
AIR BOMBARDMENTS IN SPAIN

C.8.M.4.1939.IX and
C.8(a).M.4(a).1939.IX.

**REPORTS OF THE COMMISSION FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF AIR
BOMBARDMENTS IN SPAIN**

NOTE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Geneva, January 16th, 1939.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Assembly of September 30th, 1938,¹ and with reference to the proceedings of the Council of the same date,² the Secretary-General has the honour to communicate to the Members of the League, and to submit to the Council, a series of reports presented by the Commission for the Investigation of Air Bombardments in Spain.

These reports were forwarded to the Secretary-General by the United Kingdom Government. The responsibility for their contents rests entirely with the Commission.

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LIST OF REPORTS

*Invitation No. 1.*³ Report on bombings of Alicante consequent on receipt of invitation by Spanish Republican Government.

*Invitation No. 1a.*³ Report on bombing of Alicante on August 20th, 1938, witnessed by the mission.

*Invitation No. 2.*³ Report on bombing of Barcelona on August 19th, 1938, consequent on receipt of invitation by the Spanish Republican Government.

*Invitation No. 3.*³ Report on bombing of an area on the outskirts of Sitges on August 8th, 1938, consequent on receipt of invitation by the Spanish Republican Government.

*Invitation No. 4.*³ Report on bombing of Torre Vieja on August 25th, 1938, consequent on receipt of invitation from the Spanish Republican Government.

Invitation No. 5. Report on bombing of Figueras (Catalonia) on October 14th, 1938, consequent on receipt of invitation by the Spanish Republican Government.

Invitation No. 6. Report on bombing of Barcelona on October 21st, 1938, consequent on receipt of invitation by the Spanish Republican Government.

Invitation No. 7. Report on bombing of Tarragona on November 7th, 1938, consequent on receipt of invitation by the Spanish Republican Government.

Invitation No. 8. Report on bombing of Barcelona on November 23rd, 1938, consequent on receipt of invitation by the Spanish Republican Government.

Invitation No. 9. Report on bombing of Barcelona on December 31st, 1938, consequent on receipt of invitation by the Spanish Republican Government.

¹ See *Official Journal*, Special Supplement No. 183, pages 96 and 136.

² See *Official Journal*, November 1938, page 881.

³ As this report has already been printed (see Minutes of the Third Committee of the Nineteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly, League of Nations *Official Journal*, Special Supplement No. 186, page 38 and following), it is not reproduced in the present document.

TEXT OF THE REPORTS

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INVITATION NO. 5: REPORT ON BOMBING OF FIGUERAS (CATALONIA) ON OCTOBER 14TH, 1938,
CONSEQUENT ON RECEIPT OF INVITATION BY THE SPANISH REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT

This invitation was received by the mission at Toulouse at 10 p.m. on October 14th, 1938. The mission began an investigation at Figueras at 11 a.m. on October 15th, 1938.

2. Figueras is a country town, 24 kilometres from the French frontier and 13 kilometres from the coast.

The population is stated to be approximately 16,000, including 5,000 refugees.

The main railway line from Barcelona to the French frontier skirts the eastern side of the town, and the principal road from Barcelona to the French frontier passes through the town.

3. The mission satisfied themselves that:

(a) *Regarding the Town.*

It contains no military establishments other than an Officer Cadet Training School which is used during the daytime only, the pupils sleeping in barracks outside the town.

Outside the town, there is a military barracks.

On the outskirts of the town, there is a Military District Headquarters Office and also a very small Intendencia for the military quartered in the above barracks.

The town contains no store depots or stocks of military material.

The only industries in the town are:

Two flour mills;

One small chocolate factory;

One tannery;

Three small garages employed in repairing motor transport vehicles.

The town is undefended, except against attack by low-flying aircraft.

(b) *Regarding the Railway Station.*

The appearance of the railway station and sidings indicated general disuse, lack of maintenance and of facilities for even the normal peace-time requirements of a town of such a size.

Of the 36 trucks in the station, only about 50% were fit for use.

