

The North Strand Bombing, Dublin, May 31st 1941



Picture: www.rte.ie

At the end of *The Star-Spun Web*, a real-life event occurs as part of the plot. This real-life event is known as **The North Strand Bombing**, which took place early in the morning of May 31st, 1941.

What was happening in 1941?

Between 1939 and 1945, most of the world was embroiled in **The Second World War** (or **World War II**). This, like all wars, was caused by a great many complicated things, including:

- the after-effects of World War I (1914-1918)
- the fact that the economy (the amount of money available in a country) was depressed, or low, meaning that many people were suffering from poverty and deprivation
- the rise of **aggression** between several nations, including China and Japan; the most significant act of aggression was that of **Germany** against **Poland** on September 1st, 1939, which started the war.

In Ireland, which is where *The Star-Spun Web* partly takes place, the war was referred to as ‘The Emergency’. This is because Ireland was officially **neutral** during World War II – this means that Ireland was not supposed to offer help to either side. In practice, however, lots of help was given, and many Irish people offered their aid as soldiers, code-breakers, and more.

Who was fighting?

The Second World War took place largely between Germany and countries which were friendly to them, including Italy and Japan (these countries were known as the **Axis**), and other countries including France, Poland, the United Kingdom, and many other countries and

dependent territories; later in the war, the United States also joined in (these countries were known as the **Allies**). The Second World War was the most serious conflict in human history, both in terms of **casualties** (the amount of people hurt, displaced or killed) and in terms of **cruelty** (the terror of the **Holocaust** took place during World War II).

What was the North Strand Bombing?

The North Strand is an area of **Dublin City**. Dublin is the capital of the Republic of Ireland. Early in the morning of May 31st, 1941, several German planes were spotted in the sky above Dublin. Searchlights were put up in order to find them, but the planes did not disperse – they continued to fly in an uncoordinated way over the city. The Irish army sent up flares in the colours of the Irish flag – green, white and orange – followed by red flares, to warn the planes they were over neutral ground and that if they did not leave, they would be fired upon. After several minutes, when the warning was not heeded, **anti-aircraft guns** were used on the German bombers, but to no effect. The guns were not capable of damaging the planes, and the targets were missed.

At about **1:30 a.m.** three bombs were released over Dublin; all of them caused damage, but none caused any human casualties. The bombs landed in Summerhill, in the Phoenix Park (damaging **Áras an Uachtaráin**, the Irish President's official residence), and on the North Circular Road.

At **2:05 a.m.** the fourth and final bomb fell, landing on the North Strand. It killed 28 people, injured 90, and destroyed or damaged over 300 homes.

Ireland was bombed several times during World War II, but the North Strand Bombing was the most **significant** in terms of damage and life lost.

Why did it happen?

The causes are still unclear.

Some people think the planes were lost, and perhaps running out of fuel. They may have dropped their bombs in order to shed enough weight to make it safely back to their own bases. Others theorise that the planes may have thought they were flying over a city in the United Kingdom, and therefore a 'legitimate' target. There is also the possibility that Dublin was targeted because it had recently offered help to Belfast, which had been damaged by German bombers. It may also be the case that Dublin was targeted in order to anger the Irish people into officially entering the war, as Ireland was strategically important to both sides.

Do you have any theories?

Activities:

If you have any older relatives or family friends, ask them if they remember any stories being told about what life was like during the war. They may not be old enough themselves to have lived through it, but perhaps their own mums or dads, or their grandparents, did. My grandmother was a young woman during the war and often told me stories of what it was like to live with things like rationing.

Do you know what the word ‘rationing’ means? Find out! And then think about how you’d feel if rationing was still happening now. What would you miss the most?

Research your local area and find out if there are any stories of things that happened during World War I or World War II. If you have a local War Memorial, go and visit it with your grown-ups. If you recognise any family names on the memorial, perhaps visit the library or ask your grown-ups for help finding out more about the people from your area who were alive during wartime.

Imagine you were living in the North Strand on May 31st, 1941, and write a story or draw a picture about the events of that night. How might you have felt? Imagine: what would you have done if your pet had gone missing? What if an old person lived next door and needed help to get out of their house?

Some web resources which might help:

<https://www.dublincity.ie/story/north-strand-bombing-1941-0>

<https://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/0518/789256-north-strand-bombing/>

<https://www.scoilnet.ie/uploads/resources/27946/27682.pdf>