WAR IS DECLARED - WHAT NEXT?

Now may God bless you all, and may he defend the right. For it is evil things that we shall be fighting against, brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution. And against them I am certain that the right will prevail.

Late Sunday morning, 3 September 1939: Neville Chamberlain spoke these words. Twenty months later, on Thursday, 9 May 1941, my dad joined the Navy.

What was it like living in a country at war, knowing that at any time you might become either a victim or involved in the fighting? Living in a country where the state took control of your life. If my parents talked about this period, it has long since evaporated from my memory.

There are so many questions I should have asked: What went through their minds when they heard the words 'we are at war with Germany'? What did they expect would happen next? Were they surprised by how events unfolded, or relieved that the waiting was finally over? And what, above all, was the most significant change in their lives in the months that followed?

Less than a year earlier, the Munich Agreement (30/Sep/38) had appeared to offer a means of containing Germany's territorial ambitions, but this illusion quickly collapsed. Hitler had threatened to take control of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland – a border region adjoining Germany and Austria that was home to around 3 million ethnic Germans. Neville Chamberlain had travelled to Munich and, in conjunction with France and Italy, ceded the land to Germany, prompting the British Prime Minister's famous quote, 'Peace for our time.' German troops immediately began occupying the territory.

A few days before, perhaps as a demonstration of Chamberlain's resolve or as a negotiating chip for his forthcoming meeting, the UK conducted its first, highly visible, preparation for war. Many historians discount the idea that it was a deliberate signal to Hitler; however, it shows that the possibility of war was being considered and acted upon.

The opening section of this essay starts in late September 1938 and charts the UK's steady

move towards war. At first, there was hope that peace might endure, but gradually the inevitability of conflict became clear.

GETTING READY FOR WAR

I am pretty certain I know where my mum, dad and sister were on 25 September 1938. This was 'Gas Mask Sunday', the first, highly visible preparation for war. This extract from the following day's *Daily Express* describes the scene in London:

> It might have been a church social they held yesterday at the Chelsea Town Hall. Everybody – titled people and telephone girls – attended. They flitted about in a cheerful uproar for the good of the cause. The cause was A.R.P*, the occasion, Chelsea's first face-to-face meeting with gas masks. And it was typical of the response made all over London to appeals from local authorities for immediate mask fittings.
>
> Before fitting, stations opened in the morning, fathers and mothers lined up outside, their children playing on the pavement beside them. 'Good idea to get it over on a Sunday, when we have the time,' they said in Westminster, in Dulwich, in Chelsea. They might have been paying income tax, an unwelcome duty that they brightened with their own cheer.
>
> Wondering how the average family acts in times of crisis, I searched for reports of hysterics, emotional upset to the smooth machine that collected nearly a quarter-million face sizes, issued cards worth a mask each, 'In case of need.' Everywhere they told me 'no excitement; we've had no fuss.'

The *Daily Mirror's* front page reported details about the size of the operation:

> Yesterday was Gas Mask Sunday throughout Britain. Half the population of the main cities and towns had been fitted with gas masks by a late hour. From all over the country came reports that the people had accepted calmly the call to be prepared, had co-operated with officials and helped to make their task easier. The call to the people had been well organised. On Saturday notices were flashed on cinema screens asking audiences to attend for gas mask fitting at various centres, police vans toured the streets spreading the news by loud-speaker. Football crowds also were told. Announcements were made from pulpits yesterday.
>
> An A.R.P. official with national experience estimated late last night that nearly 3,000,000 people had been fitted in London alone, and that over the whole of the country the figure must have passed 10,000,000.

By the end of 1938, The Ministry of Health claimed that the 'bulk of the civilian popula-

* Air Aid Precautions (ARP) was Britain's civil defence organisation for protecting civilians during air raids.

tion' had been issued with a mask. In practice, most adults had masks, but stocks for children and special respirators for infants were still being ramped up.

The accepted view is that British planners feared air attack with poison gas more than anything else because of the terrible injuries it had inflicted during WW1. Gas accounted for roughly 20% of total wounded cases in the British Army on the Western Front. The Committee of Imperial Defence prioritised ARP policy around the design and distribution of respirators. It's said that the issuance of gas masks came first, not only because of logistical ease, but also to calm the expected public anxiety.

What is rarely reported is that Hitler promised not to be the first user of chemical weapons but threatened massive retaliation if they were used against Germany. In the speech he gave to the Reichstag, the day before war was declared, he said:

> I want to add one thing. If the international warmongers believe that they can wage war against Germany with gas, then they should know that we are prepared, and that the German response will be many times greater than anything they can imagine.

Thankfully, this was a promise he kept, so all of those millions of gas masks never had to be used.

Having seen how, during the spread of Covid, masks were presented as a tangible way for the public to feel some sense of control and protection – despite questionable evidence of their effectiveness – I am convinced there was a similar psychological reasoning behind Britain's decision to make this its first step in preparing for war. Perhaps I am overly cynical, but there are other parallels.

When lockdowns were introduced, the authorities feared the public would soon ignore the restrictions, a term they called 'Covid fatigue'. Although compliance declined and 'fatigue' did emerge, broad-scale breakdown in adherence was not as sudden or widespread as anticipated.

Robert Mackay's book about the psychological effects of war*, Half the Battle*, tells a similar story:

> Before the war and during its first eighteen months the ruling elites, and many others besides, had had serious doubts about the capacity of British society to hold together under the intense pressures of another total war. In the event, their pessimism proved ill-founded. The bogeys of pacifism, class antagonism, regional separatism and political dissidence receded to the point where they could effectively be disregarded.

The other high-profile preparation for war occurred in September 1938, when London and other major cities dug air-raid trench shelters in public parks. Work gangs cut zig-zag trenches into Hyde Park, St James's Park and Green Park. Newspapers reported on the venture with more than a hint of irony. The *Daily Express* had a cartoon showing a young girl

gazing into a black hole with her father's head protruding and saying to his daughter 'Slip up to the house Effie and fetch my umbrella this leaks' followed by:

> THEY began to dig trenches in London's parks yesterday. From the elm to the oak would shelter 1,000; through the flower beds to the playground another 1,000. Gardeners swept away the autumn leaves and the diggers from the Office of Works staked out the ground and tore away the turf. London's parks are lovely and most useful.

Unfortunately, these trenches did leak and during the following months, attracted criticism and ridicule. Many were not completed; others filled with water and had to be pumped out. The *Daily Express* had a photo of a man swimming in the trench on Primrose Hill. Children were reported fishing for 'tiddlers' in a trench at Barnet.

Next came the arrival of the Anderson Garden Shelter. At the end of December 1938, Sir John Anderson announced the government's revised shelter policy in the House of Commons. In addition to the public trench shelters, steel shelters would provide public protection close to their homes.

The new 'Anderson' shelter was constructed of galvanised corrugated steel and was intended for erection in the gardens of houses without a basement. It was designed to protect six people (theoretically) by taking the weight of the debris that might fall from the house. Householders with an annual salary of £250 per year or less were given the shelters for free, with the limit increasing by £50 for each child of school age in excess of two.

It's interesting to note that the cut-off for free shelters ensured that, according to Anderson, 'the great majority of wage-earning households' received them for free at an annual salary of £21,500 in today's pounds. For richer households, the cost was £7, approximately £600 in today's pounds. One thing I am certain of is that my parents would have received it for free. I have the faintest childhood memories of a dilapidated shelter in our garden.

The newspapers carried extensive coverage of these shelters, with the first erected in early 1939. By the outbreak of war, around 1.5 million had been distributed and installed in gardens across the country.

Another eye-catching development was the appearance of barrage balloons over London in May 1939.

His Majesty's Stationery Office published the *National Service Handbook Booklet* in January 1939 as part of a wartime publicity drive to inform people how to 'do their bit'. Over a million copies were printed in the first run at the cost of one penny and sold in newsagents and post offices.

On the opening page is a handwritten appeal by the Prime Minister.

Call to National Service
FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

10, Downing Street,
Whitehall,

January, 1939.

The desire of all of us is to live at peace with our neighbours. But to ensure peace we must be strong. The Country needs your services and you are anxious to play your part. This Guide will point the way. I ask you to read it carefully and to decide how you can best help.

Neville Chamberlain.

For those who find Chamberlain's handwriting hard to read here is a transcript:

> 10, Downing Street, Whitehall.
>
> January, 1939.
>
> The desire of all of us is to live at peace with our neighbours.
>
> But to secure peace we must be strong. The Country needs your service and you are anxious to play your part.
>
> This Guide will point the way. I ask you to read it carefully and to decide how you can best help.
>
> Neville Chamberlain.

The introduction was written by Anderson:

> MEN AND WOMEN all over the country are today eager to fit themselves voluntarily for National Service. Some have already decided what service they can best give and are fitting themselves by training to give it. Others are wondering how they can be most useful, and I hope that they will find the answer in this Guide.
>
> The call is to peace and not to war. We have no thought of aggression; our one wish is to live at peace with all peoples. But if this wish is to be fulfilled, we must be up and doing. We must make ourselves strong so that our influence for peace may be real, and we must make ourselves safe so that others cannot be tempted to thoughts of aggression against us.
>
> It is for the Government to make clear what service the country needs and in what forms it can be given, and that is the object of this Guide. It is for you to judge what service you can best give, and the Guide will help you to decide. Arrangements are being made to help those who, after reading the Guide, feel that they need further advice. Very soon National Service Committees will be at work for this purpose throughout the United Kingdom.

