

Enduring the Battle of Britain and the Blitz

Perseverance of the British Home Front from 1940-1941

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### Abstract

The Blitz was a roughly nine-month mass bombing of London and other cities in Great Britain by the German Luftwaffe in 1940-1941. It was a time of great destruction and death but also of unity and courage among the British people. After the war had ended, Winston Churchill described how “for a year, all alone, the people of this island defied the tyrants of the world and held the fort for freedom until other great nations, themselves assailed, came into the line of battle.”<sup>1</sup> The Germans aimed to achieve a decisive defeat of Britain. They believed that by attacking the civilian population, the people would be miserable and desperate enough to sue for peace. Instead, the opposite occurred. Great Britain unified and defied the conventional expectations, not only resisting defeat but eventually even convincing the Germans that the effort was futile. This stand by average British citizens was due to their intense national pride as distinctly British, their ability to see themselves in a greater historical context and the dangers of allowing Germany to win, and finally their development of a mental toughness that could not be diminished regardless what the Germans did.

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1. “Mr. Churchill Recalls His Early Manchester Days,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, December 6, 1947, 3.

## **Enduring the Battle of Britain and the Blitz**

### **Perseverance of the British Home Front from 1940-1941**

#### **Introduction**

1940-1941 was a pivotal time during World War II. France surrendered in June 1940, and the Soviet Union and United States remained out of the war. This left Great Britain as the only remaining world power in defiance of Nazi Germany and was Adolf Hitler's "Enemy Number One."<sup>2</sup> Hitler knew that he needed to defeat Great Britain before he moved on to take what he saw as the ultimate prize, the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Fighting a war on both fronts was Germany's downfall in World War I, and he was wary of making the same mistake again. With France now out of the equation, Hitler could focus all of his attention on the British. Though Hitler's original goal was to gain complete air superiority over the British Royal Air Force (RAF), he also knew that if he could destroy the morale of the British people, he could destroy the nation itself. For this reason, though German bombings were originally aimed towards military installations and industrial centers, they soon transitioned to civilian targets as well. German leaders believed with these mass bombings, they could destroy the hope of the people and turn the emotional tide against the British government.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately for the British, this never happened. If anything, the people's resolve only strengthened when these bombings began.

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2. Gerhard Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler & World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 97.

3. Donald D. Wall, *Nazi Germany and World War II* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1997), 146.

4. Hans Adolf Jacobsen and Jurgen Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 88-92.

Though they could not make major counter-attacks, Britain knew it had to endure. Thousands of lives were lost; one in six Londoners lost their homes; and they lived under a constant fear. Yet, they would survive and give the West a fighting chance in a war that would define a generation.<sup>5</sup> Londoners needed every reason they could find to withstand the onslaught. They had many motivations to resist. First was their understanding of their place in history. Winston Churchill said, “On this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life and the long continuity of our institutions and our empire.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he claimed that, “if we fail, the whole world, including the United States and all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister and perhaps more prolonged by the lights of a perverted science.”<sup>7</sup> The British knew they were the last defense for democracy in the West against Nazi Germany.<sup>8</sup> Surrender not only meant the loss of their way of life now, but the loss of free society in Western Europe for the future. Secondly, they developed a mental toughness that was unflappable even as bombs were falling around them. Barry Fulford who was in London at the time of the Blitz said “It brought people together . . . we did, keep our chin up as they say in England because everybody got together and got friendly and sort of helped each other.”<sup>9</sup> Many even developed a mindset like soldiers,

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5. Amy Helen Bell, *London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2008), 4.

6. Winston Churchill, “Let Us Brace Ourselves to Our Duty,” Speech delivered to the House of Commons, June 18, 1940, accessed on November 10, 2016, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1940/1940-06-18a.html>.

7. Ibid.

8. Bell, *London Was Ours*, 4-6.

9. Oral history interview with Barry Fulford recorded on 2009 Mar. 11, Video (London: Central Connecticut State University Center for Public Policy and Social Research, Mar. 9, 2011), accessed on <http://content.library.ccsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/VHP/id/5873>

accepting that their death could come at any moment but refusing to allow the fear to take control of them. Thirdly, their identity and history as distinctly British gave them a national pride that they would never allow to be defeated.<sup>10</sup> They were proud of their heritage and of their country. They would not so easily lose that which they held so dear.

In the end, Great Britain's successful endurance of was not only a result of a military victory or a political shift. The endurance of Great Britain during the Blitz was "above all . . . a human story, a landscape peopled with ordinary, anonymous citizens: firefighters, heavy rescue workers, good neighbors, and those who carried on with their jobs." It is their stories that allowed Great Britain to resist such a great power.<sup>11</sup>

### **Setting the Stage**

At the beginning of World War II, Germany quickly defeated Poland while still expecting Britain to remain distant from the war. When they did not, Hitler believed that a much stronger show of force was needed to "bring Britain to her sense" to "tolerate German hegemony on the continent."<sup>12</sup> Hitler was initially very hesitant to stir up the British because of his great admiration for the British Empire. However, Hitler had a very specific plan in mind. He desperately wanted to conquer and take the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> To accomplish this, he believed Great Britain must be defeated first.<sup>14</sup> He therefore rushed

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10. Bell, *London was Ours*, 4-5.

11. Geoffrey Field, "Nights Underground in Darkest London: The Blitz, 1940-1941; Nights Underground in Darkest London: The Blitz, 1940-1941," *International Labor and Working Class History* 62 (Fall, 2002): 22.

12. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*: 78.

13. Wall, *Nazi Germany & World War II*, 146.

14. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 78-80.

his attack on Great Britain without any detailed plans. Regardless, he pressed on, determined to take the area as quickly as possible.<sup>15</sup>

### **Operation Sea Lion**

An initial report by the Luftwaffe Operations Staff in August of 1938 declared that the Germans would never be able to defeat Great Britain with their navy and Luftwaffe.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, beginning in mid-October 1938, Hitler had instructed Hermann Goering, the head of the Luftwaffe, to increase his forces by 500 percent.<sup>17</sup> The Luftwaffe began making plans for future attacks, labeling British naval and merchant shipping as targets. In July 1939, Lieutenant-Colonel Schmid, Chief of intelligence of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff presented a study that showed the RAF would be as strong as the Luftwaffe by 1940 and thus the destruction of the RAF while it was still growing was essential.<sup>18</sup> Hitler was also very nervous about the British navy, the strongest in the world at the time.<sup>19</sup>

On June 18, 1940, Winston Churchill announced that “The Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin.”<sup>20</sup> Only a month later, on July 16, Hitler issued a directive that announced the first plans for a real invasion of Great Britain, Operation Sea Lion.<sup>21</sup> To accomplish this, Hitler believed the British RAF had to

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15. Ibid., 79.

