull. She opted out of marching on Women's Day of War Weapons Week. Colin is glad that Paul is keeping his peritoneum in tact so far.

And in June 1941

Mary went to Leeds for the day meet Colin for lunch, then went with him to one of his gun stations. The ATS are not to be at the stations after all.

In August 1941 Colin went to Scarborough for "Training" and by April 1942, Mary had set up home in a flat in Leeds so that they could be together when Colin was off duty. Mary was still working on relief work in York and Hull and happened to be in York on the night of the York bombing in "Early in the morning of Wednesday, April 29, 1942, York suffered its worst air raid of the war."

The full letter that Mary wrote to Paul about the event is in the Appendix.

R.G. March 2017