

## The Bombing of Compton Dundon

This has been compiled from the recollections of residents at the time.

It was evening time, on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1940.

The weather forecast for the Bristol and Plymouth areas showed South Westerly winds, force 8, with low cloud at around 1600 to 2000 feet and some rain and drizzle.

The Battle of Britain has been waging for some months, with aerial battles being fought in the skies mainly over the East of the country.

Two days previously, the first concentrated air attack on a Somerset town had taken place, when 25 Junkers Ju88s and 50 Messerschmidt Bf110s had attacked Yeovil. 5 squadrons of fighters from No 10 Group, covering the South West of England, had shot down 7 Messerschmidts and one Junker bomber. The following day 44 High explosive bombs were dropped on the Western edge of Yeovil. A total of 27 people were killed and 32 injured in the two raids.

Meanwhile, on the top of Dundon Beacon was the body of an old green van. This had been dragged up by the Home Guard in order to provide some protection from the weather, though not from any bullets. This was the Observation post from which they looked out for invaders. It wasn't continually manned, so it would be a matter of luck if the invasion came when there was someone in post to see it! Was it manned this evening? We do not know, but if it was, they were in for a bit of a shock.

In the village Hall, where the Village Hall trustees were concerned about how long the blackout materials would last, the WI were holding their annual meeting. As usual, it was well-attended by the ladies of the village. As they listened to their speaker and indulged in their various entertainments, were they even aware of what ensued that night at 9 o'clock? An air raid siren had sounded earlier, but as usual, it made little difference to the people of Compton Dundon – who was going to attack them?

There was the sound of a plane droning in the sky, and it got closer and closer. Fires lit up the sky near Redlands Farm caused by incendiary devices. All of a sudden there was a whistling sound, followed by four loud thuds, as something hit the ground, with sufficient force to shake the buildings nearby. The plane then flew away.

The following day a search was made, to find four bombs had been dropped in a straight line across the Beacon. The first had landed at the edge of a fir plantation about 100 yards up the Beacon from Peak Lane, a second was among the fir trees just over the top of the Beacon. A third bomb had landed near a spring halfway down the North side, and the final bomb had landed in Mr Stillwell's pigsty at the back of The Nook on Ham Lane. Ham Lane was closed to the public, and an unexploded bomb squad arrived to dig for the bombs. This is the description, as published in a later book of his memoirs, by 14 year old Cleveland Bartlett, who lived at Cow Farm on Ham lane and witnessed it all – and his adventures afterwards...

*"Two days after my fourteenth birthday, I was playing in my bedroom with the old wireless set that Auntie Dora had given me for a present. My mother had gone up to the village hall to a WI meeting and my*



*father was stood out in the garden listening to a plane flying around, the air raid alert siren had sounded earlier. At nine o'clock the sound of the plane got louder and then there was a whistling sound. I heard my father run down the path as there were four thuds that shook the house but there were no explosions. My father came in and told me that some bombs had dropped but none of them had gone off. He did not know where they had fallen but he was sure that they were not far away towards the Beacon. The plane flew off and my mother returned home later. She did not realise until the next day that on her way home she walked within about 20 yards of one of the bombs.*