16. Ibid., 76.

17. John Ray, *The Night Blitz: 1940-1941* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2004), 73.

18. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 76-77.

19. Wall, *Nazi Germany & World War II*, 146.

20. P. G. Lachlan, “The German Invasion Plan, Operation ‘Sea Lion,’ November, 1947,” *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 92 (Feb. 1, 1947): 541.

21. Wall, *Nazi Germany & World War II*, 146.

be eliminated along with much of Britain's navy. This was the purpose of the Battle of Britain. Goering laid out the specific plans for this attack "to create the conditions necessary for a successful campaign against the enemy's war industry and supply lines by defeating his air force, destroying ground organization and disrupting his aircraft industry."<sup>22</sup> Goering also instructed his military "to dislocate Britain's supplies by attacking ports, and harbor installations, ship bringing supplies into the country, and warships escorting them."<sup>23</sup> All of these preparations and goals were listed out in Operation Sea Lion in order to simply weaken Great Britain enough so that an amphibious attack could occur.

### **British Preparation**

The fact that Germany was preparing for a massive assault on Great Britain was not a surprise. For over a month after the fall of France, there was a lull in the action, which allowed Great Britain to prepare both mentally and logistically for this impending attack. The British expected the Germans to "play dirty," not just attacking military installations but also aiming for civilians.<sup>24</sup> Going back to the start of the war, British women and children had begun evacuating from major cities. The first main evacuation began from London September 1-3, 1939. On these days, 166,300 mothers with 260,300 small children left along with 735,000 unaccompanied children. An additional 12,000 pregnant women and 76,000 "miscellaneous" left bringing the grand total to roughly 1.25

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22. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 80.

23. Ibid.

24. Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (New York, NY: Berg Publishers, 2007), 92.

million people in the span of three days.<sup>25</sup> In London alone, 607,000 people were removed via the London Transport system.<sup>26</sup> While unknowable, substantial numbers of other Londoners evacuated on their own. The grand total was close to two million.<sup>27</sup>

Evacuating the people had a much greater purpose than simply keeping people alive. Throughout recent history, much of warfare in Europe was confined to two opposing armies facing each other. Of course, there were several instances of enemy nations terrorizing the women and children once they had conquered the opposing military; however, World War I was the first time in history that an enemy could target civilians before first defeating that nation's army due to the invention of the airplane. Though the Germans did not originally plan on targeting the civilians, the British did not know this. In Great Britain's eyes, the Germans were a great threat to its people and if they were being bombed in their own homes, the morale in the city would drastically decline.<sup>28</sup> Churchill declared "Death and ruin have become small things compared with the shame of defeat or failure of duty."<sup>29</sup> Losing the morale of the people was a quick and easy way to lose the war.<sup>30</sup>

This concern for civilian panic was a very real one. It stemmed back to World War I when German Zeppelins raided London and the countryside.<sup>31</sup> The physical effects

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25. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 52.

26. *Ibid.*, 53.

27. Tom Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 32.

28. *Ibid.*

29. J. L. Garvin, "How We Stand: A Year After," *The London Observer (1901-2003)*, August 25, 1940, 4.

30. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 32.

31. Philip Ziegler, *London at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 9.

of these bombings certainly existed with 670 civilian deaths; however, it was the psychological terror that Londoners experienced that was much more significant.<sup>32</sup> These memories were very fresh to many British citizens. Even Stanley Baldwin, prominent politician in the House of Commons and future prime minister, fearfully promised that “the bomber will always get through.”<sup>33</sup> For this reason, the mass evacuations were designed “simply and solely as a military expedient, a counter move to the enemy’s objective of attacking and demoralizing the civilian population.”<sup>34</sup>

British precautions, however, went beyond simply evacuating the people. One of the first things the British did to prepare was to dig trenches, many of them right through local parks. These ditches were originally thirty to forty yards in length. The Brits dug a million feet of trenches by the end of September 1939.<sup>35</sup> Beyond this, they also set up anti-aircraft guns in the countryside and in the middle of some neighborhoods.<sup>36</sup> They even set up sandbags around major public buildings to give them stability.<sup>37</sup> Possibly the most important preparation they made was installing radar stations all along the coast. These radar stations would be crucial to receiving advanced warning in the case of a Luftwaffe attack. Without the radar, it would have been very difficult to give the RAF enough time to launch its planes.<sup>38</sup>

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32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 10.

34. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 32.

35. Ziegler, *London at War*, 16.

36. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 30-31.

37. Ziegler, *London at War*, 16.

38. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 92.

Despite all these preparations, the biggest concern of the people lay not as much in bombs falling from the sky, although this was a fear of many, but rather in the possibility of poisonous gas seeping through the streets. Many Londoners were frozen with fear over the possibility of poison pouring out of the bombs, burning their skin, blinding them, and producing any number of horrifying effects on the human body.<sup>39</sup> The last Sunday in September saw numerous vans with loudspeakers calling out everyone to come be fitted with a free gas mask in case of a poison strike.<sup>40</sup> By late 1939, 50 million air respirators had been distributed to adults and some older children; 1.5 million had been distributed to smaller children; and 1.4 million gas “helmets” had been distributed to babies and infants.<sup>41</sup> People even began rigging their homes to protect themselves from the gas, putting up blankets around the doors and windows. They were also prepared to wrap victims in blankets and provide them with “hot, sweet tea – nice clear thinking to thwart the holocaust.”<sup>42</sup>

Many volunteers organized themselves to help in the event of an attack. One of the more prominent organizations was the Women’s Volunteer Services (WVS.) This group organized women as nurses, serviced hospital supply depots, and planned evacuations. They also recruited many others to serve as ambulance drivers, wardens, first aid attendants, and even demolition squad members.<sup>43</sup> During this time, women had

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39. Ibid., 16.

40. Ibid., 16-17.

41. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 50.

