Opening extract from

War Boy

Written by

Michael Foreman

Published by

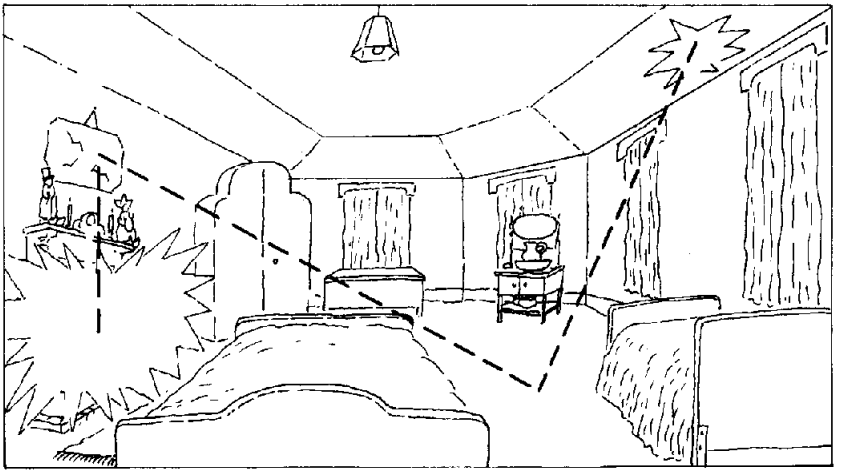
Penguin Books Ltd

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your

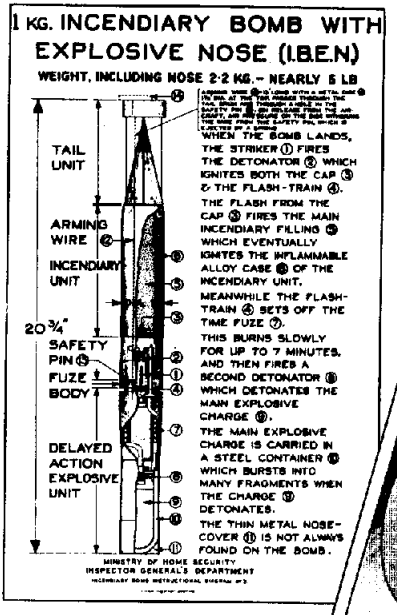
TO MY BROTHERS AND OUR MUM

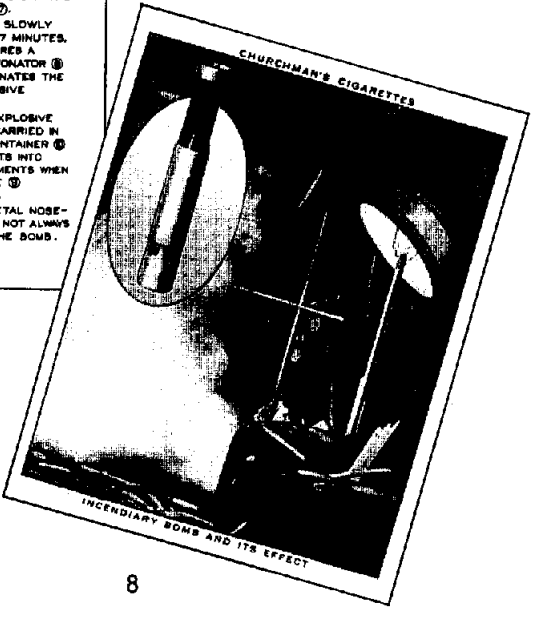




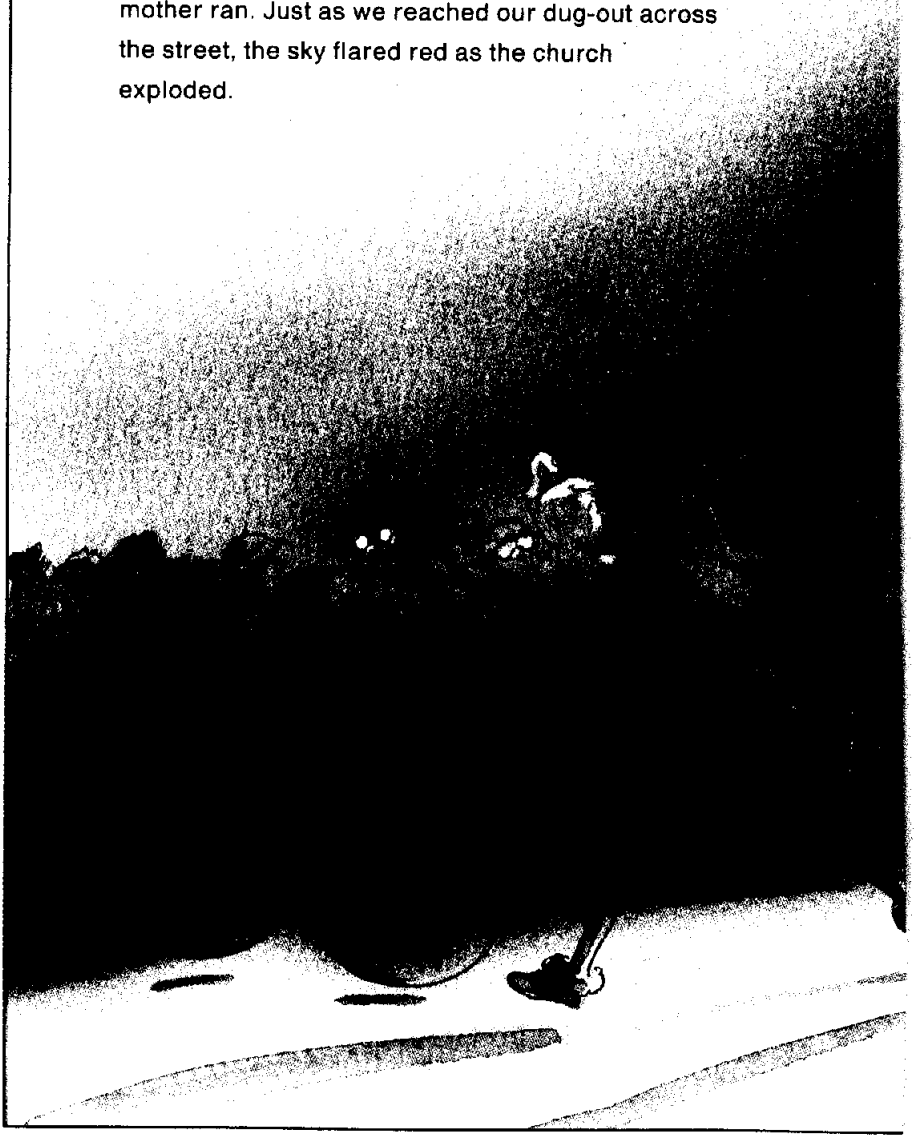
I woke up when the bomb came through the roof. It came through at an angle, overflew my bed by inches, bounced up over my mother's bed, hit the mirror, dropped into the grate and exploded up the chimney. It was an incendiary. A fire-bomb.

