

# INSIDE ROME WITH THE GERMANS

By JANE SCRIVENER

O Roma nobilis  
Orbis et domina  
Cunctarum urbium  
Excellentissima.

—*Ancient pilgrim chant*

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Saturday November 6th

They've done it. The Vatican has been bombed. Yesterday evening at about ten minutes past eight a plane flew low over the Vatican City and dropped four bombs in a more or less diagonal line running southeast to northwest. The damage is said to be extensive, but one can judge best at first hand; I hope to go there myself on Monday. The papers, naturally, publish columns of hysterical condemnation of the brutality of the British in daring to attack the Pope's own property and to endanger his life, not to speak of endangering the art treasures and the Basilica of St. Peter's. But in spite of all the printer's ink, and all the radio propaganda, the people of Rome are already saying with conviction "*i Tedeschi*."

Soon after it happened several important German officers presented themselves at the Vatican, full of concern, and ready to conduct a thorough investigation on the spot. Although the press stated that they did so, it was untrue, for their services were politely declined and they were not admitted. The strongest probability as to the identity of the pilot is that he was Farinacci's secretary flying a German plane. Farinacci is the old Fascist enemy of the Church, leader of the anti-clericals, and, at the present moment, uncrowned King of Cremona and Northern Italy. He is acting as Mussolini's representative to the German authorities, and they do not mind what he does, provided he leaves their military arrangements undisturbed. Everybody knows that the Germans have numbers of English bombs in reserve for cases exactly like this. It seems fairly clear that they wanted to get the radio station, the only means by which the Pope can communicate freely with the outside world. But they missed it so completely that even the instruments were not damaged.

This morning, from half past ten onward, large groups collected in Piazza San Pietro beneath the windows of the Pope's study, cheering and shouting "*Evviva il Papa!*" and "*Il Papa! Il Papa!*" until at last he appeared at his window and gave them his blessing. He did so again at eleven and at half past eleven, as the crowd increased in numbers and in enthusiasm.

In the meantime, Cardinal Canali, President of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City; Prince Pacelli, Councillor, and Commendatore Galeazzi, Director of the Technical Department, made a thorough examination of the damaged premises.

Sunday November 7th

This morning all the parishes of Rome sent large groups of parishioners, each one headed by the parish priest himself, to Piazza San Pietro, as a demonstration of sympathy and affection to the Pope. It was a dull rainy morning, but the crowd paid no attention to the weather. The Pope, at his accustomed work in his study, heard the cheers from the Piazza and told his secretary to look out of the window and report. On hearing what numbers of people were below he had his study window opened, the one which is directly behind his writing table, fifth from the end on the third floor of the great block of the Vatican Palace. When he was seen, all the umbrellas closed as if by magic and all the faces were raised toward him with a roar of cheering. As he held up his hand in blessing, a sudden silence fell and the words: "Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus" were distinctly audible. Then the cheering broke out again. As yesterday, so today he came back to the window twice at intervals of half an hour.

St. Peter's was open this morning. It had been closed on Saturday so that all the broken glass might be swept up, for the windows had suffered a good deal from the blast. There was no structural damage whatever to the dome or to the walls, contrary to a current report. Most glass was broken in the apse and the left transept. The great golden window with the dove, symbolic of the Holy Ghost, which occupies the centre of Bernini's "glory" in the apse, and which is the only stained glass in the entire church, was pierced by about twenty splinters, themselves of glass, blown in from its own large protecting window in the outer wall. The windows in the drum of the cupola whose heavy metal frames were strengthened quite recently, were fortunately slightly open for ventilation and were not harmed. On the other hand, some of the windows of the lantern of the cupola were blown in, although they are at a height of 120 metres.

The walls and dome may be safe, but one other thing has suffered severely in St. Peter's, and that is its climate. For the first time in history it was desperately cold inside the Basilica. The building is so vast and the ventilation managed with so much skill that it was always pleasantly cool in summer and warm in winter in comparison with the air outside. It will take some time to recover that Petrine climate, I fear. It was quite a shock to feel the cold on entering, not so much physically as psychologically. People crowded in this morning to hear the Masses which were being said as usual at the various altars.

