

with Captain Paterson, my Principal Officer, and I am convinced from exhaustive enquiries that I have made since, that his personal example and his power of organisation put great heart into the personnel of the Coventry Fire Brigade, and impelled them to resume their fire-fighting with renewed vigour. I am sure that it was due to Mr. Breaks personally that the fires were not considerably worse.

As a particular instance of his gallantry you may know that he went of his own accord to the Telephone Exchange in Trinity Street where he had heard that the sole remaining operator, who was in charge of the only outgoing line, was severely threatened by a fire in the building. He extinguished this fire himself, assisted only by one Auxiliary Fireman, and two soldiers.

If this only means of communication had been destroyed it would have been impossible for us at Regional Headquarters to supply the immediate essential assistance to the stricken City, which was so vital to them.

As Regional Commissioner, I cannot allow his conduct to go unnoticed by his superiors and I personally feel that, his behaviour while he was here merits at least National commendation, if not the award of the George Medal.

(Signed) L. DUDLEY.

Copy of Report by Mr Breaks dated 19-11-40.

Gallantry in connection with War Activities;
Coventry Nov.14/15th, 1940.

During the very serious air raid which took place on Coventry on the night of the 14th/15th November I witnessed many gallant acts by various services but the cases described in the following notes were outstanding in merit and it is for that reason that I commend them to your notice.

The story covers two incidents and although I was intimately connected with one of them I would emphasise the point that I do not wish to be included; reference to my acts being only for the purpose of drawing attention to the work carried out by the fireman and constable concerned.

Incident 1 occurred at about 3 a.m., on Friday November 15th whilst Coventry was almost completely ablaze in the city centre and: was suffering extremely from a continual bombardment of high explosive and incendiary bombs.

The men concerned are Auxiliary Fireman A. Close & Constable H. Bishop.

NARRATIVE: At about 3 a.m. I was in the central A.R.P. Control room, Council House, Coventry, and was informed by Captain T. S. Paterson, Principal Officer, No. 9 Midland Region that he had received a telephone message. from the telephone operator at the. telephone exchange situate at Telephone House, Trinity Street to the effect that only one outgoing line remained intact and that

the building from which he was speaking was on fire on the second floor, and that he anticipated he would have to quit within a short time, thereby losing the last remaining link with outside.

Realising the extreme gravity of the situation I asked the A.R.P. Controller (Captain Hector, Chief Constable) to furnish me with a guide to the premises in order that some action might be taken if possible.

The Chief Constable at first demurred, but as I insisted he instructed Police Constable 104, Harry, Bishop to conduct me to Trinity House. The distance was less than half a mile but the streets were alight on both sides and buildings falling. Numerous H.E. bombs fell quite close and the A.A. barrage was heavy.

Upon arrival Trinity House, the building was found to be well alight on the second floor, the telephone switchboard was on the ground floor.

The Police Constable carried buckets of water and extinguishers from the lower floors to the scene of the fire, these I used but with no good effect, the fire was too large.

We retreated to the street for further aid and found a charged hose line unattended. I also, found Auxiliary Fireman Andrew Close of the Coventry Fire. Brigade whose assistance I enlisted. The hose was then dragged towards the building but additional lengths had to be obtained and attached in order that the fire could be attacked from inside. Two soldiers, whose identity I do not know, helped with the dragging of the hose up the staircase.

By this time the fire had made considerable headway and it was, with great difficulty that it was controlled by the jet.

The fireman stuck to his job well in spite of the large amount of heat and smoke.

When the fire was under control, I notified the Chief Constable over telephone and returned with Police Constable Bishop to the Control Centre. The conduct of the Fireman and the Policeman on this occasion is worthy of commendation.

(Signed) TOM BREAKS.
Deputy Chief Inspector
Fire Brigades Division.

Copy of Statement, by Constable Bishop dated 18th November 1940.

