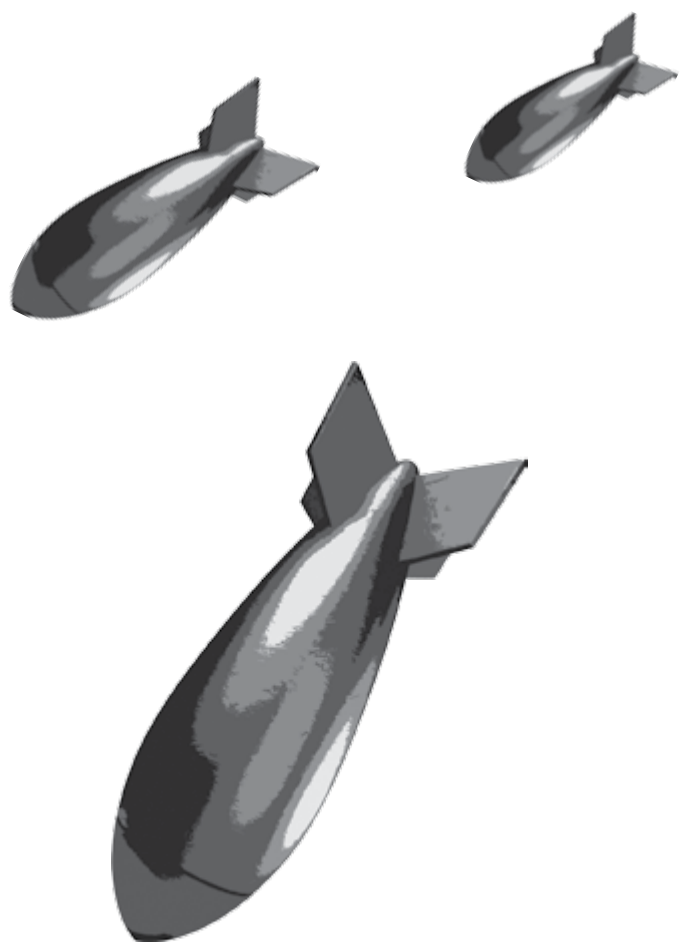


# WHAT IF THE BOMB GOES OFF?

Stewart Ross





# CONTENTS

- Page 7 **TO THE READER**
- Page 8 **THE STORY SO FAR**
- Page 10 **TIME LINE**
- Page 13 **Chapter 1 | SPECIAL MISSION**  
The four members of the Radford Road Gang prepare for a special war mission. They decide to go on a *spy hunt*.
- Page 16 **Chapter 2 | THE SUSPECT**  
The Radford Road Gang divide in groups and start their mission first thing at dawn. Soon, they are onto their first suspect...
- Page 20 **Chapter 3 | BLITZ**  
The Blitz takes place and the city is bombed all through the night. Bill and Paul have to seek shelter.
- Page 24 **Chapter 4 | BOMB DAMAGE**  
The city is badly damaged by the bombs.
- Page 27 **Chapter 5 | EVIDENCE**  
Bill and Paul find something dangerous in a damaged pub and decide to report to base at once.
- Page 30 **Chapter 6 | 'DARE YOU!'**  
Dennis and Charlie want to quit the mission.  
War is no game for children...
- Page 33 **Chapter 7 | TRAPPED**  
Bill and Paul are trapped. They have to spend the night at the pub hoping things won't escalate...
- Page 36 **Chapter 8 | THE SPY**  
Bill and Paul are rescued and their suspect turns out to be someone other than they had thought...
- Page 41 **THE HISTORY FILE**
- Page 45 **NEW WORDS**



# TO THE READER

*What If the Bomb Goes Off?* takes place in Britain during the early years of the Second World War. Bill Granger and the other characters in the book are made up, but the setting is real. The terrible bombing of Coventry in November 1940, for example, actually happened. So the story tells you what life was like during a dramatic period in our history.

Stewart Ross

# THE STORY SO FAR ...

## DANGER

Britain entered the Second World War on 3 September 1939. Everyone knew that it would be different from previous wars. In the past, most British civilians had been safe from attack, but now enemy bombers could reach anywhere in the country.

## POISON GAS

The government issued gas masks in case poison gas bombs were dropped. Air-raid shelters were built to protect city dwellers from bomb blasts. Important buildings were protected with sandbags. Hospitals, the police and fire services drew up emergency plans.

## AIR RAIDS

At night, all streetlights were switched off. Windows had to be blacked out to make it harder for enemy bombers to find their targets. Air-raid sirens sounded to warn people when an attack was expected. Wardens had the job of seeing that all these measures were carried out.

Despite the precautions, many people expected the big towns and cities to be reduced to rubble in a few weeks. In fact, things did not turn out quite like that.

