

Information Data Sheet

Category WWII Bombing

Description

Bombing raids began in the summer of 1940 and continued until the end of WWII. Bombing densities generally increased towards major cities or strategic targets such as docks, harbours, industrial premises, power stations and airfields. In addition to London, industrial cities and ports, including Birmingham, Coventry, Southampton, Liverpool, Hull and Glasgow, were heavily targeted, as well as seaside towns such as Eastbourne and cathedral cities such as Canterbury.

The German bombing campaign saw the extensive use of both High Explosive (HE) bombs and Incendiary Bombs (IBs). The most common HE bombs were the 50kg and 250kg bombs, although 500kg were also used to a lesser extent. More rarely 1,000kg, 1,400kg and 1,800kg bombs were dropped. The HE bombs tended to contain about half of their weight in explosives and were fitted with one or sometimes two fuzes. Not all HE bombs were intended to explode on impact. Some contained timing mechanisms where detonation could occur more than 70 hours after impact. Incendiary devices ranged from small 1kg thermite filled, magnesium bodied Incendiary Bombs (IBs) to a 250kg 'Oil Bomb' (OB) and a 500kg 'C300' IB. In some cases the IBs were fitted with a bursting charge. This exploded after the bomb had been alight for a few minutes causing burning debris to be scattered over a greater area. The C300 bombs were similar in appearance to 500kg HE bombs, although their design was sufficiently different to warrant a specially trained unit of the Royal Engineers to deal with their disposal.



Anti-Personnel (AP) bombs and Parachute Mines (PMs) were also deployed. 2No. types of anti-personnel bombs were in common use, the 2kg and the 12kg bomb. The 2kg bomb could inflict injury across an area up to 150m away from the impact. PMs (which were up to 4m in length) could be detonated either magnetically or by noise/vibration. Anti-shipping parachute mines were commonly dropped over navigable rivers, dockland areas and coastlines. The Royal Navy was responsible for ensuring that the bombs were made safe. Removal and disposal was still the responsibility of the Bomb Disposal Unit of the Royal Engineers.

In 1944, the German's introduced new weapons; the V1, a 'flying bomb' and guided missile, and the V2, a ballistic missile rocket that travelled at such speed that no one could see or hear its approach. London was the main target for these attacks.

WWII bomb targeting was inaccurate, especially in the first year of the war. A typical bomb load of 50kg HE bombs mixed with IBs which was aimed at a specific location might not just miss the intended target but fall some considerable distance away.



It is understood that the local Civil Defence authorities in urban areas had a comprehensive system for reporting bomb incidents and dealing with any Unexploded Bombs (UXB) or other UXO. In more rural areas, fewer bombing raids occurred. It is known that Air Raid Precaution (ARP) records under-represent the number and frequency of bombs falling in rural and coastal areas. Bombs were either released over targets or as part of 'tip and run' raids where bomber crews would drop their bombs to avoid anti-aircraft fire or Allied fighter aircraft on the route to and from other strategic targets. Bombs dropped as a result of poor targeting or 'tip and run' raids on rural and coastal areas often went unrecorded or entered as 'fell in open country' or 'fell in the sea'. The Luftwaffe are thought to have dropped approximately 75,000 tons of bombs on Britain throughout the Second World War and an estimated 11% of all bombs dropped during the war failed to detonate.

Hazard

The potential for a UXB hazard to exist on a site depends on a variety of factors. Were there strategic targets in the surrounding area? Was the site bombed? Could a UXB impact have been missed? Even in rural areas, the potential for UXB cannot be totally discounted and therefore it is essential that detailed local bombing records are obtained when assessing the UXB hazard on any site.