

# The Belfast Blitz

Blitz is short for 'Blitzkrieg' which is the German word for a lightning war. It was named after the bombs, light flashes and the noise of the German bomber planes in the Second World War. Belfast was one of the most bombed cities in the UK. The worst attacks were on 15th April 1941 and 4th May 1941.

## Unprepared

James Craig (Lord Craigavon) was prime minister of Northern Ireland and was responsible for preparing Belfast for any attacks by the German 'Luftwaffe'. He and his team did very little to prepare the city for the bombings. In fact, they even forgot to tell the army that an attack might happen! Belfast was completely unprepared for the Blitz.



Belfast had a large number of people living in the city but it had very few air raid shelters. There were only 200 public shelters in the whole of Belfast for everyone to share. Searchlights were designed to scan the sky for bombing aircrafts. However, they were not even set up before the attacks began.

The Germans were much better prepared. They knew Belfast was not ready for them. They choose seven targets to hit: Belfast Power Station, Belfast Waterworks, Connswater Gasworks, Harland and Wolff Shipyards, Rank and Co. Mill, Short's Aircraft Factory and Victoria Barracks.

## Why Was Belfast Attacked?

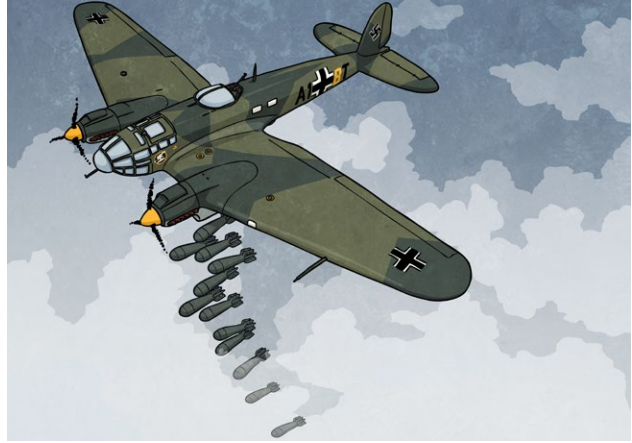
Belfast was famous and still is famous for ship building and aircraft building. At the time of the Blitz, the Harland and Wolff shipyards were some of the largest in the world. There were over 3,000 ships in the Belfast docks area and the Germans wanted to destroy them.

## The Easter Raid

On 15th April 1941 (Easter Tuesday), a crowd gathered to watch a football match at Windsor Park. They looked up and noticed a Junkers Ju-88 plane circling the city centre. Later that night, 200 more bomber planes joined it in an attack on the city. The first air raid sirens rang at 10.45pm. This was to warn citizens to get to an air raid shelter as quickly as possible.

The first bomb was dropped on the Belfast waterworks, a main water supply pond for Belfast. As thousands of fires blazed around Belfast, the bombed waterworks could not generate enough water to fight the fires. The Germans had cleverly chosen to bomb here to cause more damage and distress.

Bridge Street was almost completely flattened on 15th April 1941, yet it is still recognisable today. The Belfast Telegraph Building on York Street still has large dents in its walls today. This was caused by metal from the exploding bombs hitting with enormous force.



The shelter on Hallidays Road was crushed under the force of the bombs.

