

“What To Do In An Air Raid”

Carroll County Times article for 23 December 2001

by Jay A. Graybeal

Many people have publicly and personally compared the events of September 11th with the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. While there are the obvious differences between a surprise attack by a hostile nation and an international terrorist group, there were similarities in the impact on everyday life in America. After both events, many people questioned their personal safety and priorities in light of the attack. The nation became united with the goal of defeating a common enemy.

The 1941 Christmas season was well underway when the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor. Suddenly, most people were preparing for traditional holiday events while at the same time getting used to the idea that the nation was at war. The local press carried a mix of holiday stories about community events next to wartime articles. The December 26th issue of this newspaper included a nearly full-page announcement entitled “What To Do In An Air Raid” from W. Warfield Babylon, Air Raid Warden for Carroll County:

“1. KEEP COOL

Above all, keep cool. Don’t lose your head. Do not crowd the streets, avoid chaos, prevent disorder and havoc.

You can fool the enemy. It is easy. If planes come over, stay where you are. Don’t phone unnecessarily. The chance you will be hit is small. It is part of the risk we must take to win this war.

Until an alarm, go about your usual business and recreation in the ordinary way.

Think twice before you do anything. Don’t believe rumors—spreading false rumors is part of the enemy’s technique. Don’t let him take you in.

Know your air-raid warning. In general, it is short blasts or rising and falling pitch, on whistles or horns. The ‘all clear’ is a steady tone for 2 minutes. Watch this paper for description of the local signal. (This is subject to change.) Await official information before taking any action. When the Air Raid Warden comes to your home, do what he tells you. He is for your protection. He is your friend. He will help you do your part to whip the enemy.

We can do it. We will do it, if we stay calm and cool and strong and alert.

2. STAY HOME

The safest place in an air raid is at home. If you are away from home, get under cover in the nearest shelter. Avoid crowded places. Stay off the streets. The enemy wants you to run out into the streets, create a mob, start a panic. Don’t do it!

If incendiary bombs fall, play a spray from a garden hose (never a splash or stream) of water on the bomb. Switch to a stream to put out any fire started by the bomb. Switch back to a spray for the bomb. The bomb will burn for about 15 minutes if left alone, only about 2 minutes under a fine water spray. A jet splash, stream or bucket of water will make it explode.

Under raid conditions, keep a bathtub and buckets full of water for the use of the fire department in case water mains are broken. If you have a soda-and acid extinguisher (the kind you turn upside down), use it with your finger over the nozzle to make a spray. 'Don't use the chemical kind (small cylinders of liquid) on bombs.' It is all right for ordinary fires.

But above all, keep cool, stay home. Choose one member of the family to be the home air-raid warden—who will remember all the rules and what to do. Mother makes the best.

3. PUT OUT THE LIGHTS

Whether or not blackout is ordered, don't show more light than is necessary. If planes come over, put out or cover all lights at once—don't wait for the blackout order. The light that can't be seen will never guide a Jap. Remember candlelight may be seen for miles from the air.

If you have portiers, over drapes, or curtains, arrange a double thickness over your windows. Blankets will do. If you have heavy black paper, paste it on your windows. Don't crowd or stampede stores to get it, however. You probably have everything you need at home. Be ingenious—improvise.

Should you get an air-raid warning, remember to shut off gas stoves and gas furnaces. Bomb explosions may blow them out from the blast effect. Gas that collects may be explosive later.

Prepare one room, the one with the least window glass, in the strongest part of your house, for a refuge room. Put food and drinking water in it. Put a sturdy table in it. Put mattresses and chairs in it. Take a magazine or two and a deck of cards into it. Take things like eyeglasses and dentures with you when you go into it. Take toilet facilities, paper, a screen. If you have a portable radio, take that too. Above all, keep calm. Stay at home. Put out lights.

4. LIE DOWN

If bombs start to fall near you, lie down. You will feel the blast least that way, escape fragments or splinters. The safest place is under a good stout table—the stronger the legs the better. A mattress under a table combines comfort with safety. The enemy may use explosive bombs or incendiary bombs, or both. If incendiaries are used, it's more important to deal with them than to be safe from blast. So defeat the incendiary with a spray (never a splash or stream) of water, then go back to safety under a table in a refuge room.