From cross-examination of a number of people interrogated at random in various parts of the town, from 3 to 5 trains pass daily through the station and at the time of the attack no train was in the station, nor had any train passed through within one hour of the attack.

(c) *Regarding General Matters.*

There are no road or rail bridges in the town or its outskirts.

From cross-examination of many civilian witnesses, no troop concentrations, military convoys, or abnormal events were observed on October 14th, 1938, or within several days of the raid.

There are two military hospitals in the town, one containing 900 and the other 400 wounded.

Particulars of Attack.

4. The raid was made at 10 a.m. on October 14th, 1938, by two formations of five and four aircraft respectively. The formations approached the town from the E.S.E., and, after dropping their bombs, flew off towards the north-east. The actual direction of attack of each formation is variously reported, due probably to the difficulty of observing accurately the courses steered by two formations making an almost simultaneous attack and also the fall of their bombs. There is evidence, however, that the general direction of attack was from east to west across the railway station (at right angles to the railway line) and over the centre of the town, the Officer Cadet Training School being not far distant from this line of attack.

The attack was made from a height of approximately 3,500 metres, and about 70 bombs (high-explosive and incendiary) were dropped.

The sky was clear and the visibility excellent.

Results of the Attack.

5. All the bombs fell to the west of the railway station and in the town, except for a few in the fields to the west of the town.

Neither the railway station nor the Officer Cadet Training School was hit.

Approximately 17 houses were destroyed and 24 damaged.

Casualties: 5 dead, 11 wounded.

Conclusion.

6. The mission find on the evidence available that bombs were dropped on the town proper of Figueras, which is an open town, except for the location therein of one military objective—an Officer Cadet Training School.

7. The mission have had no opportunity of examining:

- (a) The Nationalist intelligence reports on Figueras;
- (b) The orders issued to the pilots;
- (c) The pilots' reports on the raid.

Note. — All times referred to in the above report are Spanish Republic time, which is one hour in advance of British time (G.M.T.).

(Signed) R. SMYTH-PIGOTT,
Group Captain, R.A.F. (Retd.).

(Signed) F. B. LEJEUNE,
Lieut.-Colonel, R.A.

Toulouse, October 17th, 1938.

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INVITATION NO. 6: REPORT ON BOMBING OF BARCELONA ON OCTOBER 21ST, 1938, CONSEQUENT ON RECEIPT OF INVITATION BY THE SPANISH REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT

This invitation was received by the mission at Toulouse at 7.30 p.m. on October 21st, 1938. The mission landed at Barcelona at 9 a.m. on October 22nd, 1938, and forthwith began an investigation.

Particulars of the Attack.

2. The attack was made at 6.20 a.m. (dawn) by two or three aircraft which, owing to the weather conditions, were not clearly seen.

The weather conditions were as follows: Over the port area, but not over the city, there was a slight low-lying mist. From 300 to 1,000 metres, there were patches of light fog covering seven-tenths of the sky. Very light wind (10 km. per hour) from E.N.E. at 1,000 metres.

These conditions and the poor light at dawn must have resulted in bad visibility from air to ground, not only making it very difficult for the pilots to determine the exact outline of the port area as distinct from the city, but rendering the accurate use of the bomb-sight extremely doubtful.

The aircraft approached from the sea and to attack flew in a northerly direction, across the centre of the port area towards the city and at an angle of approximately 45 degrees to the general line of the coast. After dropping the last bomb, they circled clockwise and flew off southwards.

Great uncertainty exists regarding the height of the attacking aircraft, owing to the weather conditions: estimates as varied as 1,500 to 4,000 metres were given by several witnesses.

About 25 bombs (high-explosive) were dropped.

The anti-aircraft artillery opened fire only after the first bombs had exploded and did not therefore interfere with the "run-up". Fighter aircraft of the defence were not present.

The attack surprised the defence, and the alarm was only given after the first bombs exploded.

Results of the Attack.

3. Some bombs fell in the inner harbour at a distance not greater than 100 metres from the quay fronting the city, causing damage to small craft.

Seven bombs fell on or around the above quay and transit sheds.