The Sources section contains a link to this 64-page document, which explained how the public could help their country by becoming involved in a long list of organisations:

- Air Raid Precautions (ARP) – wardens, rescue, first aid, gas decontamination etc.
- Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) – roles of volunteer fire crews, training and equipment.
- First aid posts and medical services – voluntary first aid parties, stretcher-bearers, hospital provision.
- Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) – reception centres, evacuation support, canteens, clothing and child welfare.
- Evacuation – the billeting system, escorts and reception areas.

- Other voluntary services – e.g. ambulance driving, police auxiliaries, communications.
- The fighting services – outline of joining the Territorial Army, Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, Royal Auxiliary Air Force.
- National Register of Volunteers – how to sign up, what details to provide and where to report.

I don't know how successful the campaign was, although I am pretty certain it didn't motivate my family to volunteer.

On 29 March 1939, Chamberlain announced that the Territorial Army* would be doubled in size, triggered by Hitler's seizure of Prague two weeks earlier – the first time he had occupied non-German territory. As a result, the British and French governments guaranteed Poland's independence, effectively establishing the 'red line' that would lead to war.

The number of Territorial Army (TA) divisions was doubled through a process known as 'duplication', in which existing divisions were replicated to create new second-line formations. This expansion increased the force from about 130,000 to a target strength of 340,000 part-time volunteer soldiers.

Recruiting the new volunteers was a lot easier than providing the infrastructure to support them. Doubling the numbers increased the demand for drill halls, armouries and training space. Many of these second-line battalions had no permanent HQ, so they drilled in schools, church halls, cinemas, even open fields, until new facilities could be built†. The War Office launched a construction programme for additional drill halls and camps, but much of it lagged behind the recruitment of recruits.

So far, all of these war preparations were motivated by civic duty. That changed on Saturday, 27 May 1939 when the press reported that Mr Ernest Brown (Minister of Labour) required (not suggested) men aged 20 and 21 to register at a local office of the Ministry of Labour on 3 June.

These men weren't being 'conscripted' but were required to undergo six months of full-time military training. Afterwards, they would be transferred to the Militia Reserve, where they could be recalled periodically for short training periods and annual camps. This 'Reserve' was not the same as the long-standing Army Reserve of ex-regulars. It was a new category comprising young men who had completed a short compulsory training period.

The concept of conscription was deeply unpopular after WW1, so these men were called 'militiamen' to avoid calling them 'conscripts'. The public reaction was one of grudging, reluctant acceptance rather than enthusiasm. As Britain's illusions about appeasement began to crumble, so did the deep-rooted suspicion of conscription. The Labour Party was opposed to the scheme, however, with 87% of its MPs voting against the motion. Clement Atlee, the Labour leader, said:

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* The TA was the volunteer reserve of the British Army. Members trained part-time, usually alongside civilian jobs, and could be called up in wartime.

† As a child, I recall hearing many places referred to as drill halls. It is only when writing this section that I realise where the name originated.

> ... that the measure proposed is ill-conceived, and, so far from adding materially to the effective defence of the country, will promote division and discourage the national effort, and is further evidence that the Government's conduct of affairs throughout these critical times does not merit the confidence of the country or this House.

In April 1939, the British Institute of Public Opinion asked the question: 'Should compulsory national service be enforced immediately?' The results showed 48% in favour and 45% opposed, exposing the division of opinion within the country. I don't know how my parents felt about this idea. My dad's opinion of the Labour Party was, what shall we say, 'cool', so I expect he agreed with the proposal.

Without doubt, the potential evacuation of children from city centres must have been the largest and most concerning event of this pre-war period. Rumours about this draconian move began in mid-1938 and slowly became more tangible. My parents saved a copy of the leaflet that spelt out how the scheme would work. On the back page it listed the 'evacuable' areas, which included the County Boroughs of West Ham and East Ham where they lived. The full list of areas is shown in the Appendix.

EVACUATION

WHY AND HOW?

PUBLIC INFORMATION LEAFLET NO. 3

Read this and
keep it carefully.
You may need it.

Issued from the Lord Privy Seal's Office July, 1939

A section of the document they must have pondered at length was titled 'PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS':

> If you have made private arrangements for getting away your children to relatives or friends in the country, or intend to make them, you should remember that while the Government evacuation scheme is in progress ordinary railway and road services will necessarily be drastically reduced and subject to alteration at short notice. Do not, therefore, in an emergency, leave your private plans to be carried out at the last moment. It may then be too late.

This leaflet was published in July 1939, and the evacuation took place at the beginning of September. I wonder if my mum and sister left London for her parents' home in Sussex? I had initially thought they would have moved sometime during August, but now I am not so sure.

The National Archives contain details of what happened on the day of the transfer in London, when 600,000 children departed for the country. They assembled at 168 'entraining stations' (as officials referred to the stations where evacuees joined trains) and were 'detrained' at 271 stations in the reception areas. In the pre-internet age, organising such a complex operation was truly remarkable.

During the first three days of official evacuation, 1.5 million people, throughout the country, were relocated, including 827,000 school-aged children, 524,000 mothers and young children under the age of five, 103,000 teachers and 13,000 pregnant women. Later in the essay, I will look at the consequences of this huge undertaking.

The waiting, debating, arguing and hoping had come to an end. Everyone understood that their lives were about to be turned upside down. Only 21 years had passed since the end of WW1 and it had all begun again. Until now, the government had merely nudged its citizens towards the reality of conflict, but after the haunting announcements that war had been declared, it crossed the line and took control.

THE STATE TAKES OVER

After Chamberlain's address announcing the start of the war, Alvar Lidell, who became known as the BBC's voice of the war, read a five-minute statement detailing the new rules that now governed daily life:

> All cinemas, theatres and other places of entertainment are to be closed immediately until further notice. In the light of experience, it may be possible to allow the reopening of such places in some areas. They are being closed because if they were hit by a bomb large numbers would be killed or injured.
>
> Sports gatherings and all gatherings for purposes of entertainment or amusement, whether outdoor or indoor, which involve large numbers congregating together are prohibited until further notice. This refers espe-

> cially to gatherings for entertainment purposes. But people are earnestly requested not to crowd together unnecessarily in any circumstances. Churches and other places of public worship will not be closed.
>
> As from now, no hooter or siren may be sounded except on the instructions of the police. In the event of certain air raid warnings will be given in urban areas by means of sirens or hooters which will be sounded in some places by short intermittent blasts and in other places by a warbling note changing every few seconds. The warning may also be given by short blasts on police whistles. When you hear any of these sounds take shelter. Do not leave your shelter until you hear the 'raiders past' signal which will be given by the continually sounding the sirens or hooters for a period of two minutes on the same note. If poison gas has been used, you will be warned by means of hand bells.

These words convey the facts; however, listening to Lidell's haunting voice expresses the gravity of the situation. All the radio broadcasts from this time are detailed in the Sources.

What must it have felt like to have the state seize control of your future? One moment you're living your own life, making your own choices; the next, a faceless bureaucracy takes over. It was a dimension of war I never imagined I'd encounter – until Covid arrived. I appreciate that the constraints on our life then were nothing like those during WW2, but it gave a taste of state control with all its foibles and silliness.

We soon came to see that although Covid posed terrible risks for certain groups, it didn't threaten the majority. War, however, was an entirely different thing – though at first, the threat didn't materialise.

Britain became a state where freedoms were no longer guaranteed by default. Every aspect of daily life could be regulated – a stream of controls reached into the home, the workplace and the street. It was a quiet but relentless control of ordinary life by the needs of war.

In this section, I aim to trace the timeline of state control from the outbreak of the war up to when my dad swapped his paintbrushes for a naval uniform in May 1941.

In the month before war was declared, Parliament rushed through the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act (24/Aug/39), a law that gave it authority to issue sweeping regulations. This was a catch-all instrument that could regulate virtually anything: industry, property, movement, labour, speech, even personal liberty. With such a broad mandate – 'to secure the public safety, the defence of the realm, the maintenance of public order, and the efficient prosecution of war' – it enabled the government to rule as it wished.

The war thus began with an instant intrusion into the lives of families. The evening after war was declared the blackout was enforced. Curtains and blinds had to be thick enough to stop all light escaping; shopkeepers painted over windows; lamp lights were extinguished; motorists fitted shaded headlamps.

The result was that the capital and provincial towns were plunged into darkness. There were reports of pedestrians colliding with lampposts, trams and each other. Road accidents rose sharply, and railway workers were killed or injured due to a lack of lighting and unsafe

conditions. Fatal accidents surged. ARP wardens patrolled to ensure compliance, issuing fines for any breaches, even small sources of light.

Attitudes towards wardens were mixed and changed with the intensity of the war. Some were mocked as 'little Hitlers' – bossy, overly strict and enjoying their authority. The ARP warden in the TV show *Dad's Army* personifies this type of person. During the Covid pandemic, the police assumed the role of these wardens, with the government encouraging neighbours to 'report your neighbour for flouting rules'. I was amazed at how many people seemed to relish this new power and how many relinquished their freedoms without a whimper.

Another early measure was the censorship of communications. From 4 September, the Ministry of Information had the power to suppress news that might aid the enemy or damage morale. Newspapers received daily guidance on what could be printed; foreign telegrams and letters were intercepted and read.