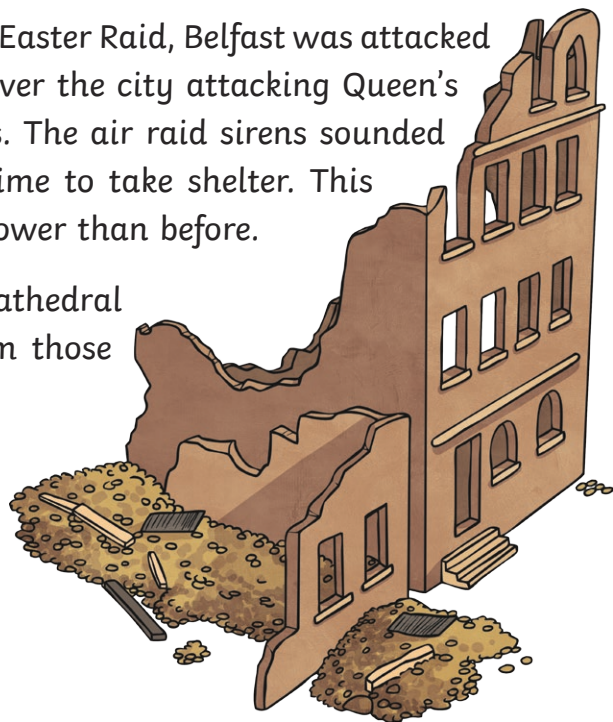
There were no survivors left. Many people took shelter in their own homes, hiding under tables or under the stairs. They were later pulled alive from the rubble. Luckily their homes had escaped a direct hit. At 4am, the entire city was up in flames. The 'all-clear' signal was not given until an hour later.

Over 900 people died in Belfast that night. 1500 were injured, 55,000 homes were damaged and 100,000 people were left temporarily homeless.

### **The Fire Blitz on 4th May 1941**

On 4th May 1941, three weeks after the Easter Raid, Belfast was attacked again. At around 1am, bombers flew over the city attacking Queen's Island. Over 150 people lost their lives. The air raid sirens sounded at 11.45pm, giving people plenty of time to take shelter. This meant that the casualties were much lower than before.

Many buildings in the city centre and Cathedral Quarter still bear the battle scars from those nights in April and May 1941.



# Questions

1. What does 'Blitz' mean?  
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2. Why was the attack on Belfast called a 'Blitz'?  
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3. What dates were the worst attacks?  
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4. What was the name of the Prime Minister in charge of preparing the city for war?  
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5. How many public shelters were there in the whole of Belfast?  
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6. What date was the Easter Raid?  
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7. How many people died in the Fire Blitz?  
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8. How many people were left temporarily homeless after the Easter Raid?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
9. How many people were killed in the Easter Raid?  
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10. What was the name of the shipyard the Germans chose to attack?  
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11. Give the name of a German bomber plane.  
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12. Where was the first bomb dropped in the Easter Raid?  
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# Questions

13. What did the crowd at the football see when they looked up on the night of the 15th April 1941?

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14. Why did the Germans want to destroy the planes in the Short's Aircraft factory?

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15. What did people do if they could not get to an air raid shelter?

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16. Why did the Germans bomb the waterworks?

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17. Would have chosen to go to an air raid shelter or take cover in your home? Explain your answer.

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# Answers

1. What does 'Blitz' mean?  
**Blitz stands for Blitzkrieg' which is the German word for a lightning war.**
2. Why was the attack on Belfast called a 'Blitz'?  
**It was called a Blitz because the bombs, light flashes and the noise of the German bomber planes reminded people of lightning and thunder.**
3. What dates were the worst attacks?  
**The worst attacks were on 15th April 1941 and 4th May 1941.**
4. What was the name of the prime minister in charge of preparing the city for war?  
**James Craig (Lord Craigavon) was the name of the prime minister in charge of preparing the city for war.**
5. How many public shelters were there in the whole of Belfast?  
**There were 200 public shelters in the whole of Belfast.**
6. What date was the Easter Raid?  
**The Easter Raid was on 15th April 1941.**
7. How many people died in the Fire Blitz?  
**Over 150 people died in the Fire Blitz.**
8. How many people were left temporarily homeless after the Easter Raid?  
**100,000 people were left temporarily homeless after the Easter Raid.**
9. How many people were killed in the Easter Raid?  
**Over 900 people were killed in the Easter Raid.**
10. What was the name of the shipyard the Germans chose to attack?  
**Harland and Wolff Shipyards were the shipyards that the Germans chose to attack.**
11. Give the name of a German bomber plane.  
**A Junkers Ju-88 is a Luftwaffe bomber plane.**
12. Where was the first bomb dropped in the Easter Raid?  
**The first bomb was dropped on the Belfast waterworks**
13. What did the crowd at the football see when they looked up on the night of the 15th April 1941?  
**They looked up and noticed a Junkers Ju-88 plane circling the city centre.**
14. Why did the Germans want to destroy the planes in the Short's Aircraft factory?  
**The Short's Aircraft factory was chosen because it made planes which were used in the war. The Germans wanted to stop the factory making these planes.**