My brother Ivan appeared in pyjamas and his Home Guard tin hat. Being in the Home Guard, he had ensured that all the rooms in our house were stuffed with sandbags. Ivan threw sand over the bomb but the dry sand kept sliding off. He threw the hearthrug over the bomb and jumped up and down on it, until brother Pud arrived with a bucket of wet sand from the yard. This did the trick.



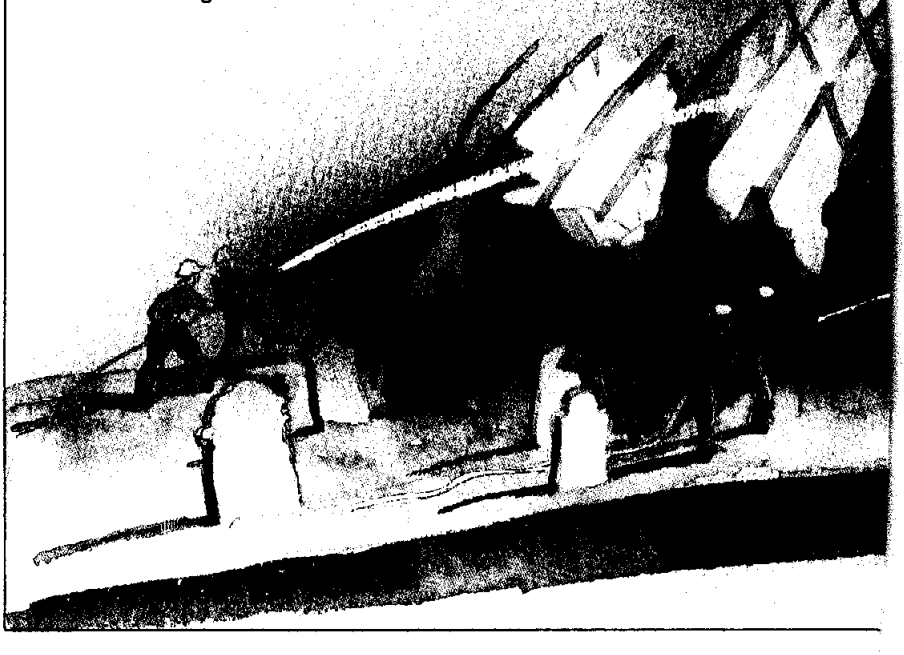


Mother grabbed me from the bed. The night sky was filled with lights. Searchlights, anti-aircraft fire, stars and a bombers' moon. The sky bounced as my mother ran. Just as we reached our dug-out across the street, the sky flared red as the church exploded.



It was Monday, 21 April 1941, just before 10 p.m. Thousands of incendiaries were dropped on our village, Pakefield, and the neighbouring big town, Lowestoft. The Germans were trying to set alight the thatched roof of the church to make a beacon for the following waves of bombers. Within a few minutes more than forty fires were blazing in Pakefield and the southern part of Lowestoft. Two incendiaries buried themselves in the roof of the church. The Rector climbed ladders to extinguish one, but was unable to reach the other.

The high-explosive bombs followed immediately. More were dropped in this raid than in any other, but with the church now blazing, a thick mist rolled up from the sea and ruined the bombers' night. The following waves of bombers turned back.



We were safe. And we were together. We were three brothers and Mum. Ivan, Bernard (known to us only as Pud) and myself. (Our father had died one month before I was born.) Also with us was Aunt Louie.

In the morning we returned home. Mum went to the loo, which was outside in the yard, and found a hole in the roof and a bomb, unexploded, in the floor. Pud pulled it out and carried it to 'Pal' the policeman in the police box on the corner.

'Young Bernard!!'

My big brother Ivan worked in a garage. Brother Pud went to school every day in a nearby village, as the local school was full of soldiers.