Thirteen bombs fell in the old town quarter of Barcelona, the most densely populated part of the city, where the streets are narrow and the houses congested.

The bombs fell generally in a straight line, the distance between the first and last bomb being 1,500 metres, whilst the last bomb was approximately 1,400 metres from the water's edge.

At least 16 buildings were damaged or destroyed by the bombs that fell in the old town. One bomb fell in the centre of a covered market.

Casualties stated to be 24 dead, 40 wounded.

After the Attack.

4. Fighter aircraft of the defence which gave chase to the attacking aircraft reported that the latter, when flying out to sea, dropped bombs when 8 miles and some more when 35 miles from land.

Conclusion.

5. The mission consider from the evidence available that the pilots, owing to poor light and misty conditions, probably did not see the port area distinctly, and consequently an inaccurate attack was made, resulting in half the bombs falling "over" and upon the city.

If a deliberate attack on a civilian area had been intended, the pilots would have continued to drop further bombs which they still retained and eventually dropped far out to sea.

The mission find that, although they have had no opportunity of examining

- (a) The Nationalist intelligence reports on Barcelona;
- (b) The orders issued to the pilots;
- (c) The pilots' reports on the raid,

the raid on Barcelona at 6.20 a.m. on October 21st, 1938, was an attack on the port area, conducted under such weather conditions and in such a direction as to jeopardise the lives of the inhabitants of a thickly populated part of the city.

Note. — All times referred to in the above report are Spanish Republic time, which is one hour in advance of British time (G.M.T.).

(Signed) R. SMYTH-PIGOTT,
Group Captain, R.A.F. (Retd.).

(Signed) F. B. LEJEUNE,
Lieutenant-Colonel, R.A.

Toulouse, October 23rd, 1938.

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INVITATION NO. 7: REPORT ON BOMBING OF TARRAGONA ON NOVEMBER 7TH, 1938, CONSEQUENT ON RECEIPT OF INVITATION BY THE SPANISH REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT

This invitation was received by the mission at Toulouse at 11.30 a.m. on November 8th, 1938. The mission began an investigation at Tarragona at noon on November 9th, 1938.

2. From a study of a map, an opposing force might certainly conclude that the historic town of Tarragona (present population 41,000) and its port, situated only 60 km. from the Ebro front, at the junction of two railway lines and two main roads leading therefrom, would be used for military purposes, especially during a heavy battle. Nevertheless, investigation shows this assumption to be incorrect. There were no signs of the existence at Tarragona of combatant troops, staffs, war material or stores (including rations for the front) or of any present or recent movement of such through the town.

The main reasons advanced for the above are:

- (a) The complete lack of cover from sudden aerial or naval attack of rail and road movement by the coast route, practically all of which, in consequence, is carried out inland.
- (b) The desire to prevent the destruction by bombs of an historic town together with 41,000 civilians unable to be moved owing to the existing overcrowding of other towns.

3. The mission satisfied themselves that:

- (a) *Regarding the Town on November 9th, 1938.*

It contains the following military establishments:

A military school for training prospective N.C.O.s and officers with a total establishment of 200 personnel.

A town commandant's office with 70 personnel. Buildings on the outer circumference of the town containing a total of 1,800 physically imperfect troops, mostly recruits, for rearguard duties only.

An Intendencia of sufficient size for the above personnel.

There are no stocks of military material nor store depots other than for the normal requirements of the local troops.

It is not an industrial town, though there are:

- A large tobacco factory;
- A clothing factory;

neither of which is now operating.

Outside the town, there is the ruin of a petrol depot which was destroyed many weeks ago and is now totally disused.

The town is undefended against aerial attack.

(b) *Regarding the Railway Station.*

The appearance of the station and sidings does not indicate abnormal use, nor are they equipped with facilities in excess of peace-time requirements.

At the time of the inspection, a short passenger train was preparing to depart. About 3 such trains are reported to pass daily through the station in each direction and 1 goods train is assembled at or near Tarragona each day.

There was evidence that, at the time of the attack, there was no train in the station.