## PHONEY WAR

For the first eight months of the war, few enemy bombers appeared in the skies of Britain. Then suddenly, in May 1940, this 'Phoney War' ended. Adolf Hitler launched a massive attack on France and the Low Countries. The British army, fighting alongside the French, was defeated and the troops were brought home. Hitler conquered France and prepared to invade Britain ...

# TIME LINE

CE (Common Era)

**1936**

Britain starts building air-raid shelters

**1930**

**1939**

**September** War begins

Blackout started



## **1941**

**March** Women have to sign up to do war work

**April** Two more heavy raids on Coventry

**December** USA joins the war

## **1944**

**July** Missiles hit London

## **1950**

## **1941**

**August** Last of forty-one air raids on Coventry

## **1945**

**May** War ends in Europe

**August** War ends in Far East

## **1940**

**May** German forces invade France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland

**May–June** British army rescued from Dunkirk

**25 June** Coventry first bombed

**July–October** Battle of Britain

**September** London Blitz begins (ends May 1941)

**14–15 November** Coventry Blitz



## SPECIAL MISSION

‘War’s great!’ said Bill Granger, looking round at the rest of the gang.

Paul, Bill’s ten-year-old brother, wasn’t so sure. But he kept quiet. No one ever won an argument with Bill Granger.

William Horatio, known as Bill, wasn’t a bully. He wasn’t a particularly large twelve-year-old and there was nothing special about his untidy mouse-brown hair and bright, grey-green eyes. What made him different was his brain.

Bill’s brain picked up facts like a vacuum cleaner picks up dust. Except Bill’s brain was never full. It was quick, too – quicker than any other brain in St Michael’s Elementary School, Coventry. Bill worked out the answers to Mrs Matthews’ mental arithmetic tests faster than any pupil she had ever taught.

So when Bill said the war was great, Paul said nothing. The other members of the Radford Road Gang – Dennis Smith and Charlie Boxer – didn’t say anything either. Dennis, a tall, gangly boy the same age as Bill, never spoke much anyway. Bill called him ‘the strong, silent type’ (‘SST’ for short). The eleven-year-old Charlie (or ‘Perky’, another of Bill’s nicknames) just grinned. Nothing upset Charlie. At least, not then.

When he was teased for wearing his elder brother's hand-me-down trousers, three sizes too big for him, he just laughed and said, 'Better than going naked, eh?'

It was a hot afternoon in the middle of the summer holidays, 1940. All four members of the Radford Road Gang were sitting with their legs dangling over the edge of the canal. As usual, they were talking about the war. 'Don't you want to know why it's great?' prompted Bill.

'Why's the war great?' asked Charlie, staring into the murky waters of the canal and wondering how fish survived in such a filthy soup.

'Well', said Bill, warming to his subject, 'We've got more freedom for a start', he explained.

It was true, the others realised. Because of the war, their parents were either away from home or at work all day, and the boys had all the time in the world to get on with their own business.

Bill's dad was a fitter with the RAF in East Anglia, and his mum had recently taken a full-time job at the Daimler factory, making armoured cars. Dennis's dad was in the army, and his mum was always out doing voluntary work. Charlie didn't have a dad. Not one that he had met, anyway. He didn't have much of a mum, either – she worked behind the bar of the Lady Godiva and didn't get home until almost midnight. Sometimes, Charlie said, she didn't come home at all.

After giving everyone time to think through what he had said, Bill went on. 'The war's exciting, too.'

Again, he waited for someone to ask what he meant. Eventually, Paul obliged.

‘What d’you mean?’ he yawned. ‘It’s not very exciting staring into a stinky old canal, is it?’

Bill leaned back and closed his eyes. With the sun full on his face, he felt dreamy – almost inspired. ‘Listen, Paul,’ he said. ‘This is just the rest period. The Radford Road Gang is gathering its strength, preparing for a special mission.’

‘What special mission?’ asked Paul, suddenly feeling more awake.

Bill sat up. ‘Sssh! Not so loud, Paul. Come closer, all of you.’

When the gang had gathered around him, Bill explained, ‘Coventry’s top secret, you know, with loads of factories making weapons. So why have we had only a few air raids?’ Bill looked at the blank faces around him, then answered himself. ‘Because Jerry wants to find out about those weapons, not blow them up. And how’s he going to find out?’

The others shrugged their shoulders.

‘Spies!’ whispered Bill. ‘*German spies!* The city’s teeming with them.’

Dennis scratched his head. ‘OK. But I still don’t get where we fit in.’

Bill’s eyes shone with enthusiasm. ‘Come on, SST! It’s our job to track them down. That’s our special mission – a *spy hunt!*’