# Answers

15. What did people do if they could not get to an air raid shelter?

**People hid in their homes under the stairs or tables for protection if they could not get to a shelter.**

16. Why did the Germans bomb the waterworks?

**The Germans bombed the waterworks so that the city would struggle to put out the fires caused by exploding bombs. They wanted to cause as much damage to the city as possible.**

17. Would have chosen to go to an air raid shelter or take cover in your home?

Explain your answer.

**Various answers.**

# The Belfast Blitz

Blitz is short for 'Blitzkrieg', which is the German word for a lightning war. It was named after the explosions, light flashes and the noise of the German bombers during the Second World War. Belfast was the second most bombed city in the UK, with two separate major attacks on 15th April 1941 and 4th May 1941.

## Unprepared

James Craig (Lord Craigavon) was prime minister of Northern Ireland and was responsible for preparing Belfast for any attacks by the German 'Luftwaffe'.

However, he and his team did very little to prepare the city for the bombings. In fact, they even failed to tell the military that an attack might happen! Therefore, Belfast was completely unprepared for the Blitz.



Although Belfast had a high population, it had very few air raid shelters. There were only 200 public shelters in the whole of Belfast. Searchlights, which were designed to scan the sky for bombing aircrafts, were ordered but arrived too late. They were not even set up before the attacks began.

The Germans were much better prepared. They knew Belfast was not ready so choose seven targets to hit- Belfast Power Station, Belfast Waterworks, Conswater Gasworks, Harland and Wolff Shipyards, Rank and Co. Mill, Short's Aircraft Factory and Victoria Barracks.

## Why Was Belfast Attacked?

Belfast was a massive centre for shipbuilding and aircraft building. The Harland and Wolff shipyards were some of the largest in the world and were responsible for building over 3,000 ships in the Belfast docks area.

## The Docks Raid

On 7th April 1941, a small group of Luftwaffe bombers targeted the docks area of East Belfast. Six bombers dropped bombs on the docks, shipyards and surrounding houses.



Casualties were low, with thirteen citizens losing their lives. A factory floor, where aircraft bombers were being manufactured, was destroyed. After their attack, the German crews returned to their bases in northern France and reported that Belfast's defences were useless!

### The Easter Raid

On 15th April 1941 (Easter Tuesday), a crowd watching a football match at Windsor Park noticed a Junkers Ju-88 plane circling the city centre, followed later by 200 more bomber planes. The first air raid sirens sounded at 10.45pm - this was to warn citizens to get to an air raid shelter.



### Where Did They Hit?

#### Belfast Bombing Map



The Luftwaffe's first target was the Belfast Waterworks, a main water supply for Belfast. At first, it was thought that the Germans had mistaken the waterworks for the docks where ships were moored. However, the German bombers chose



the waterworks for a good reason. As thousands of fires blazed around Belfast, the bombed waterworks could not to generate enough water to fight the fires.

Bridge Street was almost completely flattened on 15th April 1941, yet it is still recognisable today. The Belfast Telegraph Building on York Street still bears the scars of the night of 15th April 1941. Metal from the exploding bombs hit the walls of the building with enough force to leaves large dents in it, still there today.

The shelter on Hallidays Road was unable to stand up under the force of the bombs. There were no survivors left. Many people took shelter in their own homes, hiding under tables or under the stairs. They were later pulled alive from the rubble. Luckily, their homes had escaped a direct hit. At 4am, the entire city was up in flames. The 'all-clear' signal was not given until an hour later.

In total, over 900 people died in Belfast that night, 1,500 were injured, and 55,000 homes were damaged with 100,000 people left temporarily homeless.