42. Ibid., 51.

43. Ibid., 50.

more responsibilities than any other member of the family. While her role was not necessarily more important, it was simply more diverse. They filled the jobs that the men had vacated upon entering military service, were organized as volunteers as stated above, and yet still maintained their role as housewives and mothers.<sup>44</sup> However, throughout the war, despite their increased roles, their responsibility as wives and mothers was still labeled as the most important. In fact, Jack Halliwell spoke on behalf of many children during the Blitz when he said “so strong was the spirit, our mothers worked hard to save us from worry.”<sup>45</sup>

Lighting was also taken under precaution by the British government. All the lights and electricity of the city would make for a very obvious target as the German bombers aimed for the city. To the initial annoyance of the London people, the government instituted a nation-wide blackout on September 1, 1939. Irene Byers was outside at the time of one of the early blackouts and said, “I stood still, panic-stricken, then said firmly over and over again to myself, ‘I know this street absolutely well – don’t be such an ass – walk forward quietly and you will come into Newgate Street.” Upon arriving she said, “I felt damp with perspiration and quite exhausted.”<sup>46</sup> Though this caused some minor traffic accidents and injuries, Churchill decided the amount of camouflage that it provided from German bombers was well worth the inconveniences. Unfortunately, this

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44. Benjamin Townsend Mosteller, “Families in Wartime Manchester: A New Look at the World War II British Home Front.” *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global* No. 1475811, College of Charleston, (2010): 51.

45. Jack Halliwell, “A Child’s View: Life in Chadderton,” BBC, 11 November 2003, accessed on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/40/a2017540.shtml>.

46. Ziegler, *London at War*, 68.

remained a sore spot for British citizens for the entire duration of the war.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that “since the war has begun, there has been a serious deterioration in road behavior by all classes, largely due to war-time mentality of ‘living dangerously.’”<sup>48</sup>

Possibly the most influential and well-known moments of this time was Churchill’s “We will fight them on the beaches” speech. Churchill famously said, “I have, myself, full confidence that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone.”<sup>49</sup> This idea, that Britain was alone, the bulwark against Nazi Germany’s domination of the West, motivated and inspired the British people. Vera Brittain wrote “It became clear to me that the world’s eyes were concentrated on London.”<sup>50</sup> They understood their historical context. The fact that they were the only ones who could protect the future of democracy and of the normal way of life for all of Western Europe was a powerful motivation. Yes, Britain was alone, but they were also responsible. This idea of being alone became their rallying cry.<sup>51</sup> Stephen Spender wrote that “morale is an innate British national characteristic: British morale

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47. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 35.

48. “Bad Manners on the Road,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, November, 22, 1941, 8.

49. Malcolm Brown, *Spitfire Summer: When Britain Stood Alone* (London: Carlton Books Ltd., 2000), 59.

50. Vera Brittain, *England’s Hour* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1941), ix.

51. *Ibid.*

springs from within, and not from without.”<sup>52</sup> Germany had expected the British morale to sharply turn against their own government and sue for peace; however, the very opposite had happened.<sup>53</sup> The very thing Germany expected to demoralize and destroy the British people became the very thing that inspired the British. This was one of the main reasons Great Britain was able to endure through the coming Blitz.

### **The First Sirens**

Despite the massive British preparations, Hitler made a statement on September 1, 1939 that “[I] will not make war against women and children. I have ordered my Air Force to restrict itself to attacks on military objectives” but also mentioned that “It is a natural condition for the maintenance of this command that the opposing air force should keep to the same rules.”<sup>54</sup> This would be soon broken when the Germans mercilessly bombed Poland without regard to women and children. To defend themselves, Germany claimed that the British first violated the loose agreement when they instituted a naval blockade because this “affected women and children” which gave them reason enough to break their own side of the promise.<sup>55</sup>

On September 3, 1939 at 11:00, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain informed the British people that they were officially at war. Shortly after this, the alarms sounded warning the people of an incoming raid. This alarm turned out to be false as it was simply

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52. Stephen Spender, *Civilians at War* (London: Harrap, 1945), 38.

53. Britain in the Early Years of World War 2, “War Underway,” BBC History, accessed on November 28, 2016, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwtwo/earlyyears\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/earlyyears_01.shtml).

54. F. W. Koch, “The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany: The Early Phase, May-September 1940,” *Historical Journal* 34, no.1. (1991): 122.

55. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 61.

a few French aircraft that had accidentally stumbled into British airspace.<sup>56</sup> However, the British people knew that this was only the beginning. People in London reacted very differently to this first alarm. Many of the people were frightened, but the way they handled their fear looked very different. Some, like Gwladys Cox, a widow living in West Hampstead, said, “My knees were knocking together with weakness,” and she ran directly to the bomb shelter.<sup>57</sup> Others, such as, Stanley Rothwell, a historian at the time, quietly started the kettle for a cup of tea. However, he would later say, “I believe that if the Germans had raided us then, panic would have defeated us. We were not prepared. We could not believe it would happen.”<sup>58</sup> Joseph Macleod, news reader for the BBC, described the alarm as “the loudest, most ear-tearing, most soul-lacerating thing I had ever heard.”<sup>59</sup>

This mix of terror and indifference caused an odd blend of chaos in the streets of London. In one case, a group of golfers continued to play their game while just next door a family of five and three maids appeared quite the opposite. As soon as the sirens sounded the family jumped into action. Immediately, they put the dogs away, shut the windows, and went down into the cellar with all the essential items: gas masks, cigarettes, 2 bottles of beer, a box of “sweets,” a knitting kit, a pile of books, and even a bucket to be used for the bathroom.<sup>60</sup>

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56. Ziegler, *London at War*, 36.

57. *Ibid.*, 37.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*, 38.

60. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 43-44.

False alarms would be a common occurrence in the following weeks. This repetition of false alarms lasted for an entire year from September 1939 until September 1940 (when the first bombs eventually did fall.) This period became commonly known as the “Phoney War.”<sup>61</sup> The alarms would sound at all times of day and night, waking up Londoners and sending them to the nearest cover. However, time and time again, they were false alarms. As one can imagine, the British people began wondering if they would ever be accurate and fear was quickly replaced with frustration and anger. On September 4, Alexander Cadogan responded once “Went down to basement. Damned nuisance. All clear after about half an hour” after being woken by a false alarm at 3 a.m.<sup>62</sup> The very next night it happened again and Cadogan said, “It’s an outrage!”<sup>63</sup> Despite the frustration, the people were still brought closer together in this shared frustration. They were enduring the “war” together and though no bombs had dropped, the reality of their position as defenders of the West was still very much on their minds. On September 4, Irene Byers said that everyone “had that strange but familiar feeling which always comes with any crisis that we are all *one* just belonging to one another.”<sup>64</sup> Yet again they shared a common sense of frustration and began developing the mental toughness that would be crucial when the bombs started dropping in the coming months.

There were other major changes that occurred in the city as the Phoney War began. Great Britain converted the iconic Tower of London into a war headquarters and

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61. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 74.

62. Ziegler, *London at War*, 38-39.

63. *Ibid.*, 39.