Most raids will likely be over in your immediate neighborhood in a short time. However stay under cover till the 'all clear' is sounded. Know your raid alarms. Know the 'all clear'. Official news of these will come to you from your Air Raid Warden. Don't believe rumors. Watch this paper for air raid alarm description. Ask the warden when he comes.

Should your house be hit, keep cool. Answer tapping from rescue crews if you are trapped. (You most likely won't be either hit or trapped, but if you are, you can depend on rescue squads to go after you). Again—keep cool and wait. Don't yell after you hear them coming to you, unless they tell you to. Keep cool!

Just keeping cool hurts the enemy more than anything else you can do. Keep calm. Stay at home. Put out the lights. Lie down.

5. STAY AWAY FROM WINDOWS

Glass shatters easily so stay away from windows. Don't go to the windows and look out, in an air-raid. It is a dangerous thing, and helps the enemy. The Air Raid Warden is out there watching for you. Again we say, get off the streets if planes come over.

At night, there is danger of being caught in [a] blast from explosives. Anti-aircraft fire means falling shrapnel. You are safe from it indoors, away from windows. It's more important to shell a plane than it is to see it from a window. Stay in your refuge room away from windows. That is the safest place. Go there at the first alarm; stay there until the 'all clear'.

Above all, keep calm. Stay home. Put out lights. Lie down. Stay away from windows. Do not say we are repeating; we would rather repeat until we bore you than have you forget.

You can do all those things without any special equipment other than what you have now in your home. You can help lick the Japs, with your bare hands, if you will do just those few, simple things.

Be a good fellow and follow instructions and keep well. Do not be a wise guy and get hurt.

6. YOU CAN HELP

Strong, capable, calm people are needed to man the volunteer services. If you want to help, there are lots of opportunities. If you know first aid, you have a certificate, there is an immediate job for you. If you are veteran, or a former volunteer or regular fireman or policeman, there is work for you. If you have no special skills but are strong and husky, there is a job for you in rescue squads. If you have and can drive a car, you may be needed for driver's corps. Older Boy or Girl Scouts over 15 can help as messengers. Both men and women are needed.

Here's how to get started: If there's a Civilian Defense Volunteer Office in your community, call there and ask where to report. If not, call your local Defense Council or Committee, or the Chamber of Commerce. Phone and ask where to report rather than going in person."

Fortunately, Americans were never seriously threatened by air attacks. Air Raid Warden Babylon's efforts, however, probably provided a degree of comfort and security for those who feared attacks during the opening months of the conflict.

Blackout Rehearsal for AIR RAIDS

A rehearsal for a black-out will be held on

Friday Evening
DECEMBER 12th, at 9 P. M.

The signal for the air raid warning will be a waving signal of the fire siren to start the raid and one long blast for the all-clear signal.

When the signal is heard people in automobiles should pull to the right as close to the curb as possible and turn out their lights. People on the street should enter the nearest building and avoid assemblies of large groups or assemblies near places where there is lot of glass. **STORE-KEEPERS SHOULD TURN OUT THEIR SIGNS AND WINDOW LIGHTS AND DRAW THEIR SHADES. RESIDENTS IN HOUSES SHOULD PULL ALL SHADES AND HAVE AS FEW LIGHTS ON AS POSSIBLE.** Civilians are advised not to use telephones except in cases of emergency. At the time of an air raid warning turn on all radjos.

If children are near home, go home immediately; if not near home, go to a friend's home.

State Guard personnel will be stationed at all main highways leading into Westminster to immediately park all cars to avoid any congestion of the traffic.

In cases of any accidents during the black-out, wait until the all-clear signal before making adjustments, unless someone is seriously injured. Above all, keep cool and calm, confusion is disastrous.

Warfield Babylon,
AIR RAID WARDEN.

A handbill announced the first blackout rehearsal for Westminster scheduled for December 12, 1941. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of the Boyle Family, 1979.