### The Fire Blitz

On 4th May 1941, three weeks after the Easter Raid, Belfast was attacked again. At around 1am, Luftwaffe bombers flew over the city attacking Queen's Island. Over 150 people lost their lives. The air raid sirens sounded at 11.45pm, meaning that casualties were much lower than before.

Many buildings in the city centre and Cathedral Quarter still bear the battle scars from those nights in April and May 1941.



# Questions

1. What is 'Blitz' short for?  
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2. How many public shelters were there in the whole of Belfast?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What date was the Easter raid?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How many people were killed in the Easter raid?  
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5. What were searchlights used for?  
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6. Name a street that was nearly completely destroyed in the Belfast Blitz.  
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7. At what time was the 'all-clear' signal given after the Easter Raid?  
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8. What caused the dents on the Telegraph Building which we can still see today?  
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9. Give the name of a German bomber plane.  
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10. What did people do if they could not get to an air raid shelter?  
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11. Name three of the seven target sites chosen by the German bombers?  
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# Questions

12. Why do you think the Short's Aircraft Factory was attacked?

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13. Why did the Germans bomb the waterworks?

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14. Would have chosen to go to an air raid shelter or take cover in your home? Explain your answer.

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# Answers

1. What is 'Blitz' short for?  
**Blitz is short for Blitzkrieg' which is the German word for a lightning war.**
2. How many public shelters were there in the whole of Belfast?  
**There were 200 public shelters in Belfast.**
3. What date was the Easter raid?  
**The Easter Raid happened on 15th April 1941.**
4. How many people were killed in the Easter raid?  
**Over 900 people were killed in the Easter Raid.**
5. What were searchlights used for?  
**Searchlights were designed to scan the sky for bombing aircrafts.**
6. Name a street that was nearly completely destroyed in the Belfast Blitz.  
**Bridge Street was nearly completely destroyed.**
7. At what time was the 'all-clear' signal given after the Easter Raid  
**The all-clear signal was given at five o'clock in the morning.**
8. What caused the dents on the Telegraph Building which we can still see today?  
**Metal from the exploding bombs hit the walls of the building with enough force to leave large dents in it.**
9. Give the name of a German bomber plane?  
**A Junkers Ju-88 is a Luftwaffe bomber plane.**
10. What did people do if they could not get to an air raid shelter?  
**People hid in their homes under the stairs or tables for protection if they could not get to a shelter.**
11. Name three of the seven target sites chosen by the German bombers?  
**Various answers including:  
Belfast Power Station, Belfast Waterworks, Connswater Gasworks,  
Harland and Wolff Shipyards, Rank and Co. Mill, Short's Aircraft  
Factory and Victoria Barracks were the seven targets chosen.**
12. Why do you think the Short's Aircraft factory was attacked?  
**Short's Aircraft factory was chosen because it made planes which were used in the war. The Germans wanted to stop the factory making these planes.**

# Answers

13. Why did the Germans bomb the waterworks?

**The Germans bombed the Waterworks so that the city would struggle to put out the fires caused by exploding bombs. They wanted to cause as much damage to the city as possible.**

14. Would have chosen to go to an air raid shelter or take cover in your home?

Explain your answer.

**Various answers.**

# The Belfast Blitz

Blitz is short for 'Blitzkrieg', which is the German word for a lightning war. It was named after the explosions, the light flashes, the noise and fires which devastated cities across the UK and Europe in the Second World War. Belfast was the second hardest hit city in the UK, with two separate catastrophic attacks on 15th April 1941 and 4th May 1941.

## Unprepared

James Craig (Lord Craigavon) was prime minister of Northern Ireland and was responsible for making preparations for Luftwaffe attacks. However, it is reported that the authorities did very little to prepare the city for the bombings. In fact, they even failed to tell the military that an attack might happen! Therefore, Belfast was completely unprepared for a possible Blitz.



Despite being a city with a high population, Belfast had very few air raid shelters. There were only 200 public shelters in existence in the whole of Belfast. Around 4,000 householders built their own Anderson shelters made from corrugated iron and packed mud. Searchlights, designed to scan the sky for bombing aircrafts, arrived too late to be set up before the attacks began. The Germans were much better prepared. They knew Belfast was not ready, so choose seven targets to hit: Belfast Power Station, Belfast Waterworks, Connswater Gasworks, Harland and Wolff Shipyards, Rank and Co. Mill, Short's Aircraft Factory and Victoria Barracks.

