

LET'S FACE THE FACTS

No. 3

**Address to the Men and Women
of Canada**

BY

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**over a national network of
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Text of Gregory Clark's address over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation national network, Sunday night, August 4, follows:

Men and women of Canada:

In the addresses of Dorothy Thompson and Frederick Birchall, who preceded me in this series, you had an incomparable account of that slow shaping of the heavens, that gathering of the clouds for this greatest storm in human history. My task tonight is to give an account of the storm itself which, as one of twenty-nine newspapermen attached to British GHQ during the Blitzkrieg on Flanders, I was so fortunate as to see and to survive.

The point I wish to make tonight is merely to confirm from what I witnessed myself the malevolence of those forces which the two previous speakers in the series have impressed upon you. They spent years amidst the gathering storm. My experience was a mere matter of weeks. They saw and knew the personalities and the characters who have enthroned themselves in the heart of this malevolence. Like a hunted animal, amidst that frenzied stampede of millions of refugees, I watched for days and weeks the full force of that malevolence let loose.

I am a witness to the bombing and machine gunning of helpless civilian multitudes. Out of the welter of experiences of that retreat from Brussels and Louvain via Lille, Arras, Amiens, Abbeville and Boulogne, I am selecting only two to make my point. The destruction of the little Belgian town of Enghien by Stuka dive bombers and the random bombing by a fleet of Heinkels and heavy bombers of the beautiful Belgian city of Tournai, so filled with helpless refugees, mostly women and children and old men, that all I can compare Tournai to, at that hour of terror and slaughter, is a town on a fair day, or a Canadian town jammed as they were a year ago for the royal visit.

CALCULATED BOMBING

What I wish to leave with you is a clear cut conviction which I

hope you will share with me regarding the monstrosity of this mercilessly calculated bombing of civilians. The mere force of the statement that the Germans bombed civilians is somehow dulled and numbed by the fact that war is always frightful. Many people who stop to consider this fact of the bombing of civilians are apt to mollify their own thoughts with the impression that, in any army, in any air force, there might be elements capable of being carried away by the fury and the passion of their profession. I have even heard people say, not in any attempt to justify the Germans, but more in despair to try and justify human nature, that possibly the German fliers were drunk or perhaps they were very young and heartless . . .

The fact we have to face is that this supremest of all brutalities was not, by any stretch of the imagination, an incident, an accident, a local and ill-advised course, but a part of the strategy of the German high command; a fully considered and carefully calculated section of a program plotted months and possibly years in advance. The civilian populace of Belgium, Holland and Flanders was used by the German military genius precisely as women and children are used by savage tribes, to be driven ahead of the advancing troops.

MASS MURDER

With a complete and contemptuous understanding of the humane spirit of the French and British, the Germans so bombed certain towns—and only certain towns—that the highways most needed by the Allies were suddenly thronged with a one way traffic so dense, so panic stricken, so beyond any human control that the movement of the Allied armies was rendered hopeless. Beyond human control, yes. But not beyond inhuman control. For those roads the Germans wished to use they simply cleared with machine guns. And those roads which were panic stricken, they swept methodically with bombing and machine gunning planes, and the army traffic which followed simply rode over the dead who

had not had sense enough to get out into the fields and stay there.

It is terrible enough to say that the Germans, with absolute brutality and heartlessness, bombed civilians. In the bombing of military objectives, it might be said a certain risk of killing civilians in the vicinity is inevitable. But what do you think of the bombing of women, children and old men as a military objective? What do you think of the quality and breed of a race of men who, first travelling the skies in reconnaissance planes to observe to what degree the enemy's roads are rendered useless by hordes of pitiable women and children and old men, return and send forth fleets of bombing planes to bomb deliberately those towns which, as the instant result, will thicken up the traffic on those roads not sufficiently crowded. In short, coldly, scientifically, technically and with no more mercy than we feel for the coal we feed to the fire, the German high command bombed women and children for the purpose of converting those helpless, gentle souls into implements of war. This is more than mere brutality. This lets you see the German mind as it is. No hope remains to us that the brutal in them may subside. Those tens of thousands who are dead, those millions who are homeless, ragged, lost and broken in spirit and soul are so, not because of mere brutality, but because of a scientific and technical program. THAT is the fact we have to face.