64. *Ibid.*

prison for enemies of the state. They converted the moat surrounding it into a vegetable garden. Several galleries and shops closed down permanently to allow their owners and staff to volunteer in some way for the defense of the city. The change in lifestyle even forced many businesses to temporarily shut down.<sup>65</sup> Anything that needed any excess light was automatically ended. This included many sports teams and entertainment options in the city such as football and dance halls. In fact, at one dance hall in particular, the manager called all his staff in and they immediately began tearing down the tables and setting it up to be an air raid shelter.<sup>66</sup>

One of the areas of the city that required the most change was the zoo. Many of the animals, including the manatees, poisonous snakes, and spiders, and most of the fish were killed. The pandas, elephants, and a few others were shipped to other zoos to be kept safe. Even the entire aquarium was drained. All the carnivores were kept; however, there was a constant patrol of riflemen to ensure none were released if a bomb hit.<sup>67</sup>

After a few weeks of false alarms, Londoners and people across Britain became virtually numb to the German threat. Many reverted as much as they could to their old lifestyle. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that “In a hundred ways you are aware of a slackening in the poise and energy of the people.”<sup>68</sup> Freda Godfrey said “When in one night we had five warnings I became incapable of distinguishing between warnings and

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65. Ibid., 42.

66. Ibid., 41.

67. Ibid., 44-45.

68. “The Two Years of War: How London Took It,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, September 3, 1941, 4.

‘all clear.’”<sup>69</sup> Obviously most of the city was still temporarily shut down; however, many evacuees began to return to their homes. A few clubs reopened and the men of the city were often found at these establishments drinking to their heart’s delight.<sup>70</sup> Museums were also seen opening their doors once again. Even some sports leagues were formed in the city to provide recreation for people to release the stress of waiting on the Germans. The temporary calm had lulled the people into a false sense of peace.<sup>71</sup> In fact, by the late winter, one individual in London even said, “I wouldn’t be out of London now for a hundred pounds! We’re so well protected here.”<sup>72</sup> Another said, “As a matter of fact, at the back of my mind I don’t believe they are coming – but of course I know they really will.”<sup>73</sup>

### **The Battle of Britain**

The Phoney War, though dominated by false alarms, was not completely bereft of actual attacks. Both British and German forces would, on occasion, strike the opposing side with the supposed goal of destroying military and industrial targets; however, they often killed civilians in the process. On July 10, 1940, the Battle of Britain began.<sup>74</sup> The Battle of Britain was the time from July to October of 1940, when both the British RAF and German Luftwaffe made many air strikes on enemy military installations, such as

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69. Freda Godfrey, “Under Fire in England: Air Raid Reflections,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, August 30, 1940, 3.

70. Ziegler, *London at War*, 53-54.

71. *Ibid.*, 51-60.

72. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 52.

73. *Ibid.*

74. “Timeline,” Battle of Britain Memorial, accessed on October 20, 2016, [www.battleofbritainmemorial.org](http://www.battleofbritainmemorial.org).

coastal convoys, ports, and radio location stations in and around London and Berlin.<sup>75</sup>

Though July 10 marks the official start of the Battle of Britain, there were other small raids made beginning in May of the same year.<sup>76</sup>

The purpose of this period for the Germans was to cripple the RAF and gain air superiority to pave the way for an actual physical invasion as stated by Field Marshall Goering.<sup>77</sup> During these air strikes, the Germans unleashed their arsenals on military and industrial targets; however, since these were always located close to civilian dwellings, there were many civilian casualties. For example, on the night of June 18-19, bombs fell on an area close to London in East Anglia. Germans were supposedly aiming for oil and airports but many of the bombs fell on civilian targets. One church, one school, and several houses were destroyed, killing ten civilians and injuring twenty-four others.<sup>78</sup>

The Germans became quite fond of these sorts of attacks. They called them *Störangriff*, or dislocation and nuisance raids.<sup>79</sup> These raids were issued at the beginning of the conflict by Goering who said “active operations against Britain are to be confined to nuisance raids by relatively minor forces on industrial and RAF targets.”<sup>80</sup> The German Luftwaffe would aim for railroads, streets, and oil installations that were nearby local civilian populations. They would then purposely strike at night so the warning

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75. Brown, *Spitfire Summer*, 120-121.

76. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 51-56.

77. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 81.

78. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 77.

79. *Ibid.*, 78.

80. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 79.

sirens would wake the civilian population nearby.<sup>81</sup> The goal was to not only affect the civilians' lives on the ground by creating massive amounts of rubble, but also to disrupt their sleep by attacking at night. The Germans believed these nuisance raids would whittle away at the morale of the British civilians in and surrounding London.<sup>82</sup>

To respond to the German raids, the British began to make air raids on Berlin. These bombings were very similar to the raids on London; however, the British still attempted to disguise them as attacks on military and industrial installations. The *Manchester Guardian* reported after an attack in early September, that oil plants, shipping, lighting installations, aircraft engine works, and an "aerodrome" were the primary targets for the RAF pilots.<sup>83</sup> The raids typically only lasted a few hours.

Due to the British attacks, German hatred for England grew to unprecedented levels. In fact, a report dated June 20, 1940 from a British officer detailed the "strong hatred of England" Germans had in which they called "time and again for revenge."<sup>84</sup> Ironically, the casualty numbers for the Germans paled in comparison to the deaths of British civilians at the hands of the Germans. From May until November of 1940, the British killed roughly 975 German civilians while the Germans killed 15,000 British civilians.<sup>85</sup>

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81. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 78.

82. Ibid.

83. "More Bombs on Berlin: Week-end Raids, Aeroplane Engine Works Attacked," *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, September 2, 1940, 5.

84. Koch, "The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany," 133.

85. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 70.

During this summer, life was particularly hard for the British. The British economy had plummeted as restaurants and shops of all kinds struggled to keep their doors open. Though some of the wealthy attempted to still live their lavish lifestyles, many had to live the life of an average citizen. Restaurants often placed limits on what an individual could order to better save their resources.<sup>86</sup> Newspapers were significantly reduced as well since the government vigorously protected any paper. There were even several cases of newspapers reusing old copies because the headlines were common and popular. The most common reused headline was easily “HEAVY GERMAN LOSSES.”<sup>87</sup> Other shops that sold things like leather goods, clothing, or radios suffered losses and could only remain open for repairs because trade became so sparse.<sup>88</sup>

To combat a rise in poverty, the “Coalition Government,” a combination of leaders from the Labor, Liberal and Conservative parties that were gathered together by Churchill, worked alongside the trade unions to institute a policy that gave out subsidies to keep the cost of basic necessities inexpensive. These subsidies allowed the people to be able to support themselves without harsh consequences. It also protected against a huge inflation rate from occurring directly after the war ended because the adjustment in the cost of living never changed.<sup>89</sup> There was also a debate during the time on the use of coal and how to ration it. Hugh Dalton, President of the Board of Trade at the time, brought the issue to the House of Commons saying, “the coal situation was serious. The

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86. Ziegler, *London at War*, 90.

