

Buzz-Bomb Blitz

By Sgt. FRANCIS BURKE
YANK Staff Correspondent

LONDON [By Cable]—GIs with desk jobs here in the city have been wearing their European Theater ribbons a little bit more proudly than usual since Adolf Hitler started to smash southern England with his weird robot bombs.

Nervously dodging the day and night attacks of these pilotless planes of destruction, they smile and make wisecracks about "those limited-service men at the front in Normandy."

As a matter of fact, one American officer who returned here the other day from Normandy says that many parts of the front lines in France are much more peaceful than London is right now. And the number of British soldiers lost in the first week of the invasion was less than the number of civilians killed during the first 21 days of the robot bombings. In those three weeks, 2,752 persons were killed and 8,000 were hospitalized.

GIs in London have learned to go on with their normal duties and still keep one ear open for the arrival of a buzz bomb in their neighborhood. Like the British, they now know how to tell from the sound approximately where the bomb will land. If it sounds close, they forget their military dignity and get the hell under cover quick.

The robot bomb in flight is a fearful spectacle. In the daytime it is a long graceful streak of brown and by night it is a speeding dart with a flaming tail. The sound begins in the distance like a low mutter and then gets louder until it roars like an outboard motor. Vibrations shake floors and rattle windows — and the nerves of everybody waiting below.

You catch your breath when the noise stops. That means the robot's fuel is exhausted and it is about to drop. Sometimes it goes straight down and sometimes it glides on a few more miles.

When the bomb hits, the results are sometimes freakish. Buildings are shattered, but some windows don't even crack. A few people in a group get badly shocked and others are not even dazed. One American soldier says he was tossed head over heels by an explosion and landed against the side of a building. He looked down and saw a bunch of flowers resting on his chest.

GIs and Wacs who have seen their American friends killed in robot bombings feel that there is something uncivilized about this kind of warfare. One Wac private was telling me about some soldiers who were killed outside her billet. They were climbing into a truck when the buzz bomb landed. There was nothing left of the truck except a few small pieces of metal and some bits of rubber from the tires. "It seemed more like murder than war," the Wac said.

A British charlady, describing the bombing of a maternity hospital, said: "I'd like to knife whoever is sending over them things. One woman I know and her 3-year-old baby girl were killed there. This is worse than the blitz. In those days we knew when they were coming and when they were going away. But not now."

Despite the destruction that the robot bombs have spread, the authorities here feel that this new weapon has no great military importance and won't make much difference in the war. Some famous landmarks have been hit—an annex of the Regent Palace Hotel near Piccadilly Circus, the majestic Guards Chapel at Wellington Barracks and the Bankruptcy Court. But utilities have only

been slightly affected, and the bombs have been too scattered to do any real strategic damage.

IRONICALLY enough, the new German weapon is probably the best thing that ever happened to Anglo-American relations.

It has made Americans here realize and appreciate what the British people endured in the early days of the war. They know now what it is to spend an evening in a damp crowded bomb shelter or subway platform. A tech sergeant, who used to think stories about the blitzing of London schools, hospitals and churches were just so much propaganda, changed his mind a few days ago. He was routed from his bed by a robot-bomb blast and dashed downstairs in time to carry wounded nuns from a shattered convent.

On the other hand, the London newspapers carry many letters praising the Americans for the way they have helped British civilians during the bombings. One woman, writing about the speed and tenderness with which Americans evacuate the wounded, remarked: "No job seems too much for the Yanks."

During the bombings, many Americans have struck up friendships with British people whom they would never have met under normal conditions. Forced to spend hours together in bomb shelters, the GIs and the British civilians have plenty of time to explain their respective customs, likes and dislikes and to clear up misunderstandings. They find, to their surprise, that they have many similar ideas about what they want after the war.

The Americans can't get over the calm courage and cheerfulness that the British people maintain during the worst moments of the bombings. There is one cleaning woman here, for instance, who jokingly calls the robots "Bob Hope bombs."

"When they come," she grins, "you bob down. And then hope for the best."

THIS BOMB FAILED TO EXPLODE. OTHERS
HAVE BEEN SHOT DOWN BY THE RAF.



YANK

AUGUST 11, 1944 * p. 10