MAY IN FLANDERS

On a beautiful shining May day, we twenty-nine war correspondents, including artists, cameramen and radio men, got into our army cars in Lille and scattered to various sections of the front up around Brussels and Tournai. In the car with me was Captain Bryan de Grineau, the artist who draws sketches for the Illustrated London News. In the front seat was Captain Hughes, our conducting officer beside the army driver, because no correspondent could travel the battle zone without a conducting army officer whose job was not so much our safety as to see we did not intrude too far or get into mischief. On our way for-

ward, by taking back roads, we made good time against the endless stream of refugees, most of them Belgian and Dutch, in cars, trucks, wagons and afoot. But we had to pass through Tournai, an important Belgian town, old and turreted and full of the past, because in the low country, all roads converge on the big towns. Here our progress was stemmed to a snail's pace, and we made way in stops and starts. It took nearly half an hour to get through this small city. The reason was that Tournai had been adopted as a resting place by tens of thousands of Belgians and Dutch who had been on the road two and three days.

It was so lovely a day, so sunny and bright and safe looking, and Tournai was made for rest. It is full of old churches, convents and a castle or two, and its grand place or town square, a great spacious park of soft turf to lie on. Here thousands had come to rest. Tens of thousands, of course, pressed straight on, but thousands halted, too exhausted to go farther; and here in Tournai were shops and kindly townfolk to provide hot water and bread to be bought, and horses rested and fed. Tournai was like a Fair Day, jammed to the limit. On the far side, on the war side of the town, the oncoming hordes had slowed and backed, making a traffic jam for two or three miles due to the congestion of Tournai.

And as we struggled free and got going out on a dirt road, not so congested, beyond the town, Capt. Hughes, our conducting officer, his eyes eternally scanning the skies through the slide top of our little English car, said—"I don't like this much. The reconnaissance boys will see that traffic jam. And there is a reconnaissance plane over now."

DEATH RIDES ALOFT

And sure enough, high in the sky, surrounded by the puffs of the anti-aircraft, a plane zig-zagged over Tournai, and the spectacled scientists aloft peered down through their binoculars and made their telephoto pictures of the situation to take back home to the super-minds.

We went up to Enghien, a lit-

tle thronged town where many roads meet, and there the confusion was immense—so immense, that traffic was slowed again, and the roads beyond it too were congested. We went around Enghien because it might take us an hour to pass through. The only military activity in Enghien were traffic police trying to unscramble the mess.

We went to a village called Lessines. Our purpose was to see there a church built in the fourteenth century, thirteen hundred and something, and venerated throughout Belgium for its antiquity and beauty. It was one of the shrines of the Belgians. Away off the main highways, in a little old village with no more military importance than any town you pass through on your holiday journey this week-end, the German fliers had expertly sought out this one little village, containing this one shrine. And to make it appear a military attack, they dropped explosive bombs on a railway crossing far down at the outer edge of the village, but on the church itself, far at the other end of the straggling village, they had dropped, on two crossings, forward and back, a whole load of small incendiary bombs. Not on anything else. Just on the church that dates to thirteen hundred and something. A shrine. And only a cinder remained.

THE HUN HAS NO PITY

We saw it, de Grineau drew it. Then we started south, where the distant crunch of bombs and the mutter of gunfire drew us. We got about 800 yards from Enghien again, approaching by a back road, when Capt. Hughes suddenly ordered the driver to pull under the shade of some trees. Over Enghien appeared a fleet of Stuka bombers. We got out of the car and for an hour and twenty minutes watched the Stukas, at a distance of three or four city blocks, blow Enghien off the map.

We stood there thinking of all that bewildered and check-mated horde of women and children trying to get through the bottle neck of Enghien and on to the road to the south. We watched the Stukas, three by three, advance as in some

devilish polka, poise, and dive. follow the leader, one, two, three. saw the four huge black pigs of bombs topple out of each one at the bottom of its dive, and heard the crunch of their bursts.

When we passed Enghien, there was no town left, only ruin and what still stood up was brightly flaming. The dead lay in the ruins,—stranger dead,—women and children who had never even seen this place before, dead and flung all about this little ruin of Enghien. And the rest—who had dared delay, dared slacken the congestion on the roads to the south,—were hastening on, madly, frantically.