87. *Ibid.*, 91.

88. *Ibid.*, 90-92.

89. “First Peace Budget Brings Some Tax Relief,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, Oct 24, 1945, 6.

production was insufficient, consumption was excessive and stocks were much too low.”<sup>90</sup> Many other items were rationed during this time as well including food, clothing, and even kindling. Ralph W. Hill recorded in his journal that they were only allotted two ounces of cheese, two pints of milk and two ounces of tea per person per day. They were also only given one egg per month during the winter.<sup>91</sup> This extreme rationing would continue throughout the course of the Blitz through the rest of World War II.

On August 1, 1940, Hitler changed the way the war was to be fought, specifically by the German Luftwaffe. The goal was to intensify the attacks on the British in order to “establish the necessary conditions for Britain’s final defeat.”<sup>92</sup> These orders included “to destroy the British air force as quickly as possible.”<sup>93</sup> Then, “once local air superiority has been won the air war will be turned against the enemy’s ports.”<sup>94</sup> Finally, and possibly most interestingly, Hitler stated that “I reserve to myself the decision with regard to terror attacks as reprisals.”<sup>95</sup> This was the first time that Hitler acknowledged that innocent civilians were legitimate targets even though he claimed they would remain simply collateral damage.

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90. “Long Commons Debate On Fuel Rationing,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, May 8, 1942, 7.

91. Ralph W. Hill, “Rationing and Shortages,” BBC, July 24, 2005, accessed on October 22, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/73/a4532573.shtml>.

92. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 83.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid., 84.

On August 8, Nazi Army and Navy officers agreed with Hitler to “unleash the full might of the Luftwaffe against Britain.”<sup>96</sup> The first large scale attack on British soil was scheduled for this same day but was postponed due to weather until August 13. There had been small attacks on less populated regions of the country; however, this was the first large scale strike. The Germans sent 485 bombers, and 1,000 single and twin-engine fighters to attack.<sup>97</sup> The Germans called this Adler Tag or Eagle Day.<sup>98</sup> Two days later, the Battle of Britain would reach a new high with an astounding 1,786 German planes in the air over Great Britain.<sup>99</sup> The RAF was badly hurt and the British Fighter Command realized they needed to concentrate their counter-attacks on the German bombers and not allow its fighters be tempted to chase the German fighter sweeps.<sup>100</sup> If they attempted to engage the German fighters, they would lose precious resources without preventing any real threat. The service leaders and politicians were greatly worried.<sup>101</sup> In a speech to Parliament on August 20, Winston Churchill spoke of his reverence for the RAF pilots defending London saying, “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”<sup>102</sup>

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96. Wall, *Nazi Germany & World War II*, 146.

97. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 86-87.

98. Securing the Skies, “Battle of Britain in Detail Part 5,” Royal Air Force, accessed on October 20, 2016, <http://www.raf.mod.uk/campaign/battle-of-britain-75th/the-battle/battle-of-britain-in-detail-part-5/>.

99. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 86-87.

100. *Ibid.*, 87.

101. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 80.

102. Securing the Skies, “The Few,” Royal Air Force, accessed on October 20, 2016, [www.raf.mod.uk/campaign/battle-of-britain-75th/the-few/](http://www.raf.mod.uk/campaign/battle-of-britain-75th/the-few/).

As the Battle of Britain was becoming more heated, German General Alfred Jodl made a statement that “In conjunction with propaganda and terror raids from time to time – announced as “reprisals” – a cumulative depletion of Britain’s food stocks will paralyze the will of the people to resist, and then break it altogether, forcing the capitulation of their government.”<sup>103</sup> Shortly after this statement, in late August of 1940, a contingent of German Luftwaffe bombers, intending to strike British oil and aircraft installations, got lost and accidentally unleashed their arsenal on London itself. Their bombs fell on the East End, Bethnal Green, St Giles church, and other neighborhoods in London.<sup>104</sup> By complete accident, the Blitz began. From August through October, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz would coincide as the British RAF battled the Luftwaffe, while the Luftwaffe also bombed British civilians.

The last days of the Battle of Britain were potentially the most devastating for the British home front. From August 21 until September 6 (which marked the first official day of the German Blitz), 471 people were killed and 2,316 were injured in the German bombings. Most of these people were civilians.<sup>105</sup> Already, doctors, policeman, firefighters, nurses, and wardens were put into action. *The Manchester Guardian* reported that the fire brigade quickly brought many fires caused by incendiary bombs under control.<sup>106</sup> An eyewitness of the bombing in early August told reporters that the “explosion shook the whole town and laths, bricks and slates were hurled more than 100

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103. David Irving, *The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe: The Life of Field Marshall Erhard Milch* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 104.

104. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 55-56.

105. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 80.

106. “The Week-end’s Raids,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, August 26, 1940, 2.

feet into the air.”<sup>107</sup> Though these numbers paled in comparison to the devastation that was about to come, the people began to clearly understand that this war was not to be won any time soon.

The RAF easily became the toughest air force the Luftwaffe had faced.<sup>108</sup> The RAF pilots displayed great courage despite overwhelming odds and fought a smart fight. The British strategy of only confronting the German bombers and avoiding direct confrontation with the Luftwaffe fighters, frustrated the German command who were looking for a decisive air superiority and complete victory over the RAF.<sup>109</sup> In addition, Germans were experiencing heavy losses during their daytime raids. According to the Quartermaster General’s Department of the German Air Ministry, by September 30, Luftwaffe bombers had already experienced sixty-nine percent casualties during their daytime raids. 621 of their aircraft had been destroyed and 334 had been damaged.<sup>110</sup>

At this point in the war, the German pilots were still very inexperienced and untrained in “group night-flying.”<sup>111</sup> Additionally, there were not enough capable fighters to escort the bombers, no reliable navigation aids, no radar flying equipment, and no devices for blind bomb-aiming.<sup>112</sup> The Germans could not withstand this kind of a consistent loss to their air forces with so little return. These losses, coupled with the

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107. “Bomb ‘Like a Torpedo’ Shakes a South Coast Town,” *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959), August 22, 1940, 5.

108. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 100.

109. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 87.

110. Williamson Murray, *Luftwaffe* (Mt. Pleasant, SC: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1985), 44, 55-57.

111. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, 92.