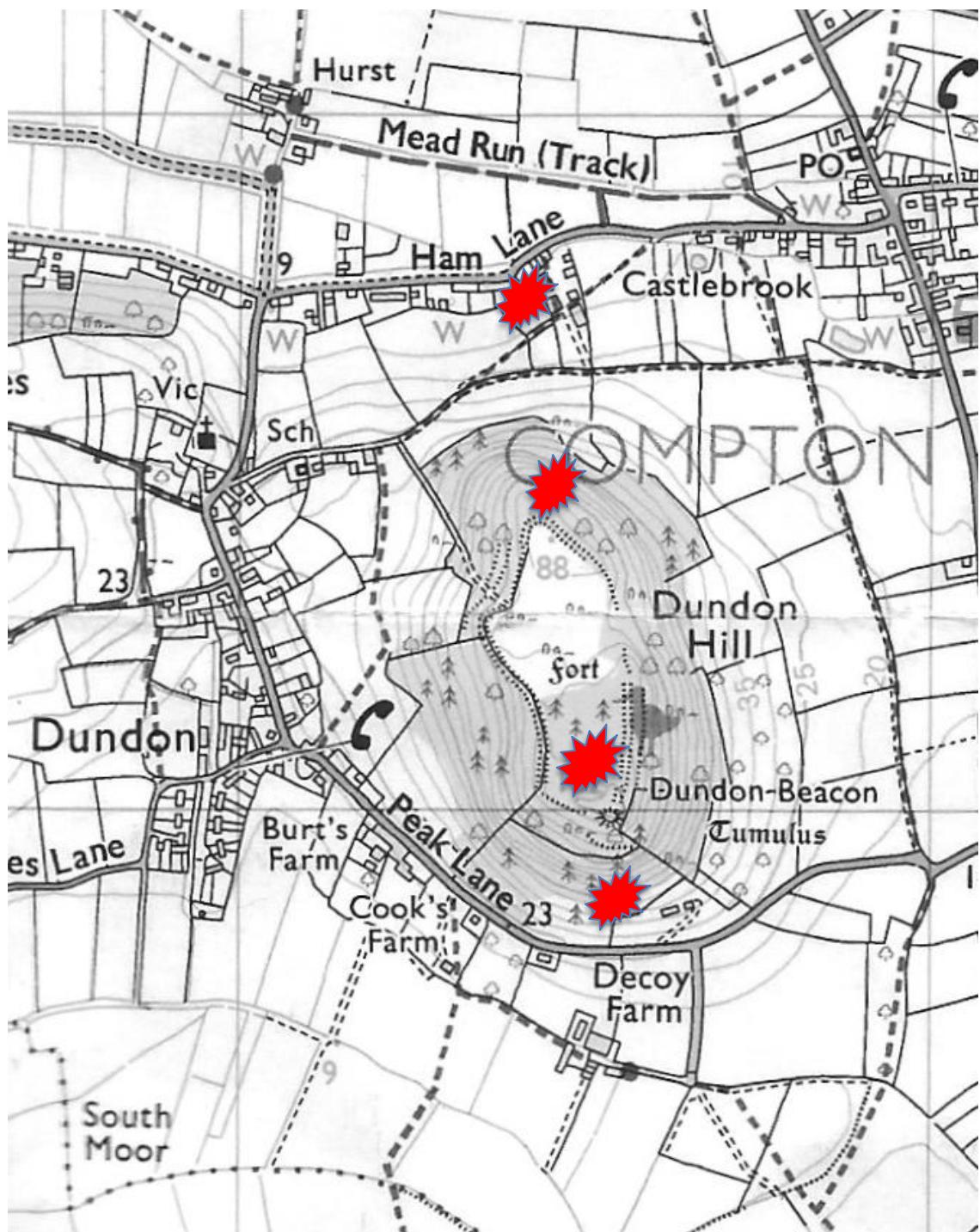
*Unlike Ham Lane. Peak Lane was not closed and one afternoon as I cycled by I noticed a gap in the hedge that the bomb disposal squad had used to get to the bomb. I got off my bike and climbed through the hedge and saw a soldier standing by a large hole just below the trees. I walked to the hole and asked if I could have a look.*

*He said that I could so, I peered into the hole and about fifteen feet below sticking out from the bottom of the hole was the tail end of the bomb. It had four green fins and the body, about a foot in diameter, had green and yellow bands painted around it. I think it was a 500-kilogramme bomb\* (\*They were in fact 50kg bombs not 500) It was safe, the fuse had been removed. I thanked the soldier and left to collect my bike. Later that afternoon the bomb was detonated on the site and the explosion shook the whole village. Several of the stone lintels over the windows and doors at Cow Farm were cracked by the ground shock. The shock was even felt in Street. The other two bombs on the hill were also detonated on site.*

*I went later to see the huge craters that they had produced and to pick up pieces of shrapnel. There was still a strong acrid smell of explosive hanging around. The fourth bomb in Ham Lane was lifted out of the hole and placed on the back of a lorry. I saw it on the back of the lorry when it was taken to the bottom of Middle Drove, where it was detonated in the field on the left-hand side of the dirt drove. Being in soft ground it made a crater over twenty feet across and about six feet deep. Somehow I managed to get hold of a large piece of the TNT explosive that I kept for several years on a shelf in the barn. When ignited, it burnt slowly with an orange flame releasing a large amount of dense black smoke. I took a small piece along to school and gave it to Mr Low my chemistry master to see if he could find out what it was. At that time I did not know that TNT contained nitro-glycerine that could under certain conditions sweat (exude) and become unstable. Luckily I had burnt it all before this could happen."*



At a Parish Council meeting in November that year, James Stilwell asked the Council to fill in the bomb crater at his property – they replied that they couldn't raise the manpower and that it was the duty of the Rural District Council. We don't know when it was finally filled in.



*Where the 4 bombs landed*