We were still looking at Enghien when Capt. Hughes suddenly spotted higher and mightier, a fleet of bigger bombers. Not the small two-man Stukas but the big freighters of the sky, Heinkels and heavy bombers, 29 of them in a great formation, while high above them moved the specks of the fighters escorting them. Where were our fighters? Where they belonged, I suppose, forward yonder, where the soldiers were.

THE DEATH OF TOURNAI

"There goes Tournai," groaned Capt. Hughes. We had to make a swift decision. To go left and forward as far as we might be permitted towards Louvain to see what stand the Guards were making against the armored divisions of the Germans. But Tournai drew us. Down back roads and country dirt roads, by such furious dashes and heartbreaking delays, we went to Tournai. We were, of course, too late. As we travelled, we saw the "brave" bombers, no longer in proud formation but each on its own, engine full out, tail up, racing furiously for home, the fighter escorts dashing about, for the fell job was done. We got to Tournai thirty minutes after these twenty-nine had, at random, not seeking military objectives, but only flying over as low as they dared and loosing at random two hundred big bombs into that sunlit frenzy of women, children and old men; not destroying roads or junctions or stations or military positions; but just in pandemonium loosing two hundred high intensity bombs into that insanity fair day. When we

drove in, except for the many fires raging and the small stunned crews of Belgian civic firemen helplessly moving about them, Tournai was deserted. In thirty minutes, those thousands, as planned by the spectacled experts, had got out on the roads. The roads south and west of Tournai were the way the Germans wanted them—filled with wild creatures in the shape of old men, women and children.

Dazed, lawless, beyond any human control.

HITLER KILLS A CHILD

The streets of Tournai razed, half a block at a time, blown out into the road. The dead everywhere, flung in doorways, crouched in their cars, the big Belgian farmhorses grotesquely sprawled, still in harness. And on the wall of a white rough cast cottage in the town, the shape of a child, just its shape, imprinted like a shadow, only against the white, its arms upflung, its head high, just an imprint of a child . . .

But they did not hit the railway station, nor did they hit the main streets and intersections, nor did they hit the citadel, which was more of a police station, but might come under the German heading of military objectives. They hit the park, the side streets

full of kindly townsmen handing out hot water endlessly, they hit two convents, churches in whose shadows the refugees lay resting from the dead march of their lives. Tournai was not aimed at, Tournai was just plastered to convert other tens of thousands of children and women into instruments of war.

Of my own witness and out of literally hundreds of conversations with Dutch, Belgian and Flanders refugees of every class and degree, I could keep on detailing the evidence of this superbrutality, of machine gunning and bombing the roads as well as the towns. One of the heavy bombers in that fleet that attacked Tournai was hastening home low and came along the road where de Grineau and I were in the ditch, watching the last of the tragedy, de Grineau sketching furiously, and as the plane swung by, the gunner in the tail amused himself by loosing off bursts down into the thickest of the traffic of innocent humanity. "Get a wiggle on, there," you could imagine him saying, as he crooked his finger for each burst. But babies and children and women died.

WE MUST AWAKEN

There is no more I need say. There are in France alone six million refugees, each one a wit-

ness to what I have told you. The day will come, as divine justice requires, when all this story will be told in detail. But I, like you, have been one of those millions in our country and all the British countries and France and America, who, despite all that Dorothy Thompson and Frederick Birchall have written, and the Douglas Reades and the Matthew Haltons, not for months, but for years, have gone blindly on our patient way, while these storm clouds gathered—we would not see the clouds. Now can we see the lightning and hear the thunder? Now can we see the smoke of ricks and homes afire. But the fact far greater to be faced is that there is nothing to be expected of humanity from our enemies. The King said: "We are fighting for our lives." President Roosevelt said: "These people have not discovered something new in the government. They have dug up something old." Yes, old. My friends, we have to go back centuries, away back into a time so far only its faded stones remain, to find men who thought as these men think and who enlist in the scheme of their high strategy, the blood of children and of women.

We must awaken. We must smash them back into the dark ages from which they have exhumed themselves.