Primary Source: Richard Daughtry on Surviving the Blitz [1]

This interview comes from the "Remembering World War II. World War II Veterans Oral History Preservation Project." Those interviewed told about conditions in active duty service, battle strategy, and other important elements of warfare.

Daughtry:

I hope I'm not forgetting because I wanted to talk a little about the Battle of Britain.

Hayes:

Oh, OK. Well that's a good point. You mean in other words, while you're doing these short things, the Luftwaffe [2] was bombing at that point?

Daughtry:

Not especially in the daytime in England. This is the point I was going to make. They did not make daytime raids when I was there. I was there eight months before invasion. And they didn't do daytime raids in England. They'd start about, if it was in the wintertime, about 5:30 or 6:00 when darkness. Usually they would come in and whatever type airplane, bomber or whatever... I'm sure it was a bomber type, they would drop canisters of foil over their target areas, approaching their target areas.

This foil would foul up the English radar. We did the same thing. We did the same situation. But it would look like, at night it would look like snow coming down. But it would foul up radar.

Hayes:

But your P-47's were not going up fighting these?

Daughtry:

No. And that's another point. We only did our missions in the daytime, and the British flew at night and the Germans flew at night. So anything we heard were either German or British planes.

Hayes:

And had they targeted your base at all?

Daughtry:

They did several times and they, actually they were targeting cities at that time more industrial. In fact, I saw them firebomb Colchester one night, which is about three miles from us. Their firebombs were, well they did different kind of ways. They had the napalm stuff, I'm sure but they didn't call it that but they had it.

And what was so interesting, that type of material would be on fire when it left the bomber and it was like a stream, like a hot molten, like you would pour hot molten out of a... But they also had incendiaries [3] , and that was what mostly hit our base were incendiaries and anti-personnel. They didn't drop any huge bombs.

Hayes:

Now how would you know, you have an air raid warning?

Daughtry:

Yes.

Hayes:

Where'd you go then? What did you do?

Daughtry:

Well we, in the beginning, we all, they had bomb shelters on that base and they had so many men were assigned to a bomb shelter. So I would run into a bomb shelter to start with. But what happens to you in war, you get tough. And I would tell you that during that eight months, sometimes we were out three times a night because they were bombing heavily right on up until the invasion.

Hayes:

Wow.

Daughtry:

How those people in England stood it I'll never know. They were tough and they were bombed since 1939. So I give them a lot of credit. Those people are due... I wonder if we could stand that in this country. Questionable, isn't it?

Hayes:

Well, if we had to.

Daughtry:

Well, it was tough on them and those, you know, miles and miles of burned-out area in London there.

Hayes:

Now what about your planes during that? Were they protected?

Daughtry:

Well they were in revetments [4]. The sandbags up around them.

Hayes:

Oh, good. So you didn't lose any planes?

Daughtry:

Not unless it was something hit right in the revetment. But we didn't lose. I don't remember ever being hit while we were in England. But I wanted to say something about the war there. Actually, that particular part of the war helped win the war. The British action against German planes that bombed at night. You may have heard that, about their loss of fighters.

Now I watched that at night. I got to where I'd stand outside my little old Nissen hut and watch it. I wouldn't even go to the bomb shelter. And it was so interesting, it was like a movie. Like a sports thing. And those search lights would be wiggling up in the air. And they'd catch one in the beam, a fighter or bomber or anything they would catch. The rest of the searchlights would focus in on that one. And then there would be a hundred or so from the ground that was not on. It would suddenly come on. And they had that sky lit up like day.

I never saw a plane get out of that type of a situation. Either the ground crew knocked them down or an English fighter knocked them down. And you got this ovation out in the countryside like you could hear somebody had scored a touchdown. This huge roar would come.

Hayes:

People just...

Daughtry:

Yeah, standing out watching. And so the point I was going to make. When we got into France, there were no enemy planes around and it was because of what the British did to those fighters. I would love for people to know that. That that really helped. And another thing in association with that, Churchill insisted on manufacturing fighter planes, English fighter planes. And he and another, I've forgotten his name, it was some fellow high up in the military, against a horde of people that wanted to just manufacture bombers. But that was a great decision because the English had their fighters. We had our fighters and when we got into France, we had domination.

Hayes:

Air domination.

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