There are echoes of this today with the state's involvement in the media. *The Guardian* newspaper, not known for criticising government controls, said: 'The UK's Online Safety Act is a licence for censorship – and the rest of the world is following suit' (9/Aug/25). During the pandemic, governments, especially in the US, secretly controlled the material published on social media, all in the name of curbing misinformation.

It's strange – no, it's disturbing – how analogies between wartime and the Covid pandemic keep appearing.

On 29 September 1939 came the most comprehensive registration of the population Britain had ever attempted in modern times. Enumerators went door to door with forms to create the National Register. Unlike the regular census, this just captured residents' names, addresses, ages, sexes, marital statuses and occupations. Identity cards were issued on the spot. In this way, about 41 million people were registered and documented in a single weekend. For those of us interested in our ancestry, it provides the most recent national register of the UK population.

In my family's case, it shows that my mum and sister were in London on that date. This could be true because, after a month with no sign of the expected bombing, people were returning from the countryside (more on this later). So, maybe they had never left or maybe they had decided to come back. Another explanation is that when completing the form, there was a provision to record 'usual residents who were temporarily absent'. Yet another question that will remain unanswered.

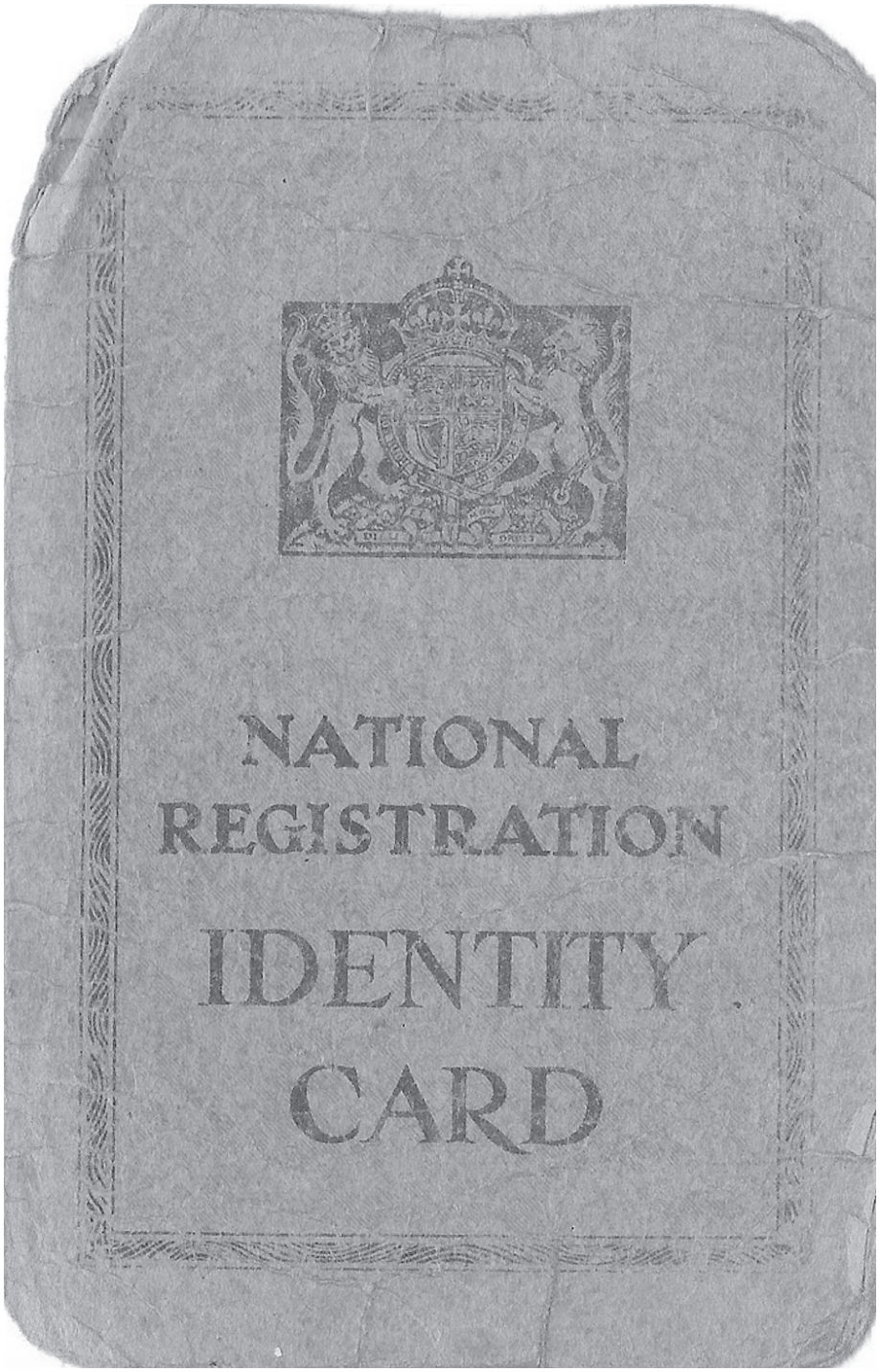
Decades later, on 26 September 2025 the government announced:

> A new digital ID scheme will help combat illegal working while making it easier for the vast majority of people to use vital government services. Digital ID will be mandatory for Right to Work checks by the end of the Parliament.

As I write these words, the arguments are raging about the rationale, cost and practicality of such a scheme. How much is driven by political convenience, how much by necessity? One thing is certain: the current project will take longer than a weekend to implement.

At the time of registration, my sister was two years old; however, the physical handwritten record of her details was updated 22 years later to include her married name. In 1948, the register was transferred to the newly created National Health Service and became the basis of its patient register. It was still updated with name changes, such as those because of marriage, well into the 1990s. This conjures up images of thousands of people spending their working lives updating 50-year-old bits of paper.

These small buff-coloured cards had to be carried at all times and produced on demand. Below is an image of my grandfather's ID card. For a society that had prided itself on freedom from continental bureaucracy, this was a profound shift. The card became indispensable: without it you couldn't claim a ration book nor move freely.



At the same time, the Defence Regulation 18B was passed, enabling the government to detain individuals, without trial, if they were suspected of acting against the war effort or of sympathising with Nazi Germany or other hostile powers – effectively suspending habeas corpus (which requires detention to be justified before a court).

There was a limited right of appeal to an Advisory Committee, whose recommendations were not binding. British subjects were those mainly affected by the regulation, including British fascists (notably Sir Oswald Mosley and members of the British Union of Fascists) and Irish republicans suspected of sabotage or collaboration.

Enemy aliens were generally detained under separate powers, such as the royal prerogative and the Aliens Restriction Acts. About 2,000 people were imprisoned under this regulation.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 fell short of suspending habeas corpus but gave the state a raft of emergency powers to limit public gatherings, detain individuals suspected of Covid infection, close certain businesses and restrict travel.

Petrol was the first commodity to be controlled, beginning in September 1939, immediately after the outbreak of war. Initially, private motorists were issued coupons, permitting limited driving. Mileage allowances were set and quickly reduced as supplies tightened. By March 1942, petrol for private use was withdrawn entirely; only people in essential occupations (doctors, farmers, emergency and transport services) received petrol coupons.

In January 1940 food rationing began, with bacon, butter and sugar being the first items controlled. Ration books were issued based on the National Register and included strict weekly allowances. Choice was eliminated: you could not buy more, even if you had money (theoretically). Gradually, more foods were added – meat in March, tea and jam in 1941. This was perhaps the most visible expression of state power: the government now determined what families ate.

Human nature being what it is, the black market in goods soon flourished, driven by organised crime, as well as ordinary citizens wanting to make some extra money. I can just about remember accompanying my mum to buy eggs, which were still rationed in 1954, from a lady who had a 'no questions asked' supply of them. Long after the war my family were scathing about their neighbours and relatives who managed to avoid fighting and profited from the war.

In spring 1940, the government assumed still wider powers. The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1940, passed in May, allowed compulsory direction of labour and harsher penalties for disobedience. At the same time, travel restrictions were tightened, requiring permits to enter coastal zones.

Mass internments of 'enemy aliens' took place in June and July 1940, affecting mainly Germans and Austrians (many of whom were Jewish refugees), as well as Italians. At one stage, approximately 27,000 people were being held in camps, 14,000 of them on the Isle of Man, many of them Jewish.

State control extended into the workplace with Defence Regulation 58A, introduced in August 1940, which empowered the government to direct workers into jobs deemed essential. Though it was applied sparingly at first, this power marked a turning point: employment shifted from a matter of personal choice to a national assignment.

Until December 1941, British women were not subject to compulsory service. At that point, the National Service Act made it legal for unmarried women aged 20–30 to be called up for war work, including industrial jobs and service in auxiliary corps. What had begun as an appeal for volunteers soon became a formal obligation.

This involvement of women in the workforce both exposed and began to challenge entrenched inequalities between men and women. In teaching and the civil service, the 'marriage bar' required women to resign upon marriage, reflecting the belief that a wife's primary role was in the home. A 1940 Ministry of Labour circular put it bluntly: 'the married woman is expected to withdraw from paid employment once domestic duties commence'. Trade unions were at the forefront of resisting equal pay and the rehiring of married women.

Despite the dire shortage of teachers caused by the conscription of men and the disruption of the evacuation, some local education authorities refused to recruit married women teachers.

Pay, too, was unequal: women in factories or clerical posts often received lower wages for doing identical tasks.

Men and women are urgently required for the conduct of ration issue stores and for the provision of canteen facilities for the Navy, Army and Air Force now fully mobilised.