## Why Was Belfast Attacked?

Belfast was a massive centre for engineering and industry. The Harland and Wolff shipyards were some of the largest in the world with many ships built here for the Royal Navy. They were one of several shipyards in operation. As well as shipping, Belfast was also a centre for building aircraft.

## The Docks Raid

On 7th April 1941, a small group of Luftwaffe bombers targeted the docks area of East Belfast. Six bombers dropped explosive devices around the docklands, shipyards and surrounding residential areas.



Casualties were relatively low, with thirteen citizens losing their lives. A factory floor where aircraft bombers were being manufactured was destroyed. After their attack, the German crews returned to their bases in northern France and reported that Belfast's defences were useless!

### The Easter Raid

On 15th April 1941 (Easter Tuesday), a crowd watching a football match at Windsor Park noticed a Junkers Ju-88 plane circling the city centre. That evening, over 200 more bombers left bases in northern France and the Netherlands. The first air raid sirens sounded at 10.45pm - this was to warn citizens to get to an air raid shelter.



### Where Did They Hit?

The Luftwaffe's first target was the Belfast Waterworks, already damaged from the previous week's attack. Initially, it was assumed the Germans had mistaken the waterworks for the docks where ships were moored but the bombing of the waterworks was a very deliberate attack. As thousands of fires blazed around Belfast, the bombed waterworks failed to generate enough water to fight the fires.

Bridge Street was almost completely destroyed on 15th April 1941, yet it is still recognisable today. The Belfast Telegraph Building on York Street still bears the scars of the night of 15th April 1941. Shrapnel from the blasts hit the walls of the building with enough force to leave large dents in it.

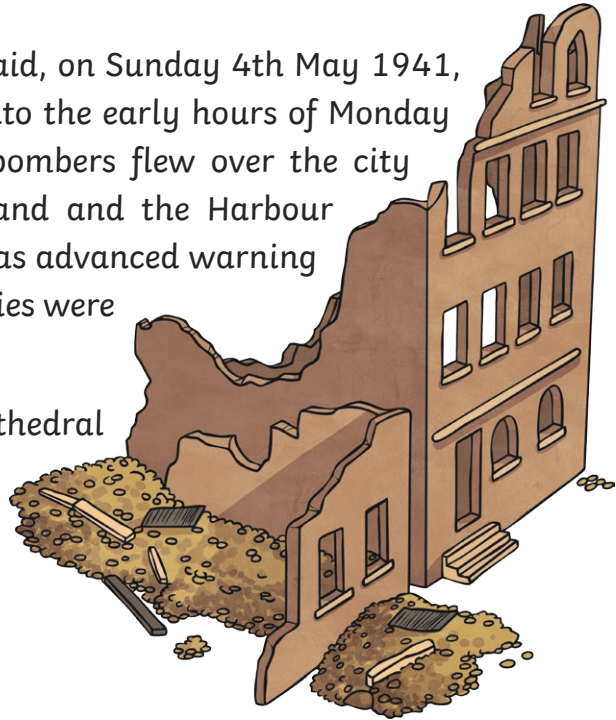
The shelter on Hallidays Road was poorly constructed and unable to withstand a direct hit. There were no survivors left. Many people took shelter in their own homes, hiding under tables or under the stairs and were pulled alive from the rubble. Luckily, their homes had escaped direct hits or raging fires. All night, the Blitzkrieg went on and at 4am, the entire city was up in flames. The 'all-clear' signal was not given until after 5am. North, West and East Belfast and large sections of the city centre were almost decimated by the raid.

In total, over 900 people died in Belfast that night, 1,500 were injured and 55,000 homes were damaged with 100,000 people left temporarily homeless.