Of the 100 trucks (approximately) in the station and sidings on November 9th, 1938, at least 50 % had not been moved for a long time, and every truck was empty.

(c) *Regarding the Port.*

On November 9th, 1938, it contained only one small sailing vessel and a number of small fishing craft.

The port has been heavily bombed in the past and most facilities have been destroyed.

The appearance indicates complete disuse and goes far to confirm the authorities' statement that it has not been used, except by fishing boats, for the last ten months.

(d) *Regarding General Matters.*

There are one road and two rail bridges outside the town.

There is a large military hospital outside the town and a small general hospital (now destroyed) in the town.

From cross-examination of civilian witnesses, no troop concentrations, military convoys or abnormal events were observed on November 7th, 1938.

Particulars of the Attack.

4. The raid was made at 12 noon on November 7th, 1938, by a formation of ten aircraft in two patrols, each of five machines, one patrol flying behind and slightly to the north of the leading patrol.

The formation approached from the east and, flying due west, traversed the centre of the town.

The attack was made from a height reported to be approximately 3,500 metres, and about 100 bombs (high-explosive and a few incendiary) were dropped.

The sky was clear and the visibility excellent.

Results of the Attack.

5. All the bombs, excepting about four, dropped by the leading patrol fell on the town. The distance between the first and last bomb was about 1,600 metres, and the general line of attack, which was along the main road through the town, was, at the nearest point, about 500 metres to the north of the station.

All the bombs from the second patrol fell in the fields to the west of the town, most falling within an area 300 metres in length. The distance of the nearest bomb to the now totally destroyed petrol depot or the road bridge over the River Francoli was 300 metres and to the west thereof.

Approximately 30 houses and the civil hospital were destroyed and more than 50 houses damaged.

Casualties: 7 dead, 32 wounded.

Conclusion.

6. The mission find that, although they have had no opportunity of examining:

- (a) The Nationalist intelligence reports on Tarragona;
- (b) The orders issued to the pilots;
- (c) The pilots' reports on the raid,

the raid on Tarragona on November 7th, 1938, was directed by one patrol either against the town or the railway station and by the other patrol either against an already destroyed petrol depot or against a road bridge, both outside the town.

7. In view of the facts disclosed in this report, the mission expresses the sincere hope that this beautiful city, with its historic cathedral and civilian inhabitants, may be spared from further destruction.

Note. — All times referred to in the above report are Spanish Republic time, which is one hour in advance of British time (G.M.T.).

(Signed) R. SMYTH-PIGOTT,
Group Captain, R.A.F. (Retd.).

(Signed) F. B. LEJEUNE,
Lieut.-Colonel, R.A.

Toulouse, November 11th, 1938.

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INVITATION NO. 8: REPORT ON BOMBING OF BARCELONA ON NOVEMBER 23RD, 1938, CONSEQUENT ON RECEIPT OF INVITATION BY THE SPANISH REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT

This invitation was received by the mission at 7 p.m. on November 23rd, 1938. The mission landed at Barcelona at 9 a.m. on November 24th, 1938, and forthwith began an investigation.

Particulars of the Attack.

2. Of the daylight attacks carried out on November 23rd, 1938, the mission was invited to inspect only the results of the first, which was made at 10.40 a.m.

The sky was clear and the visibility excellent.

The raid was made by eight aircraft in two formations in line ahead, the second formation of five machines being about 600 metres behind the first.

The aircraft approached from the sea and to attack flew in a northerly direction towards the south-western extremity of the port area and the city and at an angle of 45 degrees to the general line of the coast. After releasing their bombs, they circled in a clockwise direction.

The attack was made from a height reported to be between 4,500 and 5,000 metres. About 90 of the bombs dropped fell on the land.

The anti-aircraft fire did not interfere with the "run up" of the attack.

Results of the Attack.

3. The bombs fell generally in a straight line across the port area and the old town quarter of Barcelona, the most densely populated part of the city where the streets are narrow and the houses congested. The distance between the first and last bomb was approximately 2,100 metres. The first bombs fell in the harbour about 500 metres from the waterfront, and the remainder were evenly distributed across the old town, the last bombs falling 1,500 metres inland.

