

## SECTION 8

# Effects of a Nuclear Attack on Britain

The general effects of a nuclear attack on Britain are now widely realised, but, as a reminder, we briefly list here some of the consequences.

'Doomsday', which contains the most comprehensive and scientific, computerised analysis of a nuclear attack, says: '... even a moderate level of attack would be likely to result in at least four-fifths of the country's population being killed and injured by the direct effects, 65 per cent of all buildings in the country being seriously damaged, set on fire or demolished and 70 per cent of the inhabited area of Britain being subjected to levels of radiation from fallout which would be fatal to any person (and most animals) in the open.' (*Doomsday*, by Openshaw, Steadman and Greene, Blackwell, 1983).

The Government brief in the 1980 Square Leg civil defence exercise showed an attack of 205 megatons (one megaton equals one million tons of high explosive); this is equivalent, at a moderate estimate, to 13,000 bombs of the type that destroyed Hiroshima. The estimate was much reduced in later Home Office figures, but compared with the number of bombs available for attack on this country it is comparatively modest. Certainly with the coming of cruise missiles it must now be greatly increased. The Secretary of State for Defence (Air) said in the House of Commons on 6 March, 1980: 'More than 1,000 megatons would be needed to destroy the ground-launched cruise missiles once they were dispersed'.

The British Medical Association has estimated that one medium-size H-bomb exploded on a city would produce enough casualties to overwhelm the medical services of the entire country. For example, there are not enough hospital facilities to care for even a small fraction of the people who would suffer extensive burns.

Consequences of an attack may be divided roughly into the immediate and the long-term effects. The immediate effects would be death from blast and heat; people would be vaporised by the heat wave, cut to pieces by flying glass and other objects, flung against walls by enormously powerful winds and buried by falling buildings. Power, water and the electricity supply would be cut off, transport and communications wrecked.



The horrors of nuclear war: painting by atom bomb survivor Masoto Yamashita.

The after effects would be, if anything, even more disastrous. Firestorms would destroy many areas, incinerating people in shelters and those lying injured in the open or in houses. Epidemics would sweep the country as a result of the wreckage of the sewage system, the presence of millions of rotting bodies and the rapid increase of rats and insects unaffected by fallout. Many thousands would die slowly in agony from radiation disease. The increase of cancer and birth defects would be notable results of radiation among those who did not starve to death.

*Doomsday* refers to the original *Doomsday Book*, saying that it gave a total estimated population in 1086 of about 1¼ million. It adds 'It is quite conceivable that a nuclear attack of the magnitude we face today would leave at the end of the following year, say, only a comparable number surviving under conditions which would make the daily life of the eleventh century seem like a paradise.' (This summary does not take into account the effects of a nuclear winter, described in Section 9.)

## Resources

The most comprehensive account of the likely effects of a nuclear attack on Britain is in *Doomsday* by S. Openshaw, P. Steadman, and O. Green (Blackwell 1983). Also useful are: *London After The Bomb* by Owen Greene and others, published by Oxford University Press, 1982. (What a nuclear attack on a large city really means). *Crucible of Despair: the effects of nuclear war*. By Anthony Tucker and John Gleisner, published by Menard Press, 1982. (A short account of the effects of nuclear weapons). *The Medical Effects of Nuclear War*. (The Report of the British Medical Association's Board of Science and Education), John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1983. All these are available from the CND Bookshop, 227 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DA. Send SAE for a full catalogue.