## The Fire Blitz

Three weeks after the Easter Tuesday raid, on Sunday 4th May 1941, Belfast was attacked again at night, into the early hours of Monday 5th May. At around 1am, Luftwaffe bombers flew over the city focussing their attack on Queen's Island and the Harbour Estate. Over 150 people lost their lives as advanced warning sirens at 11.45pm ensured that casualties were much lower than previous attacks.

Many buildings in the city centre and Cathedral Quarter still bear the battle scars from those nights in April and May 1941.



## Belfast Bombing Map





# Questions

1. What is 'Blitz' short for?  

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2. How many public shelters were there in the whole of Belfast?  

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3. What date was the Easter raid?  

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4. How many people were killed in the Easter raid?  

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5. What was the first sign of an attack on the 15th of April 1941?  

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6. What were searchlights used for?  

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7. Name a type of Luftwaffe attack plane.  

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8. How many weeks were there between the Easter Raid and Fire Blitz in 1941?  

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9. Name a building that has scars from the Luftwaffe attacks of 1941.  

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10. Why did the Luftwaffe bomb the waterworks?  

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11. Why did people initially think the German had made a mistake when they bombed the waterworks?  

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# Questions

12. What were the seven target sites chosen by the German bombers?

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13. Why do you think these areas of Belfast were attacked?

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14. Which area of Belfast was least affected by the raids?

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15. Why did fires continue to blaze all over Belfast as late as 4am on the night of the 15th April 1941?

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16. Give three reasons why over 900 people were killed in the Belfast Blitz.

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# Answers

1. What is 'Blitz' short for?  
**Blitz is short for Blitzkrieg' which is the German word for a lightning war.**
2. How many public shelters were there in the whole of Belfast?  
**There were 200 public shelters in Belfast.**
3. What date was the Easter raid?  
**The Easter Raid happened on 15th April 1941.**
4. How many people were killed in the Easter raid?  
**Over 900 people were killed in the Easter Raid.**
5. What was the first sign of an attack on the 15th of April 1941?  
**The first sign of attack was a Junkers Ju-88 plane circling the city centre.**
6. What were searchlights used for?  
**Searchlights were used to scan the sky for bombing aircrafts.**
7. Name a type of Luftwaffe attack plane.  
**A Junkers Ju-88 is a type of Luftwaffe attack plane.**
8. How many weeks were there between the Easter Raid and Fire Blitz in 1941?  
**There were three weeks between the two attacks.**
9. Name a building that has scars from the Luftwaffe attacks of 1941.  
**The Belfast Telegraph Building still has scars from the shrapnel.**
10. Why did the Luftwaffe bomb the waterworks?  
**The Luftwaffe bombed the waterworks so that the city would struggle to put out the fires caused by exploding bombs. They wanted to cause as much damage to the city as possible.**
11. Why did people initially think the German had made a mistake when they bombed the waterworks?  
**The people thought that the Germans had intended to hit the docks because it had shipbuilding and aircraft building factories.**
12. What were the seven target sites chosen by the German bombers?  
**Belfast Power Station, Belfast Waterworks, Connswater Gasworks, Harland and Wolff Shipyards, Rank and Co. Mill, Short's Aircraft Factory and Victoria Barracks were the seven targets chosen.**

# Answers

13. Why do you think these areas of Belfast were attacked?

**The Germans wanted to destroy the factories where ships, weapons and planes were being made for war. They wanted to cause disruption and chaos by attacking the power station, Gasworks, Waterworks and Barracks.**

14. Which area of Belfast was least affected by the raids?

**South Belfast was the area least affected by the raids.**

15. Why did fires continue to blaze all over Belfast as late as 4am on the night of the 15th April 1941?

**They continued to blaze because the bombed waterworks failed to generate enough water to fight the fires.**

16. Give three reasons why over 900 people were killed in the Belfast Blitz.

**Various answers including:**

- **The prime minister was unprepared.**
- **The military was unprepared.**
- **Search lights were not in place.**
- **The warning siren was not sounded.**
- **The people of the city were not evacuated in time.**
- **There were not enough shelters.**
- **The bombed waterworks failed to generate enough water to fight the fires.**