

Belcher Bits BL5: Small Bomb Container (SBC) 1/72

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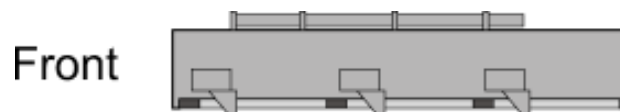
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Small Bomb Container (SBC)

The Royal Air Force made devastating use of incendiary bombing during WWII, including the Dresden firestorm that killed more people than the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki. The use of incendiaries was a key part of the RAF night bombing campaign, aimed at the industrial heartland of Germany and at the homes and towns of its workers. Night bombing was notoriously inaccurate, but delivered in large waves combining blast to knock down walls and open windows with incendiaries to set the results ablaze resulted in tremendous damage.

The development of incendiary bombs was undertaken in the years immediately prior to the war, and initial bombs were more traditional shapes, some of which were designed to spew flames from the tail after impact. Trials indicated that many small sources of fire were more effective than several larger ones, and the result was the 4 lb incendiary. This was a simple hexagonal case of 'elektron' (ironically, a German developed magnesium-zinc alloy) that burned fiercely when thermite charges inside were ignited by a simple impact fuse in the nose. The bomb was 48 mm across the corners, and 545 mm long; the last third was a hollow section which acted as a tail to allow the bomb to fall nose first.



These 4 lb incendiaries were carried in a hollow aluminum box called the Small Bomb Container (SBC). Originally developed to carry small bombs (how obvious!) of the 30 or 40 lb class, the design with minor modifications was ideally suited to carrying stacks of incendiaries. These were stacked in rows of five, six rows deep and typically 3 stacks per SBC. I have seen photos showing single stack SBCs (30 incendiaries) and also deeper SBCs which would have carried as many as 150 incendiaries, but the SBCs included with this set represent what I believe to be the most common size (90 incendiaries). The SBC retained its load with simple bars across the bottom of

the stack, one end hinged and the other retainer by an electrically released latch. When triggered, the bar fell open and the incendiaries dropped en masse. The empty SBCs remained in the bomb bay and returned with the bomber where they were unloaded, re-filled and ready for another trip. In total, the RAF dropped more than 8 million 4 lb incendiaries during WWII.

Photographic evidence shows that incendiary filled SBCs were used by many RAF bombers, including Hampdens, Blenheims, Stirlings and Halifaxes but the primary carrier was the Lancaster with its large bomb bay. Typical load would have been one 4,000 lb 'cookie' (available in Belcher Bits BL2) and 12 SBCs as shown below.



Painting

I have seen photos of these SBCs painted (probably dark green) but the majority were natural metal (aluminium). The electrical latches were dark, probably black or dark brown Bakelite. The 4 lb incendiaries were also natural metal, with a 3" (75mm) dull red nose, on which was painted a black/red/black stripe.

References

Surprisingly, not many clear photos exist of these containers, and apparently none exist in original form in museums. However, the best reference on the 4 lb incendiary is the first one listed below.

1. **Bombs Gone** by J. MacBean and A. Hogben, 1990 (excellent reference on RAF bombs of all sorts)
2. **Wellington Mk 1**, 4+ Publications (good photo and drawing of SBC)
3. **Beschreibung der englischen Bomben**, Dec 1940 (German publication describing British bombs; thanks to George Hopp for this!)

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