I respectfully report for your information that at 3 a.m. 15th November, 1940 I was sent from the Control Centre to accompany Mr. T. Breaks, Home Office, to a fire at Telephone House, Trinity Street.

On arriving there it was found that the second floor was on fire. With the assistance of an Auxiliary Fireman and two soldiers the fire was brought under control. I then accompanied Mr. Breaks back to the Central Police Office.

(Signed) HARRY BISHOP

P.C. 104

Copy of Report by Deputy Principal Officer dated 10.1.41.

Somebody at Headquarters has been pressing me for a confirmatory report on Mr. Break's experience in Coventry, particularly in relation to the putting out of a fire at the offices of the Coventry Telephone District, Trinity Street. I attach a report which, after much trouble I got Captain Hector to send to me, but I fear that the ultimate paragraph of his covering letter throws a great deal of cold water on the whole incident.

As you know there was a difficulty that arose when the Chief Constable refused to allow his Police Constables to escort Mr. Breaks as he felt it was too dangerous. It was only after Mr. T. Breaks had pointed out to the Chief Constable that when a Fire Officer asked for assistance from the Police the Chief Constable was bound to give it, that he gave in. I think that this little incident may have contributed to the Chief Constable's strong dislike of giving praise where praise was due.

As far as I remember the telephone operator, a man telephoned to me and said that he would have to cut the only existing line remaining from the Main Control at Coventry to the outside world if something wasn't done quickly to deal with the fire which had broken out in the second floor above the operating room.

Mr. Breaks was in the Main Control with me at the time and I mentioned it to him and he immediately volunteered to go out and deal with it. There is no doubt in my mind that the action taker by him in conjunction with other volunteers resulted in maintaining communications between Coventry Main Control and the Region.

Apart from this I would like to emphasise that Mr. Breaks voluntarily offered to accompany me to Coventry without any hesitation and on a journey which I might describe as not too healthy! He showed splendid courage and devotion to duty. His qualities as a leader and cheerfulness were an inspiration to, any persons he came in contact with, such as when we entered the city, the people, though acting gallantly, were near the end of their tether. What does not seem to be realised, and what I hesitate to rub in is that apart from the Main Control the Chief Officer and the few Officers of the Fire Brigade I met were as near shell shocked as possible, and that no attempts were being made to collect pumps and men to re-organise assistance from the static water supplies i.e. the canal.

Mr. Breaks though in a difficult position as he was not in charge of the Fire Brigade managed to inspire many Officers with the importance of getting relays of water from the canal and by this means the city had some water to combat the ever increasing fires.

Perhaps you would care to mention this to the Department in reply to their request for further information from me.

(Signed) J. PATERSON.

Copy of letter of Chief Constable dated 28th November, 1940.

I am obliged. for your letter of the 21st instant enclosing the somewhat verbose statement of Mr. Breaks regarding the good work he did with Police Constable 104, Harry Bishop, and Auxiliary Fireman Andrew Close, assisted by two unknown soldiers. The fire was tackled in a most praiseworthy manner which is what I would expect from an experienced fire officer. The Constable reports it as just another incident. From the police reports it is obvious there were numerous cases of most wonderful fire fighting by Wardens, Police, Special Constables and by ordinary unknown members of the public, and in view of this and the fact that the identity of the soldiers is unknown, I would suggest if anything that the Fireman and Constable receive the Commissioner's commendation,

I am sorry Mr. Breaks reports, that I demurred at providing a guide. I objected very strongly to the manner in which the request was made particularly in my own Headquarters. Mr. Breaks was however excited and tired, as on his return he slept for several hours in the Police Stores.

In regard to the Post Office official, this is a matter for the Head Postmaster.

As to Mr. Maddocks as I am not the Chief Officer of the Fire. Brigade, you will no doubt, if you think fit, refer this to the Coventry Fire Brigade Authority in accordance with Home Office instructions. Your file is returned herewith.

(Signed) S. A. HECTOR.