The following categories are specially required for immediate employment.

CATEGORY	Rate of pay per week (according to experience) PLUS BOARD AND LODGING
MEN.	
GROCERY AND PROVISION STORE MANAGERS	from 55/-
GROCERY AND PROVISION STOREMEN	from 25/-
GROCERY AND PROVISION ASSISTANTS	from 25/-
REFRESHMENT BAR MANAGERS	from 45/-
COOKS	from 35/-
COUNTER ASSISTANTS	from 25/-
GENERAL ASSISTANTS	from 25/-
KITCHEN MEN	from 17/6
BEER BAR MEN	from 25/-
STORE CLERKS	from 30/-
WOMEN.	
RESTAURANT MANAGERESSES	from 30/-
COOKS	from 22/6
COUNTER ASSISTANTS	from 15/-
GENERAL ASSISTANTS	from 15/-
KITCHEN MAIDS	from 15/-
STORE CLERKS	from 17/6

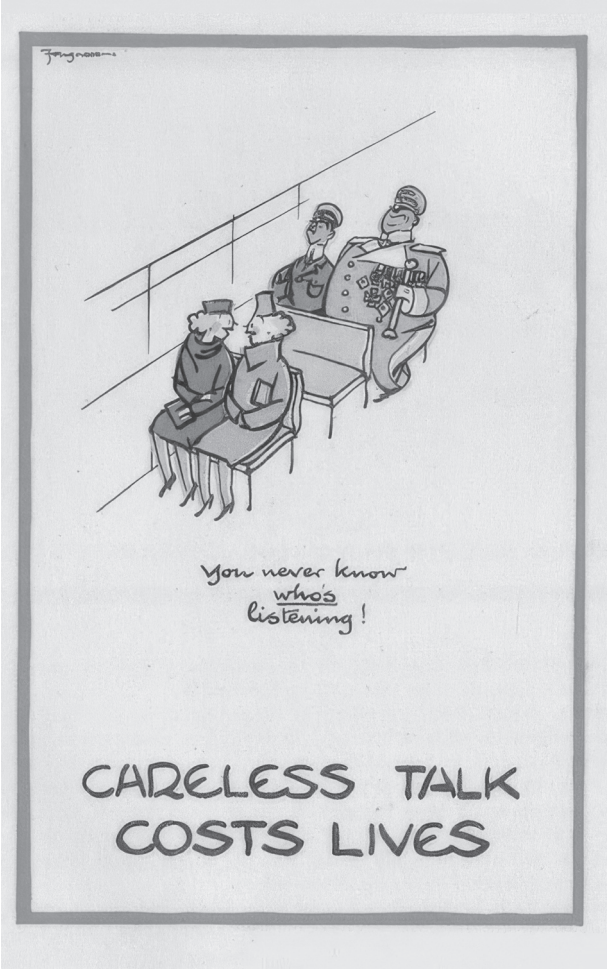
As can be seen in this advertisement, this inequality was on full display at the time. Male store clerks would be paid from 30/_, women from 17/6. In today's pounds, men were paid £125 a week, women £73.

Even in politics, inequalities lingered. The 1928 Equal Franchise Act had given women the vote on the same terms as men, but only from the age of 21. This meant that thousands of young women, conscripted at 18 into the Women's Land Army, ATS or munitions plants, could serve their country yet had no democratic voice. As one Land Girl told the Mass

Observation Study in 1941, 'I may serve my country but I may not yet choose my government.' Details of this research study are explained a little later.

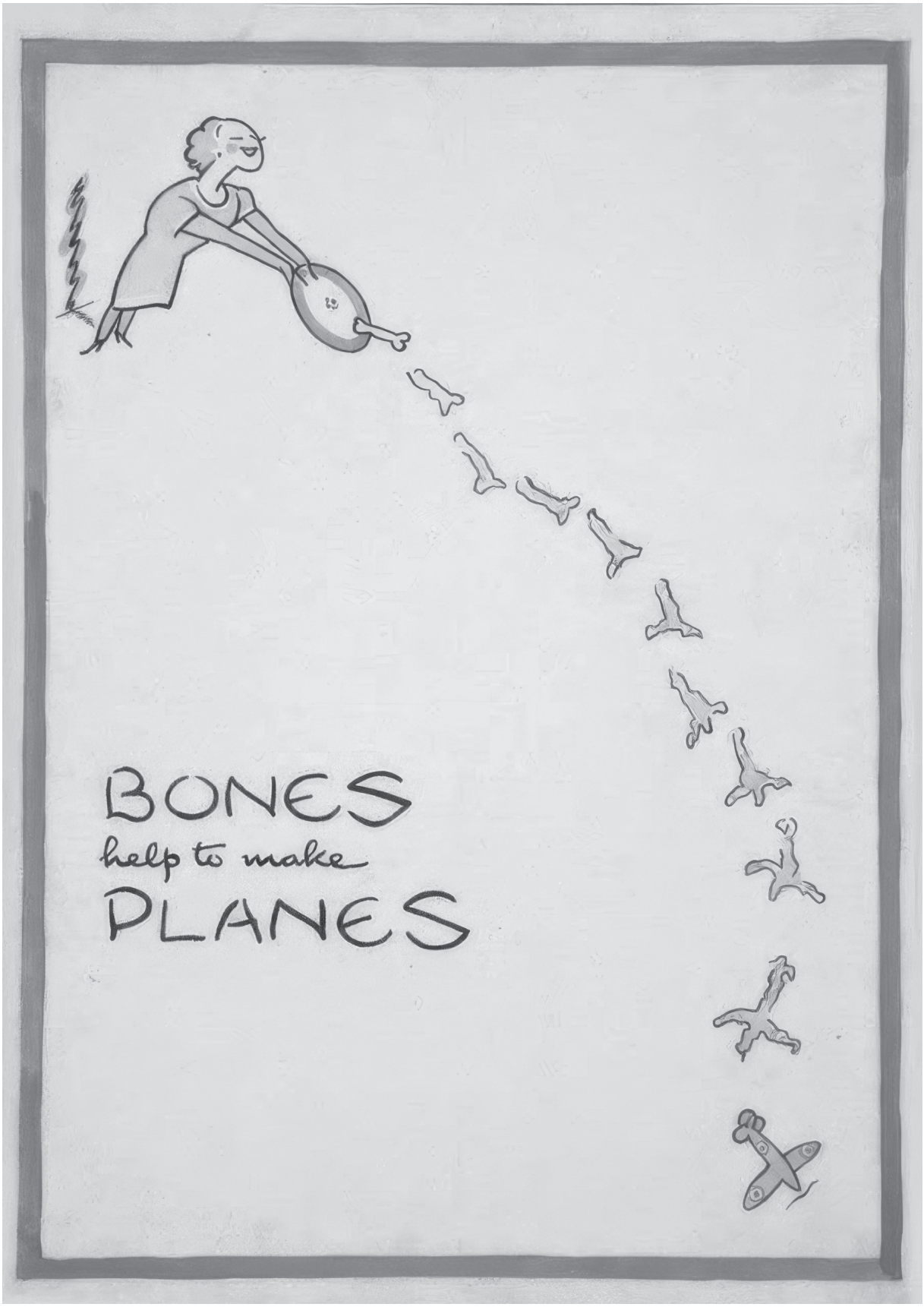
Wartime necessity again began to erode such assumptions, just as it had during WW1. Women drove buses, repaired engines, staffed anti-aircraft batteries and took over complex technical roles. Propaganda often portrayed this as a temporary patriotic duty, but their ability to do the jobs just as well as men was on full display. After 1945, the assumption was that this aspect of life would return to 'normal', but the wartime experience had sown seeds of discontentment, fuelling campaigns for equal pay, the abolition of the marriage bar and a rethinking of women's place in British society.