Monday November 8th

The damage in the Vatican City was well worth investigating for oneself. Considering what it might have been, it was slight; considering the havoc wrought, it is not slight at all. One million lire worth of glass has been smashed, not to mention damage to dwellings; the destruction in the mosaic studio will take months and months to remedy.

Two of the Palatine Guard on duty on Friday evening saw the plane circle low over the Vatican City several times. It was flying at about 100 metres when it dropped the bombs. Although no public statement has been made everyone is convinced that it was a German plane; it was too dark at the time to recognize any markings it might have borne. It did not drop either incendiary or penetration bombs, but fragmentation bombs. The first one fell about thirty metres away from the building where Cardinal Canali lives, and fairly close to the city wall. All the Cardinal's windows were broken, naturally; his doors and shutters were blown in, and much damage was done to the interior by splinters. The windows in the courtyard of the neighbouring Palazzo Sta. Marta were broken, and, in the Palazzo dei Tribunali, just across the road, a big fragment of a bomb fell in the flat occupied by the Brazilian Ambassador. Numbers of diplomats took up residence in this building as the war became more widespread; they are those from China, Cuba, Peru, Bolivia, Venèzuela, Uruguay and Ecuador.

The second bomb made a direct hit on the roof of the mosaic studio, which is half way between the apse of St. Peter's and the Vatican railway station. The damage here was very serious. The costly steel filing cabinet which was forged in Strasbourg and contains thousands of compartments for mosaic cubes of all shades was hit and the cubes were scattered; several unfinished pieces of work were destroyed; doors, windows and roof were smashed, and numbers of paintings damaged.

The most far-reaching explosion was that of the third bomb, which fell behind the Governor's Palace: besides windows, doors and shutters being destroyed, plaster fell from all the ceilings and inner walls and furniture were broken up. The retaining walls were, however, unshaken. The flat occupied by Mgr. Tardini, Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs, suffered severely, as did also the apartments reserved for visiting sovereigns.

The fourth bomb fell between the Ethiopian College and the radio station, and did no harm except to the reservoir. Windows were broken in the Vatican Museums, particularly in the Raphael Rooms and the sacristy of the Sistine Chapel. One Palatine Guard was wounded, otherwise there were no casualties.

Numbers of dignitaries called at the Vatican to express their sympathy; most of them were genuinely concerned, some were merely officious. Among the latter was the well known Gino Bardi, *Federale di Roma*, leader of the Roman Fascists, who came from his headquarters at Palazzo Braschi to offer his condolences.

Wednesday November 10th

The telephones of all who reside in the streets nearest the Hotel Excelsior have been cut off, because of the German Command having quarters at the hotel. It looks as if they were afraid of spies.

The Vatican has sent a lorry north to get some glass to replace their million lire worth broken by the bombs the other day. In Rome glass is beginning to be on the black market.

Three more classes are called up for military service: those born in 1923, '24 and '25. They must report between the 15th and 30th of this month. That means that three more large groups of young men will go into hiding. Feeling against the Germans increases daily, and the idea of being forced to fight for them

The British have broadcast today that they have now the complete report of the whereabouts of all Allied planes last Friday evening. None of them was near Rome.

Probably by way of illustrating German "protection" of the Vatican, last night the Vatican radio reported the fact that, since September, no mail has gone either in or out of Vatican City. It is an illuminating comment on the Germans' claim that they are facilitating everything for the Vatican authorities. And yet, they do clearly hope to propitiate the Pope as much as they can. There is no truth in the stories that they want him to leave Rome. Some individual Germans may have said so unofficially, but it is not the general view.

The Swiss press has stated that, on account of Friday's air attack, the families of the diplomats in the Vatican City had been directed to leave and were preparing to do so. The report is quite unfounded. No one is thinking of moving. The diplomats and their families are somewhat bored by the confinement and the limited resources of their place of residence, but would not think of leaving it.

The four reasons suggested by the British commentators for the bombing of the Vatican City by the Germans are unconvincing. They are: 1—To show the need for German "protection." 2—To show that it is unsafe for the Pope to remain there and thus have him removed elsewhere. 3—To give a pretext for taking away the art treasures of the Vatican, in order to put them in a safe place. 4—To induce the Pope to issue a protest against the bombing so worded as to cause misunderstanding between him and the Allies.