There was very extensive damage to property.

Forty-two civilians were killed (seen by the mission at the mortuary) and 90 wounded.

After the Attack.

4. After this first attack, the second formation dropped some more bombs on an industrial area on the coast on the north-eastern edge of the city.

Conclusion.

5. The mission find that, although they have had no opportunity of examining:

- (a) The Nationalist intelligence reports on Barcelona;
- (b) The orders issued to the pilots;
- (c) The pilots' reports on the raid,

the raid on Barcelona at 10.40 a.m. on November 23rd, 1938, was an attack on the port area conducted at a height and in such a direction as inevitably to jeopardise the lives of the inhabitants of a thickly populated part of the city.

From the evidence available and from previous investigations of the bombardments of Barcelona, the mission consider that there will be loss of civilian life and property whenever an attack on the port area is made from high altitudes at an angle to the coast. In view of this,

if such attacks on the port area are continued, they must be regarded as tantamount to deliberate attacks on a civilian population as well.

Note. — All times referred to in the above report are Spanish Republic time, which is one hour in advance of British time (G.M.T.).

(Signed) R. SMYTH-PIGOTT,
Group Captain, R.A.F. (Retd.)

(Signed) F. B. LEJEUNE,
Lieut.-Colonel, R.A.

Toulouse, November 25th, 1938.

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INVITATION NO. 9: REPORT ON BOMBING OF BARCELONA ON DECEMBER 31ST, 1938, CONSEQUENT ON RECEIPT OF INVITATION BY THE SPANISH REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT

This invitation was received at Toulouse by the mission at 10 p.m. on December 31st, 1938. The mission landed at Barcelona at 9.45 a.m. on January 1st, 1939, and forthwith began an investigation.

Particulars of the Attack.

2. The raid was made by a formation, believed to consist of five aircraft. This was first reported, from a point well to the north of Barcelona, to be flying down the coast at a height above 5,000 metres. The aircraft approached Barcelona on a course roughly parallel to the coast and, after traversing the centre of the city, flew away southwards.

The volume of evidence all points to the visibility being exceptionally good. A bright moon was on the port bow of the aircraft, the crews of which, when approaching the city, must have clearly seen the coast-line and the port.

Neither searchlights, anti-aircraft fire nor fighter aircraft of the defence interfered with the "run-up" of the attack.

About 60 bombs fell across the centre of the city at approximately 7 p.m.

Results of the Attack.

3. The bombs fell generally in a straight line parallel to the coast, across the centre of the city and at a mean distance of 2 km. from the waterfront of the port. The distance between the first and last bomb was approximately 3,200 metres.

The attack took place on a fine moonlight Saturday evening which was also New Year's Eve. At such a time, the main thoroughfares in that part of the city, which had been immune from attack since March 1938, would be unusually crowded.

The majority of the bombs dropped were of small size and of a type unsuitable for attacking buildings or shipping, but designed primarily for use against personnel. The material damage was in consequence slight. Owing to the fact that an interval of eight minutes occurred between the "alarm" and the fall of the first bomb, the casualties to human life only amounted to 44 dead, 66 seriously wounded and 25 slightly wounded.

Conclusion.

The mission have had no opportunity of examining:

- (a) The Nationalist intelligence reports on Barcelona;
- (b) The orders issued to the pilots;
- (c) The pilots' reports on the raid;

but they would welcome such, because all the evidence in their possession indicates a deliberate attack on human life with bombs designed for that purpose, and at a moment when the streets might be expected to be more than unusually crowded, in a part of the city where civilians, since March 1938, deemed themselves to be immune.

Note. — All times referred to in the above report are Spanish Republic time, which is one hour in advance of British time (G.M.T.).

(Signed) R. SMYTH-PIGOTT,
Group Captain, R.A.F. (Retd.).

Toulouse, January 2nd, 1939.

(Signed) F. B. LEJEUNE,
Lieut.-Colonel, R.A.