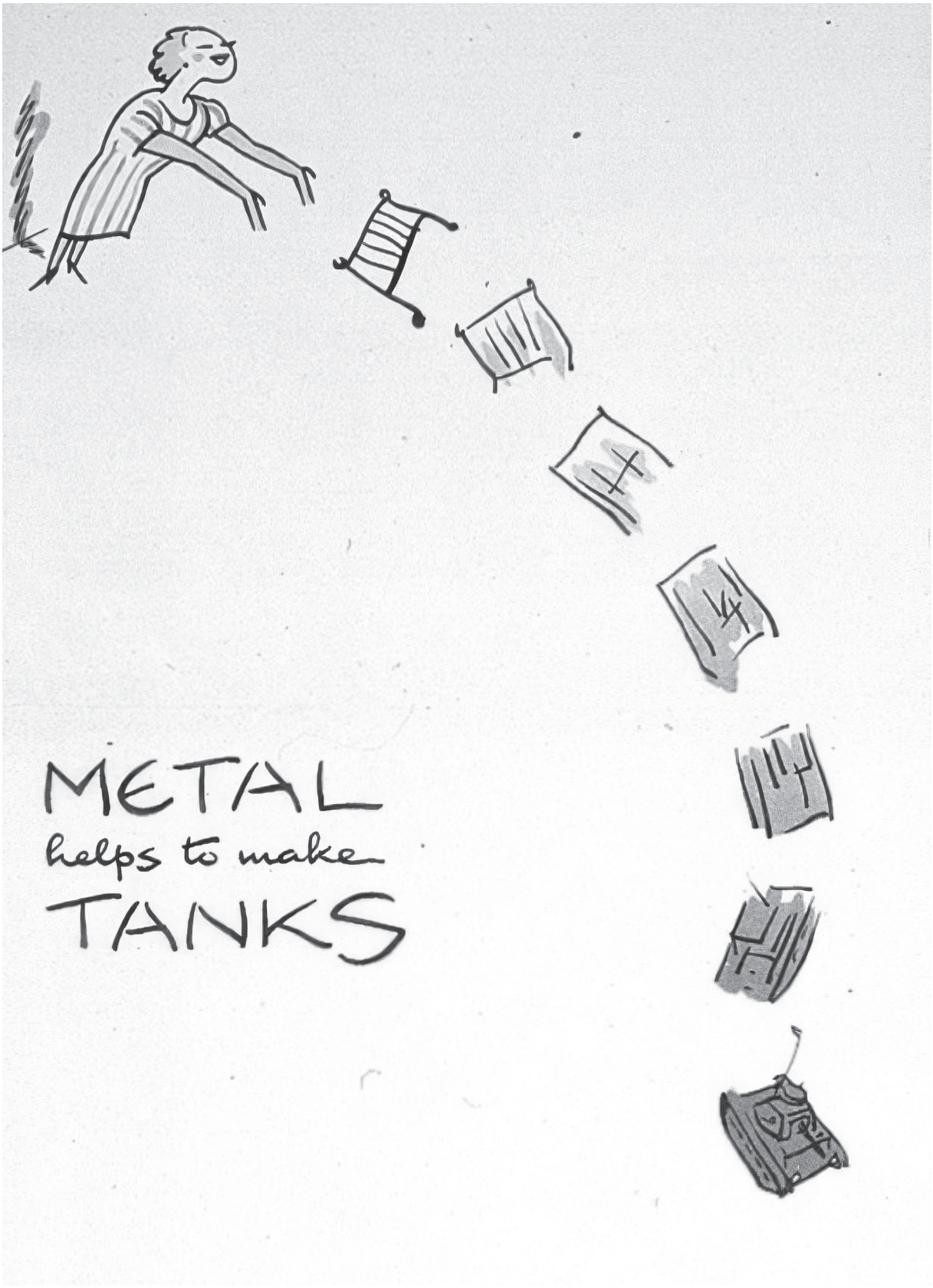
Even leisure and communication were tightly regulated. Radio sets were licensed and subject to inspection. Unlike in Germany, where listening to foreign broadcasts was prohibited, no such ban was applied in the UK, but telephone calls could be monitored. Posters and propaganda films reminded citizens that 'Careless Talk Costs Lives'– a slogan that was more than rhetoric, since loose speech could result in arrest under defence regulations.



By early 1941, controls had become intrusive and comprehensive, with more foods being rationed (e.g. meat, tea and jam). Coal and electricity were restricted under the Fuel and Lighting Orders (February 1941). People were urged to take fewer baths, cook more economically and share heating.

The Household Salvage Scheme (March 1941) introduced compulsory recycling, with families required to save paper, bones, rags and scrap metal for collection. Dustbins became regulated 'receptacles of war materials'. Posters like those shown below told households that their rubbish was raw material for victory. This has similarities to today's war being fought to save the environment, with the multiple containers we use for household waste.


BONES
help to make
PLANES


METAL
helps to make
TANKS

Housing, too, became regulated. Properties damaged by bombing could be requisitioned; families might find themselves billeted with strangers by order of local authorities. Rent control measures restricted what landlords could charge.

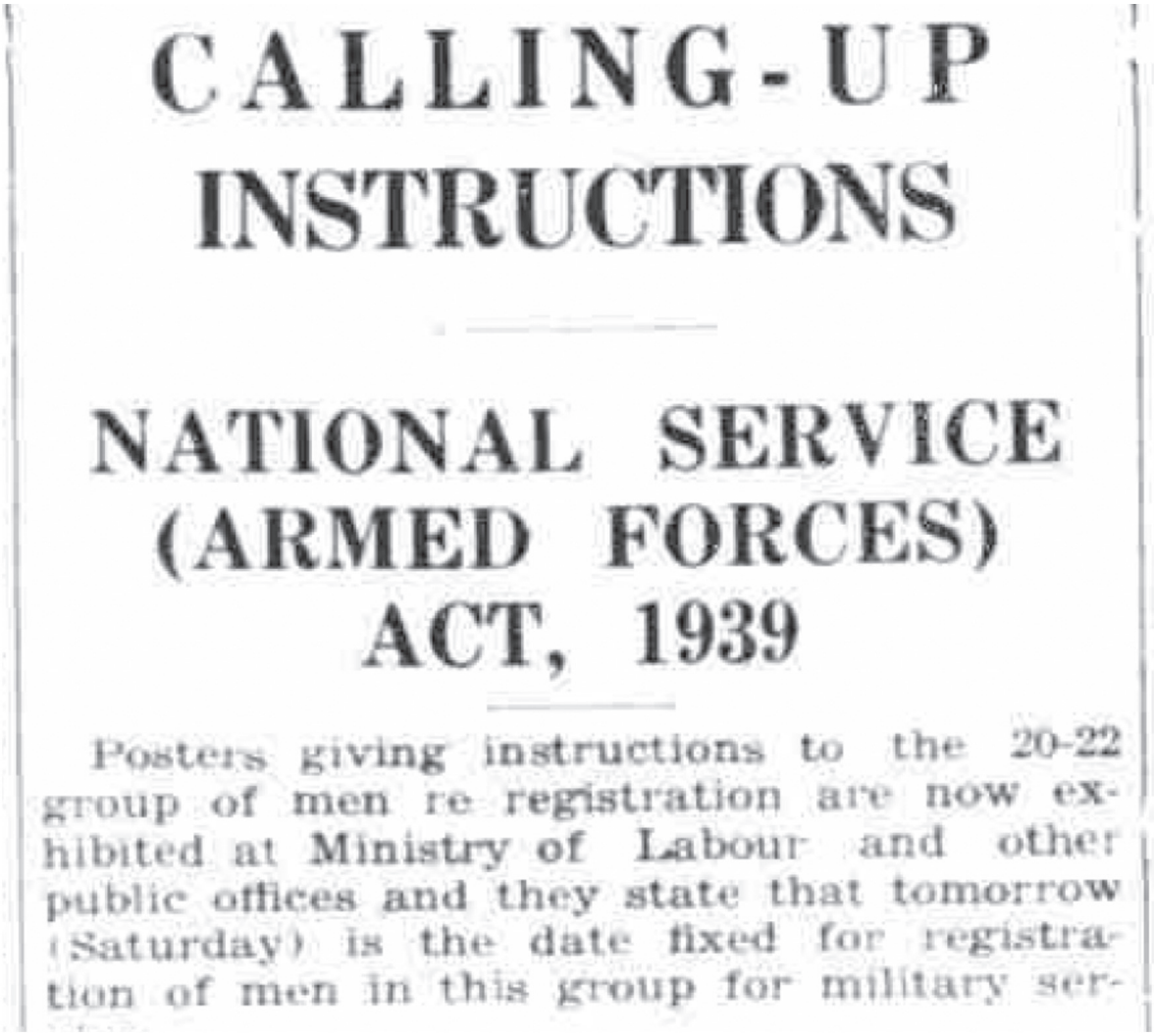
Journeys were limited by the absence of petrol, the need for permits and the dangers of travel during bombing. Evenings were spent in blackout, often in shelters. Weekends might involve fire watch duty, salvage collection or compulsory training. Adults' lives were increasingly regulated and their children's education disrupted by the consequences of mass evacuation.

During Chamberlain's radio broadcast, this statement had the most significant effect on the lives of people – the ultimate in state control:

> You may be taking part in the fighting services or as a volunteer in one of the branches of civil defence; if so, you will report for duty in accordance with the instructions you receive.

On 3 September 1939, the National Service (Armed Forces) Act was passed, granting the government authority to conscript men aged 18 to 41 into military service. That night, more than 10 million men suddenly faced the prospect of being called upon to fight for their country. One can only imagine the wave of consternation that swept through households as families absorbed the stark reality: fathers and husbands would soon be compelled to place themselves in harm's way.

To begin with, the conscription process progressed rapidly. By 20 October 1939, call-up instructions were issued to men aged 20–22.



CALLING-UP INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL SERVICE (ARMED FORCES) ACT, 1939

Posters giving instructions to the 20-22 group of men re registration are now exhibited at Ministry of Labour and other public offices and they state that tomorrow (Saturday) is the date fixed for registration of men in this group for military ser-

Just imagine opening the newspaper each morning, wondering if your time had come to leave work and join the war? How life changed for my dad when his age group was 'called up' is told in the essay 'From signwriter to sailor'.

Set against this backdrop of expanding state control was the stark reality that Britain and its allies were now at war with Germany. How did such a monumental event shape the daily lives of ordinary families? The final section explores this question – partly by tracing the course of the war, and partly by delving into the events of everyday life in Britain – covering the period up to May 1941, when my dad joined the Navy.

