

Ambassadorial Scholar  
Fifth Report  
Impressions of the London Bombing  
July 16, 2005  
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Sponsoring Rotary District 5730  
Hosting Rotary District 1040  
Leeds, England

Eleven days before the bombings in London, I was there visiting friends and experiencing Wimbledon tennis for the very first time. Staying in the Nottinghill Gate area, we took the underground subway (known as the Tube in London) practically everywhere we went, and in absence of the tube we rode on the red double-decker buses that London made famous. Our main tube lines of travel were the Circle line and the Piccadilly line - the same lines where the 3 underground bombs went off on July 7, and, of course, one of the London Double Decker Buses, #30, also bore the brunt of terrorism.

Walking through London, I remarked to my British friend that I always felt safe around the city. A city of 9 million people from every country in the world, it is arguably one of the greatest in the world.

The people who have continued to carry out these appalling acts of terrorism on innocent civilians for the past many years, makes me incredibly angry. The cowardice of it should shame these militants enough to stop, but their world view is so different than "the west". As President Bush said in his 2002 State of the Union Address, "These enemies view the entire world as a battlefield, and we must pursue them wherever they are." They truly detest our way of life.

Experiencing the terrorism of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 first hand in Washington D.C., and having two very good friends of mine on a train underground in London during the bombings a few days ago, has made these horrific terrorist events very personal and very real to me. Thankfully my friends were not on the same trains or the bus that was bombed; but sadly, it appears that more than 70 people didn't share in the same fate.

The atmosphere among the British people can be summed up in one statement: "Just get on with it." At first impression, I was alarmed by this attitude because it felt as though people didn't seem to care all that much. But as the days have gone by, I realize that is not the case at all. In fact, I have grown to understand this reaction as one of utter determination. A general attitude of "if I get on with my life, we don't let the terrorists win." One could mistake this attitude as uncaring or uncompassionate, but

they would be wrong. The attitude here - a week after the bombings - is one of active reflection but also one of deep determination. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, our nation became the most patriotic I have ever seen, but I think it is fair to say that we, as a nation, collectively continued to fear the unknown - we feared further attacks. (It didn't help our national psyche with the many additional anthrax attacks). While there is an element of fear here in England, the fear does not seem to be making any difference in people's lives. Fear is much more of a secondary issue, where defiance is the predominate feeling. Obviously, the scale of the attack was not the same as on September 11<sup>th</sup>, so that is a key difference. But perhaps another reason for our different reactions, in part, stem from our different histories. The fact that the tube lines were re-opened later on the same day of the bombings speaks volumes of the British will and defiance. But, perhaps, Britain's history with IRA bombings and the history of World War II when London was bombed every day for five years straight, has created an enduring strength and thick skin passed down for generations that had helped the public psyche deal with these kinds of tragic events in a very direct way. This is in no way to say that our reaction in the U.S. was better or worse, I would just submit that it is much different, and these differences should be understood because differences often strengthen relationships, and our societies firmly stand together in the world's war against terror.

For me, living in Leeds about 500 yards from where the terrorists actually made the bombs, reminds me that we live in a world of great conflict and contrast. The ironic point of history on that fateful day of July 7, was that two hours north of where I am, the top world leaders were meeting at the G8 summit to help save lives of the world's poorest in Africa, while 2 hours south of here, some of the most bigoted and evil men in the world had trained young men to carry out the murder of innocent people.

As angry as I get when senseless acts like these happen, I have to consciously remind myself that anger, hatred, and revenge are the way of evil and of evil men. These emotions are the very motives harnessed by these extremists who tell the world they are acting on behalf of God. In times such as these, dealing with such evilness and confronting some of the darkest parts of humanity, free people must realize what I believe is true: "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17). Freedom is within each of us, much of which we take for granted because of the privileges we have of living in our free societies. These freedoms, in part, are what the terrorists fear as an attack on their way of life; therefore, I suggest one of the best lessons to learn in how to defeat these terrorists is to adopt the British attitude: "Just get on with it." No feelings of anger, hatred nor revenge - but one of justice, solitude and defiance. I feel as if I speak for all Americans when I say, Great Britain, we stand with you.

God Bless,

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