112. *Ibid.*

frustration of the British strategy, ultimately led to the decision to attack the one location that was guaranteed to draw out the entire reserves of the RAF for what they thought would be the final decisive victory that they needed, London.<sup>113</sup> They just had to find the right excuse to execute it.

### **The Blitz Begins**

By mid-September, it became clear to Hitler that Operation Sea Lion was a failure. The Germans had postponed the invasion several times due to the failure of the Luftwaffe to gain control of the air.<sup>114</sup> This failure on behalf of the German Luftwaffe is what led Hitler to begin focusing on destroying civilian morale.

On September 6 the first German bombs fell on London proper. During September 7 and the following night, 675 bombers escorted by 648 fighters, bombed the industrial and military targets. In the first three nights alone, nearly a thousand people were killed. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, a string of hearses lined up outside the Stepney cemetery as the coroners prepared the coffins.<sup>115</sup> This was only the beginning. After this, German attacks were aimed at the power stations, docks, and supply centers.<sup>116</sup> London endured these raids for roughly two weeks, reaching their peak on September 15. After this day, weather plagued the Luftwaffe's attempts, forcing them to send fewer bombers. On the

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113. Ibid., 87.

114. History of the Battle of Britain, "Operation Sealion," Royal Air Force Museum, accessed on October 20, 2016, <http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/online-exhibitions/history-of-the-battle-of-britain/operation-sealion.aspx>.

115. Harrison, *Living through the Blitz*, 64.

116. Jacobsen and Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II.*, 88.

16<sup>th</sup>, only forty bombers were sent and on the 17<sup>th</sup> only thirteen were sent. By the 19<sup>th</sup>, only seven were sent.<sup>117</sup>

The day after the first major attack on September 7, Churchill visited the most devastated areas in London to see for himself how bad the carnage was. London had been waiting for this day for a long time and had greatly feared the destruction that could ensue because of the German bombings. Churchill knew they would never truly know how great the devastation would be until the raids started, thus Churchill insisted on walking the streets himself.<sup>118</sup> His personal detective, Walter Thompson said, “He insisted upon seeing for himself what was going on . . . his [interest] was infinitely greater than his fear of what might happen to him.”<sup>119</sup>

A backhanded reason he had for seeing the level of destruction was so that he could mentally project the same damage onto Berlin. He was comparing the devastation that the Luftwaffe had created to the amount of destruction he knew the RAF could also create.<sup>120</sup> Just five days earlier, he had told his War Department, “we must therefore develop the power to create an ever-increasing volume of explosives to Germany, so as to pulverize the entire industrial and scientific structure on which the war effort and economic life of the enemy depend.”<sup>121</sup> He knew that they needed to retaliate in any way that they could. He also wanted to give hope and courage to a people that had just hours

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117. Ibid., 89.

118. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 104-105.

119. Walter Thompson, *I was Churchill's Shadow* (London: Charles Johnson, 1951), 58-59.

120. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 105.

121. Churchill memo, “The Munitions Situation,” September 3, 1940, 352, in Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 105.

before lost everything they had. Churchill knew that to win the war, morale must be maintained, and the best way to do that was for the people to see their leader walking among them.<sup>122</sup> General Hastings Ismay walked with Churchill during this time and recounted how the people swarmed him saying, “We can take it, we can take it – but give it to them back” to which he responded “repayment, with compound interest.”<sup>123</sup> The British had the entire world watching and wondering the same thing. *New York Times* writer James B. Reston wrote on September 8, the day after this massive bombing, “Can Britain hold out? For how long can she withstand this relentless battering from the air? Can these able and heroic people, outnumbered and outequipped, prevail against the mighty German air force and beat this air force at its own game?”<sup>124</sup>

Churchill’s appearance in the streets of London was important to remind the Londoners of their national pride.<sup>125</sup> Churchill had a lot to be proud of. Though the attacks were devastating to some, the mass civilian panic that was expected never occurred. British citizens saw it as their duty to their country to endure. They knew their lot and they accepted it. Amy Helen Bell calls this resistance “quintessentially British.”<sup>126</sup> M. Mogridge’s 1942 memoir describes the British as “a people who can remain steadfast under bombardment from dusk to dawn for weeks on end” and said they “deserve to win, and Fate, in the end, gives the prize to the deserving. The victory of London was not won

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122. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 105.

123. Thompson, *I was Churchill’s Shadow*, 63.

124. James B. Reston, “War’s Key Question: ‘Can Britain Hold Out?’; ‘So This Is England,’” *New York Times*, September 8, 1940, 75.

125. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 105-108.

126. Bell, *London was Ours*, 53.

with weapons it was won in the human heart, and hearts of such caliber can do many things.”<sup>127</sup> The British self-identified as “essentially domestic, home-loving, anti-heroic but fiercely protective.”<sup>128</sup> They prided themselves as a people who were simple but tough; humble but fiercely protective. Many shops even displayed signs that read “Business as Usual” to downplay the effects the Germans were truly having on them.<sup>129</sup> This British identity and the support they felt from their leader allowed the civilians enduring horrific losses to wait patiently for the end, doing their part in the fight to preserve the freedoms of the West.

J. L. Garvin of the *London Observer* reported that Hitler “finds himself thwarted again by British self-discipline; practical adaptability; humorous stoicism; and by the general pluck of the men and women who are of the same flesh and blood as the fighting services.”<sup>130</sup> Stories of unusual acts of bravery abounded in London during this time. The *London Observer* would release long lists of stories from its citizens every so often to encourage the rest of the populace. One report wrote that shortly after her house was destroyed by a bomb, an elderly woman climbed to the top of the rubble and proudly planted a Union Jack on the top.<sup>131</sup> Another woman at the Channel port declared “the best thing about the raids is that they usually wake you up in good time to get out of bed and

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127. S. Mogridge, *Private Papers* (Imperial War Museum, 1942).

128. Bell, *London Was Ours*, 54.

129. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 106.

130. J. L. Garvin, “The Second Year: Looking Ahead, Air War and Nerve War, A People’s Battle,” *The London Observer (1901-2003)*, September 1, 1940, 6.

131. “The People and the Air Raids: Coolness Under Fire The Lighter Side,” *The London Observer (1901-2003)*, August 25, 1940, 8.

get your shopping finished early!”<sup>132</sup> Another story spoke of a woman and her fourteen year old son who captured a German pilot who had parachuted from a damaged plane. The son held him under guard with his father’s rifle and the woman eventually even served him some tea.<sup>133</sup> There simply was no panic in the minds of the British people.