FROM PHONEY TO REAL WAR

Alvar Lidell's broadcast closed with a stirring rendition of the National Anthem, then after a few moments air-raid sirens sounded all over London. Years later, Melvyn Bragg, the British broadcaster and author, made a television programme titled *Outbreak* to mark this momentous day. His explanation for making it conveys the purpose with a clarity and eloquence far beyond what I could express:

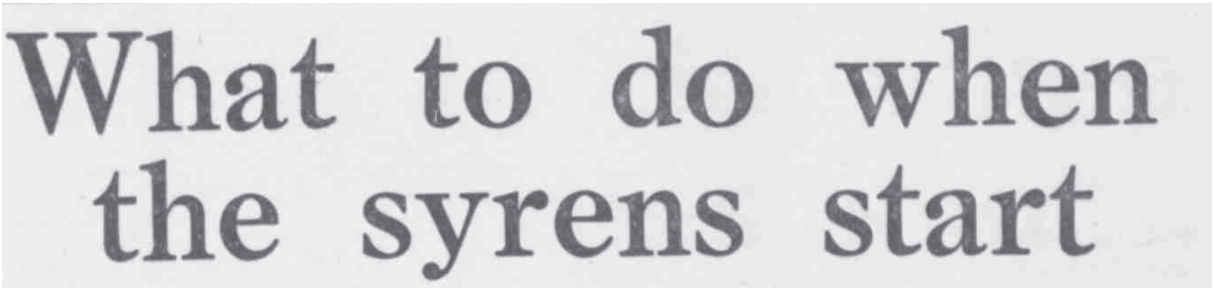
> I am as aware as anyone that history moves in decades and not days, and that events come from undercurrents, and huge tides crash on to the shore after a long journey. But this was a chance to mark and record that breaking on the shore, that one day when it was said all over the world, 'It's war.'

Unfortunately, viewing the programme is difficult; however, a five-minute excerpt is available on YouTube. Bragg also wrote about the programme, but there is no substitute for hearing the funny and fraught stories of Britain's ordinary people.

The programme shows people still visibly moved when they recall that day; others relate comical stories, like the man who, on hearing the siren, dashed to the nearest house to use their air-raid shelter, only to find it was overflowing with people and its owner shouting: 'My neighbours climbed over the fences into my shelter like a lot of bloody rabbits.' Some found it an exhilarating experience – others were haunted by the memories. Details of the programme and Bragg's account of the day are in the Sources.

Lidell was surprised that not everybody was glued to their radio for the announcement. From the radio studio, he could see people strolling about in the sunshine, completely oblivious of what was going on.

By the next morning, newspapers carried page after page of war reports and public advice, their tone appropriately sombre and serious. The *Daily Express* ran this headline, followed by a half-page of advice. I can't help wondering whether the archaic spelling of 'syrens' was simply a mistake, or whether the editor's classical education gave him licence to add a playful touch.


What to do when the syrens start

Children had been evacuated, gas masks had become a part of everybody's attire, barrage balloons hovered overhead and air-raid sirens were tested, all in preparation for the anticipated attack by German bombers. But, no bombs were dropped that day or for a long time to come.

The reality was that the Luftwaffe was not yet ready to launch large-scale raids on Britain and Hitler wanted to avoid provoking Britain into all-out retaliation against German cities. For months after September 1939, the 'Phoney War' prevailed. There were occasional alarms with the first bombs falling on 16 October 1939, when German aircraft attacked warships in the Firth of Forth. Yet these were isolated incidents, primarily targeting naval targets. The first British civilian death from bombing occurred on 16 March 1940 during a raid on the Orkney Islands.

Through the winter of 1939–40 and into the spring, Britons waited for the expected and

promised bombing, but nothing happened. Some spent their nights in shelters, others returned to the normality of their bedrooms. Civil defence routines, gas-mask drills, sandbagging and blackouts became part of everyday life but must have seemed increasingly detached from reality. Bombing of Britain remained sporadic and limited in scale, even as German forces overran Norway, Denmark and the Low Countries in the spring of 1940.

Only after the fall of France in June 1940, when the Luftwaffe could operate from its airfields, did the real air campaign begin. I know that hindsight is a great thing, but the way events unfolded seems perfectly logical. British military planners got things badly wrong during the first year of the war. They seemed to suffer from groupthink, expecting this war to be like WW1.

On 10 July 1940, the Battle of Britain opened with sustained attacks on shipping and ports. By late August, bombs were falling on London, then on 7 September 1940, the Blitz began in earnest with massed raids on the capital. The long-anticipated ordeal had finally arrived, nearly a year after war was declared.

Let's remember that in those first weeks of the war, 1.5 million people – mainly mothers and children, but also teachers and escorts – had relocated to reception areas in the countryside. Even more parents and their children, approximately 2 million, had made their own arrangements and moved to safer areas; my mum and sister might have been among them. It's not surprising that when the bombing failed to materialise, they drifted back to their homes.

Of course, the absence of bombing was a good thing, but it presented the government with a horrible decision. All schools in the evacuation areas were shut down. Many were no longer schools, having been requisitioned for other wartime activities.

What would become of children who returned home? If the government reopened the schools, it would be seen as encouraging the drift back to the towns. Leaving them closed would deprive the 'returnees' and those who were never evacuated of any schooling.

Attempts were made to dissuade parents from returning home. This poster clumsily appealed to women's consciences, urging them not to take the risk. Unsurprisingly, the campaign failed.

Only about a third of London's school children were still in the reception areas in January 1940. In Sheffield and Coventry, the figure was even less (10%). On 1 November 1939, just two months after the evacuation began, the decision was taken to reopen schools in all areas.

There is no doubt that the lack of German bombing created strong public scepticism about the government's competence and the necessity of evacuation, leading many to view the policy as premature and poorly executed. By not bombing the UK, and with no hint of gas being used, Hitler had scored his first psychological victory, making the population question the government's judgement and competence.

There was nothing 'phoney' about the war that was raging at sea, however. Within hours of the declaration of war, a German U-boat torpedoed the liner SS Athenia, killing 117

passengers and crew*. The sinking reminded everybody that civilians were targets and that Britain's survival depended on protecting the sea lanes if it were to mount successful battles in the air and on the ground.

Through the autumn, the Royal Navy suffered heavy losses, starting with the aircraft carrier HMS Courageous (17 September) and the battleship HMS Royal Oak (14 October). Both were sunk by submarine attacks, with the loss of over 1,300 men. These defeats happened to the Royal Navy when the public was braced for air attacks. The might of the German surface navy was first exhibited when HMS Rawalpindi, the armed merchant cruiser, chose to fight the battlecruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau and was destroyed (23 November).

Meanwhile, German mines were causing chaos around Britain's coasts. In November 1939 mines sank 27 ships (121,000 tons) and effectively choked the sea channel of the Thames approaches. In December, a further 33 ships (83,000 tons) were lost.

By the end of 1939, German submarines, surface ships and mines had sunk 158 British vessels, along with 148 merchantmen from neutral nations – primarily from Northern and Baltic Europe. The situation deteriorated even further in 1940, when 1,345 merchant ships belonging to Britain, her allies and neutral countries were lost.

I dread to think how many sailors died and how much cargo perished. Looking back on this period, I was struck by how little recognition the Merchant Navy† received.

The Royal Navy lost 'only' 75 warships, yet its sacrifices were widely acknowledged, reported in newspapers with a patriotic gloss. By contrast, the far greater destruction of the merchant fleet, with horrendous loss of life, was often ignored, their sinkings passing without mention.

In the final four months of 1939, Germany is estimated to have laid thousands of mines in British coastal waters, with some reports suggesting as many as 10,000. By 1940, not only had the numbers increased, but a new type – the magnetic proximity mine – had appeared, which detonated from a passing ship's magnetic field without the need for direct contact.

With all else that was going on, I doubt that my dad paid much attention to the press articles appearing in early March 1940, which explained magnetic mines and the new verb to 'de-Gauss' and praising Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander Ouvry, who discovered how they worked. In the final essay, 'Mine disposal – HMS Vernon', I explain how, by the end of the war, all of this was very much part of his life and my early childhood memories.

