

THE ZEPPELIN RAID ON THE EAST COAST

To The Editor of The Times

Sir,-I regret I was not in the House of Commons when the Home Secretary, in answer to a question put by Sir William Bull, unexpectedly made a statement regarding the motor-cars alleged to have accompanied the Zeppelins in their raid on the East Coast. Perhaps, under these circumstances, you will kindly allow me the hospitality of your columns in order to submit a counter-statement, for I am anxious that the public should be placed in possession of the real facts of the case.

Let me first test the value of the Home Secretary's statement that there were eight cars traced by the Norfolk Constabulary about the time of the raid and satisfactorily accounted for. The Constabulary were singularly blind that night. There were no less than six cars in different parts of Snettisham at the time mentioned, three of which were open to the gravest suspicion. Of these three the constable saw nothing. Similarly, the constable stationed at Heacham, where two bombs fell, informed me that after 6.30 p.m. no car passed through that place. As a matter of fact two cars visited the lower part of the village, one immediately before and one immediately after the raid, and both excited suspicion. Again, within 20 minutes of each other three cars dashed through Brancaster Staithe, which is 10 miles distant from Heacham, the last one closely followed by the Zeppelin. The audacity of the occupants of that car passes belief, but in order that the statement of the witness I am about to quote may not be brushed aside too lightly, I ought to explain that the Zeppelin, whilst over Brancaster Staithe, was flying very low, scarcely higher, as another witness states, than the telegraph wires. And I may as well here say that all my statements are based upon the evidence of what I believe to be perfectly credible witnesses. Here is the statement referred to:-

"On that particular night I was in my home in Brancaster Staithe. About 10 p.m. I heard a Zeppelin passing over the house. It remained some minutes above the field adjoining, as if uncertain about something. A motor-car with the most brilliant headlights imaginable then rushed along the road from Deepdale towards Brancaster, and when by the side of the field mentioned above the occupants in the car all shouted very loudly, and two small lights were flashed as a reply from the Zeppelin. Then the latter travelled off after the motor-car. I saw the headlights and heard the shouting, but did not see the two lights from the Zeppelin, as I was in the front of the house; but the lights were seen by other occupants of the house..... My observations were those of many people in Brancaster Staithe.

When it is remembered that the night was very still and that the Zeppelin (as remarked to me by witnesses in other parts of the County) occasionally shut off her engines, I submit there is nothing incredible in this statement.

I have a number of letters before me giving evidence of the presence of motor-cars that night in various parts of the county, but it is unnecessary to belabour that portion of the evidence. Correspondents from all parts of the county speak of seeing a motor-car with extraordinarily powerful lights in different places followed by an airship and sometimes throwing up flashes. A well-known and much-respected farmer living on the land high above

Snettisham Church speaks to seeing flashes of light sent up from six different parts in the neighbourhood, and he has forwarded me a diagram giving the approximate position of the Zeppelin as judged by the noise of her engines and the spots whence the flashes proceeded. Another farmer, also perfectly trustworthy, gives evidence of a powerful light on the other side of Snettisham being directed on the church a moment before the dropping of the bomb. There are eight credible witnesses who can speak to the flashes that proceeded from "Sixpenny Hole" and attracted the Zeppelin to the church. The car that threw these flashes went off by a narrow side lane, which no one who could avoid it would take by night. This car reappeared at the turning into Dersingham and there threw up what appeared to be a definite signal – two upward flashes and one cross flash. At the turning by the church, which leads directly to Sandringham, it threw up more flashes. Similar evidence is forthcoming from the other districts from west to east, right up to the suburbs of Norwich. What a strange series of coincidences are required to explain the circumstances that a powerfully lighted motor-car constantly preceded the Zeppelin in its journeyings through Norfolk that night! And can anyone suggest a reason why the sober inhabitants of Norfolk should be found rushing about the county at a particular moment bombarding the heavens with flashes?

Many of us have a great admiration for our Norfolk Constabulary, who are a fine set of men, and do their duty to the best of their ability. They are usually, however, planted at night in the main streets of our villages, and there is no need for anyone on devilry bent to trespass on their beat. They saw nothing of motor-cars on the night of the raid, and they are not willing to accept evidence that they cannot personally verify. I was so afraid that the Under-Secretary of State for War, relying on their evidence, might give a wrong answer to the question I put to him in the House on Monday last, that I called at the War Office on the previous Saturday and produced certain evidence for his guidance, if necessary. Indeed, a suggestion which I accepted, was made to me that an officer should call and examine the evidence in my possession. In the meanwhile the Home Secretary has rushed in with a statement which ought not to have been made until that evidence was tested. Had such been the case, I feel sure his answer to Sir William Bull's question would have been on entirely different lines.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

HOLCOMBE INGLEBY,

House of Commons, Feb.10 [1915]

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