These attacks were utterly devastating to the areas that were hit. One lady named Grace Foakes described it: “dirt and rubble trapped us in the shelter. . . with the help of our neighbors we managed to make a hole big enough for us to crawl through. I shall always remember what I saw then: Just a pile of rubble where our bungalow had stood. Beside us was a large gaping hole. Everything we had possessed had gone into that hole.”<sup>134</sup> These bombs that had struck London had killed her neighbors and completely leveled her home. From then on she walked the streets by day and slept in shelters at night, all the while taking care of multiple children.

After the all clear signal was given, a large group of people arose from a shelter into the streets. They screamed at the sight of all the demolished houses and buildings. Calls for missing family, weeping, and screaming rung through the streets of London.<sup>135</sup> Londoners had prepared for this for several months, but nothing could truly prepare them for the feeling of being in the middle of a war zone as they slept in their own beds. These attacks would be commonplace in London for the next several months. Apart from

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132. Ibid.

133. Ibid.

134. Grace Foakes, *My Life with Reuben* (London: Shephard & Walwyn, 1975), 66.

135. Harrison, *Living through the Blitz*, 60-61.

November 2, bombs were dropped every single night from the beginning of September until mid-November.<sup>136</sup>

The vast number of bombers flying overhead was overwhelming to some Londoners. Colin Perry witnessed the first raid on September 7 as he was riding his bike. He said, “It was the most amazing, impressive, riveting sight. Directly above me were literally hundreds of planes, Germans! The sky was full of them. Bombers hemmed in with fighters, like bees around their queen, like destroyers around the battleship.”<sup>137</sup> Ted Harrison hopelessly said, “Blimey, we’ve lost the war!” in response to the imposing German numbers.<sup>138</sup> These bombs contained high explosives with incendiaries, oil explosive bombs, parachute mines, and delayed-action bombs mixed in as well.<sup>139</sup> These were weapons designed to kill as many people as possible.<sup>140</sup>

As people lost their homes, the British scrambled to set up shelters for the hordes of homeless. By the end of September, 250,000 people would be homeless.<sup>141</sup> They set up many shelters right in the heart of London, yet it was impossible to house every single person forced out of his or her home. Many people were forced to leave the city and head out into the open country to camp. Regular middle class families who had always enjoyed

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136. Bell, *London was Ours*, 56.

137. Ziegler, *London at War*, 113.

138. *Ibid.*

139. Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Civil Services* (London: HMSO and Longmans, 1971), 257.

140. Ziegler, *London at War*, 113.

141. Ken Long, “Growing Up in London 1939-1945,” WW2 People’s War, BBC, accessed on October 21, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/02/a2065402.shtml>.

safe, comfortable lives were turned into “slum families” in the blink of an eye.<sup>142</sup> Though they were usually able to get their hands on bedding and food, the rest of their material possessions were gone. John Gent, an eight-year-old at the time, described how his grandparents came to stay with his family for a weekend during the Blitz. He said, “While they were with us, a bomb fell near their home and rendered it uninhabitable. As a result, their weekend visit lasted for the rest of their lives, until Grandma died in 1946 and Grandpa in 1957.”<sup>143</sup> After a week or two of the Blitz, half the population of the Stepney district in the East End of London was completely gone. Between death and evacuation, many areas of London were looking empty. Typically, the most congested parts of London saw the largest exodus. The less populated areas tended to stay in their homes and stick it out. These individuals quickly developed a toughness about them. After the first week or two anyone who was going to leave, did. Those who stayed, endured until the end.<sup>144</sup>

This was the mental toughness that London would need to survive the next several months of constant bombardment. These people quickly adapted to their new reality. A sturdiness set in; a resolution to accept the new normal and move forward despite the chaos all around. People even began downplaying the devastation of the bombs by giving them soft pet names such as “the peanuts” or even the “potato ludkies.”<sup>145</sup> By September 19, scenes that previously created hysteria in the streets now

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142. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 61.

143. “The Blitz: Survivor’s Stories,” Independent, accessed on November 9, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-blitz-survivors-stories-2070845.html>.

144. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 65.

145. Ibid.

saw neighbors conversing unfazed. Ed Murrow of CBS Radio News told his audience that “Not once, have I hear man, woman or child suggest that Britain should throw in her hand . . . it’s more probable that they’ll rise up and murder a few German pilots who come down by parachute” than surrender.<sup>146</sup> John Ray describes the “savagery of the bombing . . . ‘is matched and defeated, by the heroism it evokes, the heroism of the common men and women who know from the first moment the sirens sound at night that they are potential victims.’”<sup>147</sup>

Women especially developed this toughness. Even crying became a rare sight in the streets of London. One woman described one of the worst raids on September 18 by saying that, “Everyone was frightened, but they controlled themselves. Hetty cried, but she cried quietly, and no one saw her. Gertie fainted but she fainted at the back and didn’t make a fuss.”<sup>148</sup> Later that night a warden similarly described, “They got over it. A dreadful shock, and they got over it quickly.”<sup>149</sup> This toughness was created out of a slow acclimation to the new status quo. Londoners did not panic and give up, they accepted the new way of life they were under and moved forward, accepting their new position. This mindset gave the bombings, death and destruction less power, because they clearly were not destroying the morale of the British population like the German upper leadership had hoped it would.

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146. Norman Gelb, *Scramble: A Narrative History of the Battle of Britain* (UK: Harcourt, 1985), 235.

147. *The Spectator*, 13 September 1940, in Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 138.

148. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, 66.

149. *Ibid.*

One of the unique aspects of the British population was that many of them acted out their day to day activities as if all was right in the world. They may be getting bombed at night but when the morning came, in their eyes at least, life was normal. People whose houses had been seriously damaged near Croydon “took another air raid [last week] with the greatest calm. Their roofs had been covered in tarpaulin; beneath it wireless music went on cheerfully throughout the day.”<sup>150</sup> Pubs, clubs, churches, and women’s institutions all did what had to be done to run their normal routines as usual.<sup>151</sup> This again displayed the hardened mental toughness of the British people. They may be getting bombed with people dying and houses being lost all around them, however they refused to be bothered. Germany would find it impossible to break the morale of the people because the British refused to even allow themselves to notice that anything dangerous was occurring around them.

By the middle of November, it became clear to the German leadership that the plan of demoralizing the population by targeting the civilians in the capital had, for the most part, failed.<sup>152</sup> The people were still operating their daily lives to the best of their ability and there had been no calls for a change in leadership. The British had accepted their lot and were determined to endure through it. Over the next six months, the Germans would expand their attacks to focus more intently once again on the chief industrial and communications centers in the country.<sup>153</sup>

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150. “The People and the Air Raids” *The London Observer (1901-2003)*, 8.

151. Ziegler, *London at War*, 150.

152. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 150.

153. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 150.

In mid-November, an especially large raid was made on the town of Coventry. The city received no advanced warning prior to the attack.<sup>154</sup> The raid began at 7:20 p.m. on the night of November 14 and lasted until 6 a.m. the next morning. Over 500 tons of high explosives and 30,000 incendiaries were unleashed across just a few square miles.<sup>155</sup> A British citizen who stood miles away wrote, “I saw all the flames, sky-twinklings of shellbursts, and bomb-flashes of the old days.”<sup>156</sup> An estimated 568 people were killed, 863 badly hurt, and 393 had minor injuries.<sup>157</sup> The incredible amount of devastation wreaked over such a small area of land meant that “a civilian had a sixty percent greater chance of being killed or seriously wounded during that one night in Coventry than during the whole six years of war elsewhere.”<sup>158</sup> This raid was a reminder to many British citizens of the dangers of the war.

From this raid in November through Christmas of 1940, the Germans would continue this trend of attacking cities other than London. This did not mean London was left out. For the first time in either the Battle of Britain or the Blitz, London was not the sole focus of the German attacks.<sup>159</sup> Major raids were launched on Southampton on November 23, 30 and December 1 to destroy the shipping ports that had long been used by Great Britain. Over four hundred people were killed or injured in these bombings but

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154. Ibid., 153.

155. Ibid., 155.

156. George Beardmore, *Civilians at War: Journals, 1938-46* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1986), 102.

157. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 155.

158. N. Longmate, *Air Raid: The Bombing of Coventry, 1940* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 189-190.

159. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 160.

the ports were left relatively intact.<sup>160</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* reported that churches, a clinic, cinemas, banks, public buildings, shops, hotels and flats were all damaged. The raiders started several fires throughout the city with its incendiary bombs that were dropped for several hours.<sup>161</sup> Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Portsmouth and Manchester all experienced similar raids during this time with similar results and casualties.<sup>162</sup>

As the war entered 1941, Hitler began to realize the futility in attacking the British civilians. He announced that “no decisive success can be expected from terror attacks on residential areas.”<sup>163</sup> This did not mean that Germany was ending all raids on London nor that Hitler would never again authorize an attack on civilians; however, it did show that terrorizing the citizens was no longer his primary focus, so major raids would occur progressively less. Another benefit for the British citizens was the weather. For the first two months of 1941, the poor weather forced the Luftwaffe to make fewer raids.<sup>164</sup>

The period from March to May, 1941 represented the end of the Blitz for Great Britain. There had been a slight break in the bombings during the January and February, but in the next months before Hitler finally decided to invade the Soviet Union, Great Britain would again endure immense devastation, particularly its seaports.<sup>165</sup> Mercyside,

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160. Ibid., 161-162.

161. “Heavy Attack in South-West: A Long Raid, More Bombs on London, Four Raiders Down,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, November 25, 1940, 5.

162. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 164-174.

163. Trevor Roper, “Hitler Directive No. 18,” 12 November 1940, in Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 182.

164. Ray, *The Night Blitz*, 187.

165. Ibid., 202-204.

a key trade center at the time, was hit particularly hard. The Luftwaffe targeted this city and relentlessly bombed it for a week. At the end of this onslaught, over 1,900 were killed and 1,450 were seriously injured. In addition, thousands of others were slightly injured, while 70,000 were left homeless.<sup>166</sup>

On April 16 and again on the 19<sup>th</sup>, German raiders made surprise attacks on London, killing over a thousand people each day. One hundred forty-eight thousand houses were damaged in these two days compared to an average of 40,000 a week leading up to this point. The 16<sup>th</sup> was from then on referred to as “The Wednesday” and the 19<sup>th</sup> became known as “The Saturday” because of the loss that occurred each of those two days.<sup>167</sup> Yet again, though hurting and heartbroken, the people stood strong. The people woke up the next morning and had “no sign of fear, only a passionately expressed hope that there would be instant retaliation.”<sup>168</sup>

Though there was still a great passion in the British people to fight on, they were certainly becoming exhausted. Homelessness was an epidemic in the city. One in six London residents was homeless at one point during the Blitz between 1940-1941.<sup>169</sup> Not many were completely destroyed but with so many being so badly damaged, repairs were very difficult and the people who knew how to fix them were very few.<sup>170</sup>

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166. *Ibid.*, 207.

167. Ziegler, *London at War*, 151-152.

168. *Ibid.*, 152.

169. *Ibid.*, 154.

170. *Ibid.*

After “The Saturday,” Londoners were given a respite from the constant attacks from the German Luftwaffe bombers. For roughly three weeks there was general calm. No attacks occurred, and life somewhat reverted back to normal. Then, on May 10, during a full moon and low tide, the Germans sent the largest force yet assembled to raid London. The Germans sent 571 German bombers which dropped 711 tons of high explosive bombs and 86,173 incendiaries.<sup>171</sup> This attack would go down as the largest and last major raid on London during The Blitz. By the end of the night over 1,400 were killed. Including the injured, the casualty number climbed to over 3,000 people. The Law Courts, the Tower, and the Mint were all damaged and every bridge became impassable. Westminster Hall and the House of Commons also both took heavy damage. This attack shook London residents to the core. They had taken everything the Germans could throw at them but this raid almost pushed them over the edge. Fortunately, it would be the last major bomber attack against London in the war. There would be other raids later on, but none even close to the level of May 10, which essentially marked the end of the Blitz.<sup>172</sup> Great Britain had survived the German onslaught and having had his fill, Hitler turned his attention away from London and towards the Soviet Union.

### **Conclusion**

Great Britain’s experience from 1940-1941 was filled with death, fear, destruction, fire, bombs, and a profound sense that every day could be someone’s last. Despite all that Germany threw at them, they endured. Londoners, especially, held a

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171. History of the Battle of Britain, “The Blitz – The Hardest Night: 10/11 May 1941, 11:02pm - 05:57am,” Royal Air Force Museum, accessed on November 10, 2016, <http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/online-exhibitions/history-of-the-battle-of-britain/the-blitz-the-hardest-night.aspx>.

172. Ziegler, *London at War*, 160-161.

special kind of toughness that set them apart during the war. Morale was kept high and people rallied together to preserve their national unity and their way of life. Normal citizens quickly became the backbone of the British state as they protected each other and endured every hardship Hitler unleashed upon them. Through their intense national pride as distinctly British, their ability to see themselves in a greater historical context and the dangers of allowing Germany to win, and finally their ability to develop a staunch mental toughness, the citizens of Great Britain won the day and when the war ended a few years later, Western Europe had them to thank for preserving its freedom.

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