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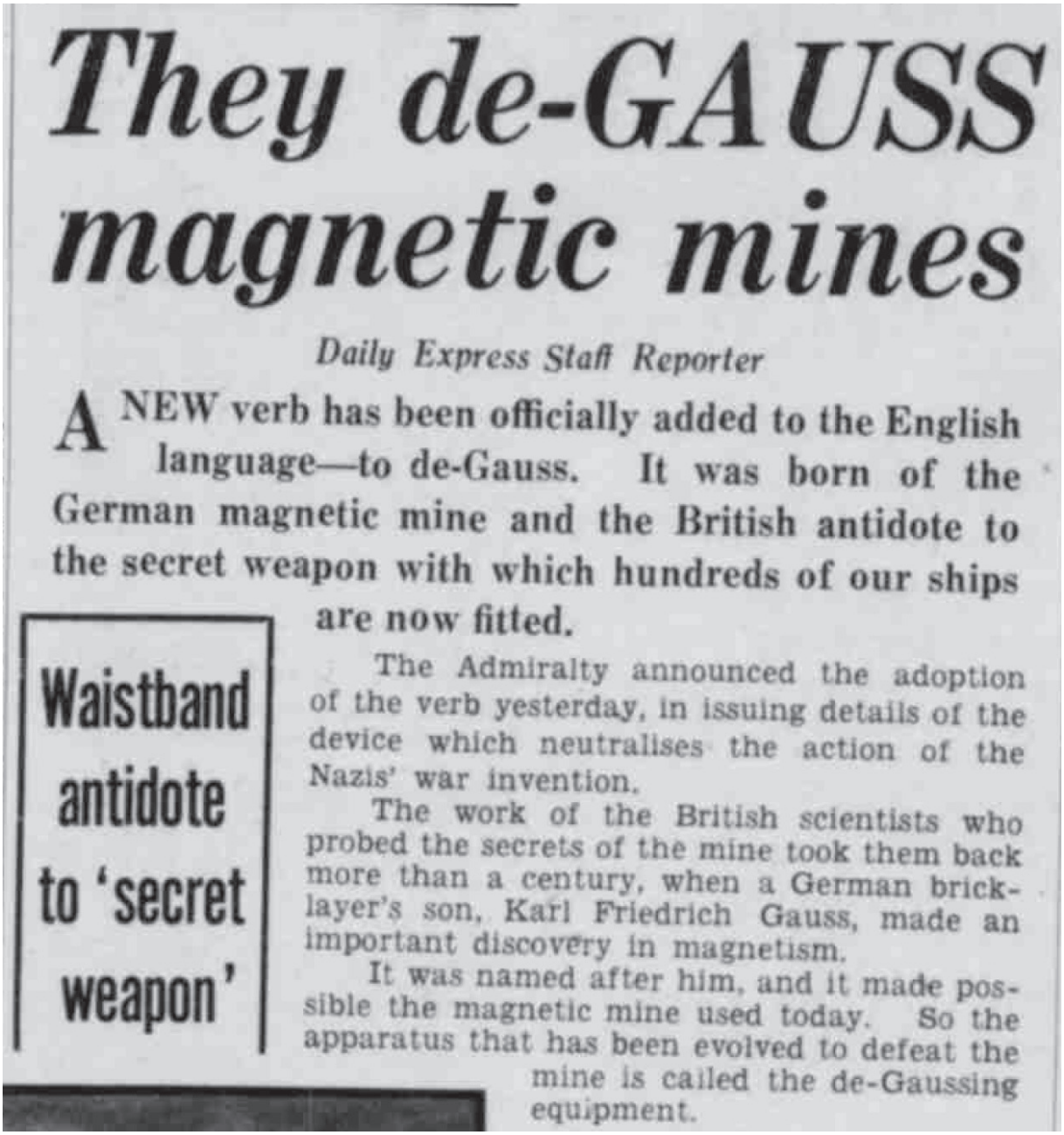
* Germany responded by denying responsibility for sinking the liner, fearing the incident would provoke the US or other neutral nations into joining the war. They launched a propaganda campaign blaming Britain for the tragedy, promoting a conspiracy theory that Churchill had ordered the sinking to sway American public opinion.

† The Merchant Navy is the civilian fleet of ships and sailors that transports goods, fuel and passengers by sea, especially in support of a nation's economy and wartime needs.



They de-GAUSS magnetic mines

Daily Express Staff Reporter

A NEW verb has been officially added to the English language—to de-Gauss. It was born of the German magnetic mine and the British antidote to the secret weapon with which hundreds of our ships are now fitted.

Waistband antidote to 'secret weapon'

The Admiralty announced the adoption of the verb yesterday, in issuing details of the device which neutralises the action of the Nazis' war invention.

The work of the British scientists who probed the secrets of the mine took them back more than a century, when a German bricklayer's son, Karl Friedrich Gauss, made an important discovery in magnetism.

It was named after him, and it made possible the magnetic mine used today. So the apparatus that has been evolved to defeat the mine is called the de-Gaussing equipment.

Following the invasion of Poland and Britain and France's declaration of war, the speed of the German advance and the Soviet Union's move to seize territory was awe-inspiring. What a strange time this must have been, with dreadful events in Europe and the expectation of worse to come, yet in Britain life was going on much as before.

During September 1939, the government had moved rapidly to regulate and control the public's access to the news through the newly established Ministry of Information (MOI). The workings of this organisation and its location, within the brutalist architecture of Senate House, London, inspired George Orwell's Ministry of Truth, made famous in his book *1984*.

This made me think about the Covid pandemic when the government felt impelled to control aspects of what was reported in the news and social media, a habit it still finds hard to abandon. The state's early implementation of wartime censorship was chaotic and indis-

criminate, yet more echoes of Covid. Weather reports, theatre listings and even benign domestic news items were blacked out or censored. Newspapers quickly grew frustrated, satirising how little they could publish and decrying the MOI's overreach*.

The press, both privately and through editorial comments, soon began to mock the Ministry, derisively dubbing it the 'Ministry of Misinformation'. This is one of the letters appearing in the *Liverpool Express* (27/Sep/1939):

> Ministry Of Misinformation
>
> At last we are finding out why the British public seems to be unable to get any real news about this so-called war [note the sarcasm]. The Ministry of Misinformation is composed of even more bureaucrats than are generally found even in wartime Government departments.
>
> It would be interesting to learn just what are the qualifications of the non-journalists who are doing journalistic work at the nation's expense, with accentuation on the expense.
>
> It seems that every hanger-on in Whitehall has found a haven of rest at the new Ministry. Well, let's hope it will be a haven of unrest.
>
> There is really only one thing to do. Turf out the imposters.

It seems the instinctive distrust and resentment of government bureaucracy has been pretty much a constant over time! Sadly, I think it has diminished in recent times, having witnessed the UK's media abandon independent reporting during the Covid pandemic and instead slavishly echo government pronouncements.

In October 1939, following the criticism, ridicule and administrative chaos the responsibility for issuing and censoring news was removed from the MOI. Powers to censor were transferred to an independent Press and Censorship Bureau. The MOI's staff was cut and its direct involvement in censorship functions effectively ceased. (In April 1940 these powers were restored, but that's another story.)

I would like to conclude this section by examining how public attitudes evolved as the war progressed. This is an ultra-short summary of an eventful time in British history. Robert Mackay's book, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War*, is a comprehensive account and available for free download.

An inspired decision at the end of 1937 saw the launch of the Mass Observation (MO) project, which gave 500 'citizen journalists' regular 'directives' to report back on every aspect of their daily lives. Their responses were collected and analysed, producing the most authoritative measure of how British people's attitudes and values changed during the war. A wonderful film *(Housewife, 49)* was made about one of the contributors (Nella Last) and provides a superb portrayal of WW2 from the perspective of a housewife living in Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire. Details of this film and access to the research are in the Sources.

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* The MOI is thought to have been ridiculed in the popular radio comedy show *ITMA*, with its character working for the 'Minister of Aggravation and Mysteries'. The German propaganda broadcaster ('Lord Haw Haw') referred to it as the 'Ministry of Misinformation'.

A limitation of the MO is that the research sample is not statistically representative of the population, meaning the diaries and panel responses are qualitative and potentially biased towards certain geographic regions and social classes. That said, it is the best study available that covers the duration of the war.

War declared to the end of 1939

At the outbreak of the war, Britain began sending its army to France. This force, known as the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), had grown to about 150,000 troops by late September. During early October, all remaining Polish resistance had ended, and 60,000 Polish soldiers had been taken prisoner. At the end of November, the Soviet Union invaded Finland. Throughout this period, an intense war at sea was being fought, as already discussed.

There was a calm acceptance after the war had begun, combined with relief that preparations were in place. When the air raids didn't occur, the mood changed to questioning whether the government had exaggerated the risks.

People became restless at restrictions, and compliance with the rules, like carrying gas masks, gradually faded. By November, frustration with censorship and the lack of news had become intense. From the end of September onward, increasing numbers of evacuees returned to their homes. Christmas was a subdued time. The government approval ranking remained steady, but trust was beginning to wane.

January–April 1940

Little happened during the first three months of 1940 and then, in early April, Britain began mining Norwegian waters to disrupt Germany's iron ore shipments. In response, Hitler began the invasion of Denmark and Norway. Within days, British, French and Polish troops landed in Norway to contest the German advance. This was a strategic failure for the Allies, exposing their weakness in joint operations and lack of air power.

The size of the BEF was further increased, so by the end of this period there were 394,000 British troops in France.

From January onwards, the MO noted that the war had 'settled into absolute dullness'. With no clear progress, many people described it as increasingly 'pointless'. Signs of indifference were obvious: a small minority of Londoners carried gas masks, and the blackout was observed less strictly. In February, pessimism and boredom deepened.

The rumours of fighting in Scandinavia stirred some interest, but morale was still judged to be fragile. Citizens were restless, waiting for something, 'however unpleasant', to break the monotony, and officials worried that this made people vulnerable to propaganda. The antagonism towards the press and government information heightened.

Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway abruptly ended the sense of drift. Shock and anxiety replaced apathy. Criticism of Britain's weak performance was widespread; however, people were now more serious and engaged, recognising that the war had become real and unavoidable.

In March, a programme of building street shelters began; each one was intended to accommodate 50 people. Their construction was hurried, raising doubts about whether they would provide adequate protection. Although they were later improved, they remained unpopular throughout the war. Not surprisingly, Londoners preferred to use the underground tube tunnels and platforms because they felt safest deep below the surface. Eventually,

stations were equipped with bunks for 22,000 people, supplied with first aid facilities and fitted with chemical toilets and canteens.

May–August 1940

In the second week of May, the 'Phoney War' ended when Germany launched its Blitzkrieg into western Europe, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. These countries were quickly overrun, with France surrendering on 22 June. Two weeks before, Italy had joined the war on the side of Germany.

From 26 May to early June 1940, the BEF and French troops were evacuated from the Dunkirk beaches. Nearly 200,000 British and 140,000 Allied troops were brought back to the UK by the armada of small ships.

Then, in July, the Battle of Britain began when Germany launched a sustained air campaign to capture air superiority over Britain.

The MO recorded widespread shock and anxiety as the invasion of the Low Countries and France ended any illusion that the war might remain distant. During this period, Chamberlain resigned and Churchill became Prime Minister (10 May). This marked a noticeable lift in morale, with people responding positively to his more direct, uncompromising style. Fear of invasion grew, but there was also a stronger sense that 'we are all in it now'.

The evacuation from Dunkirk resulted in a national sentiment of both relief and pride. The rescue was celebrated as a national achievement, yet it was shadowed by the scale of defeat in France. Ordinary people were sobered by the possibility that Britain might face the enemy alone, but their determination stiffened rather than weakened.

In July, the focus shifted to the expected invasion, with morale remaining tense but firm: civil defence measures were taken more seriously, and there was admiration for the RAF's defence. Churchill's speeches echoed in people's conversations, reinforcing a mood of resilience.

With the Battle of Britain under way, the MO reported a blend of anxiety and pride. Air raids made the war more immediate, but the sight and sound of British fighters overhead inspired confidence. People accepted that danger was real, yet morale was steadied by the sense that the nation was fighting back effectively.

September–December 1940

In late September 1940, the war widened when Germany, Italy and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact, formally committing themselves to mutual cooperation, creating the Axis Powers and sending a clear signal of their global ambitions.

While this agreement strengthened the Axis, events in Europe were beginning to unravel. The Battle of Britain, fought from the summer to October 1940, saw the Luftwaffe attempt to cripple Britain's defences. Despite the heavy bombing, the RAF held firm, denying Germany air superiority and handing Hitler his first significant defeat of the war.

Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean, Mussolini's armies were faltering. In December 1940, British forces launched a surprise offensive in North Africa. What began as a limited operation quickly turned into a rout. Italian positions collapsed under the assault, and within weeks the British had captured some 35,000 prisoners, proving that the Axis war machine was far from invincible.

In September 1940, the Blitz transformed the war into a daily ordeal. The MO study

recorded a mixture of shock and resilience as London and other cities came under sustained bombing. This was the time of the 'Blitz spirit', characterised by humour and stoicism, though frustration was expressed over the lack of shelters offering deep, safe protection. Blackout and civil defence rules were now taken seriously.

By October, the raids had become routine. The study noted that communities often pulled together in the aftermath of attacks, reinforcing solidarity, but fatigue and irritation also surfaced. Long nights in shelters and disrupted sleep wore people down. There was rising criticism of government organisations and relief systems.

In November, the destruction wrought in Coventry and heavy raids on London brought deep shock, followed by grief and anger, but also a hardening of resolve. People felt the raids were indiscriminate, affecting rich and poor alike, which created a stronger sense of shared sacrifice. Despite weariness, the bombing did not produce a collapse in morale.

Christmas traditions were maintained, even under bombardment, with households going to great lengths to celebrate in some form, treating it as an act of defiance. Morale was mixed: there was pride in endurance and humour in adversity, but also clear signs of exhaustion and strain as people faced the prospect of another year of war.

January–May 1941

From the beginning of 1941 to the end of May, the war entered a far more intense and global phase, with Germany, Britain and Italy fighting across multiple fronts.

The Battle of the Atlantic escalated as German U-boats launched continual attacks on shipping, creating severe shortages of food and raw materials. German surface raiders – including battleships and pocket battleships – also targeted convoys. In May 1941, the battleship Bismarck broke into the Atlantic, sinking HMS Hood with an awful loss of life. Shortly afterwards, however, it was hunted down and sunk, providing Britain with a significant morale boost.

In North Africa and the Mediterranean, German and Italian forces were capturing territory. By April, the British were driven back, leaving the garrison at Tobruk isolated – a place that was to become etched in my dad's memory.

Meanwhile, Malta came under relentless siege from Axis air forces based in Sicily. Despite suffering heavy merchant shipping losses, the Royal Navy scored a notable success against the Italian fleet, sinking three cruisers and two destroyers.

Fighting was taking place in the Balkans and Greece. In April, Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece in quick succession, overrunning both countries within weeks.

The Blitz continued with bombers targeting British cities, ports and industry. The heaviest raids fell on London, Coventry, Plymouth and Belfast. The peak of the onslaught came in spring; it then subsided as the German air force focused its firepower on the Russian campaign, which was building towards a full invasion. Bombing raids by the RAF increased in number, although their accuracy at this stage was poor.

British and Commonwealth forces pushed back Italian troops in Eritrea, Somaliland and Ethiopia and by the end of the period Addis Ababa had been liberated. A pro-Axis coup in Iraq led to British intervention to secure oil supplies and air bases.

The US formally began supplying Britain (and later the USSR) with war materials, marking a significant step towards US involvement in the war.

At the start of the year, morale in Britain remained relatively firm despite the winter Blitz. People were becoming resigned to the nightly raids, shelter routines and blackouts. The 'carry on' spirit was still visible, supported by neighbourhood solidarity, pubs, churches and workplace communities. Although there was irritation about food shortages or lack of sleep, they were tolerated as part of the wartime burden.

By March, however, the strain of air raids was mounting, with evidence that families were leaving towns for the countryside or safer areas, not as a sign of defeatism but as a practical attempt to get some rest. Personal diaries recorded fatigue, irritability and growing frustration with poor accommodation and a lack of amenities. People's resolve generally remained strong, though, accepting that the war would be long and that sacrifice was necessary.

April brought signs of divergence. In some places that had suffered repeated raids, observers reported apathy, depression and a longing for distraction. Elsewhere, particularly in towns less frequently bombed, people convinced themselves the danger had passed. By May in Southampton, for example, many believed the worst was over, while in Portsmouth the expectation of renewed attacks kept anxiety high.

Overall, the first five months of 1941 indicated a shift in morale from resilient endurance to a more fatigued and critical stance. People increasingly expected the government to provide better relief, fairer rationing and visible signs of progress.

Twenty-one months had passed since the war was declared, a time that must have seemed an eternity.

I imagine my dad knew the war with Germany was inescapable. Like many, he probably felt a strange blend of relief that something decisive had finally happened, mixed with dread about what it would mean. I've little doubt he would have been among those grumbling about the Ministry of Information and its heavy-handed control of news.

My family was fortunate to have an escape route from London to the Sussex countryside, where my mother's extended family lived. Even so, my dad had to keep working in London, and I suspect my mum and sister remained there as long as they could.

From the start, there was always the chance of him being called up. As Germany's victories mounted, that chance hardened into inevitability. It came on Thursday, 29 May 1941: a two-hour train journey to Fareham and registration at HMS Collingwood, where Richard Stroud became Seaman Stroud.

By then, the war was truly global. He might have been sent to the Atlantic or Arctic convoys supplying Russia, but, as we'll see in 'From signwriter to sailor', his path led instead to the Mediterranean.

APPENDIX

The places children were evacuated from – listed in the leaflet 'Evacuation why and how'.

The 'evacuable' areas under the Government scheme are :—

(a) London, as well as the County Boroughs of West Ham and East Ham; the Boroughs of Walthamstow, Leyton, Ilford and Barking in Essex; the Boroughs of Tottenham, Hornsey, Willesden, Acton, and Edmonton in Middlesex;
(b) the Medway towns of Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester;
(c) Portsmouth, Gosport and Southampton;
(d) Birmingham and Smethwick;
(e) Liverpool, Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey;
(f) Manchester and Salford;
(g) Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford and Hull;
(h) Newcastle and Gateshead
(i) Edinburgh, Rosyth, Glasgow, Clydebank and Dundee.

In some of these places, only certain areas will be evacuated. Evacuation may be effected from a few other places in addition to the above, of which notice will be given.

SOURCES

Sound recordings

BBC news broadcast explaining that the British ambassador in Berlin had issued an ultimatum to the German government. This was before Chamberlain's broadcast
https://tinyurl.com/y6h7fmv5

BBC recording of Chamberlain's speech declaring war on Germany followed by Alvar Lidell reading the new wartime rules. Broadcast on the Home Service on 3 September 1939
https://tinyurl.com/3xpjuyed

King George VI addresses the nation. Broadcast 3 September 1939
https://tinyurl.com/4639utnd

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https://tinyurl.com/49ycckd2

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https://tinyurl.com/54m9ybrw

The National Archives – Government evacuation scheme
https://tinyurl.com/2fmbafc2

Warfare History Network – The First Day of World War II
https://tinyurl.com/ny2z4t4a

Melvyn Bragg's account of his motivation for making the TV programme *Outbreak*
https://tinyurl.com/mrywbmyb

An excerpt from *Outbreak*, sometimes referred to as *Outbreak 1939,* on YouTube
https://tinyurl.com/4skjymsj

Office of War Information, Washington – Allied Merchant Ship Losses 1939 to 1943
https://tinyurl.com/2hy5r7xe

UK Government blog – Chaos and Censorship in the Second World War
https://tinyurl.com/yd2fjtfc

The BBC's account of the Mass Observation, an 80-year experiment to record the daily lives of British people
https://tinyurl.com/yc87xj4u

The Mass Observation Archive. Available for research as part of the University of Sussex's Special Collections at The Keep
https://tinyurl.com/54mr46zr

Housewife, 49. A 2006 television film based on the wartime diaries of Nella Last. Written by and starring English actress and comedian Victoria Wood
https://tinyurl.com/58zck4zm

Books

Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War, Robert Mackay
https://tinyurl.com/dvspdfyd