

S.J.I. HOLLIDAY

# Ben and the Bomber

**PB Publishing**

London

First published in the UK in 2010 by PB Publishing Ltd, PO Box 9974, London, SW16 1LP.

Copyright © S.J.I. Holliday

The moral right of S.J.I. Holliday to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

All the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, is purely coincidental.

ISBN (Export Trade Paperback) 090 9 9974 2309 7

Printed in Great Britain by Lulu.com

To Doc,  
These things take time...



**Upminster, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1940**

‘Ben! Your breakfast’s ready... hurry up before it gets cold.’

No response.

‘Ben!’

‘I’m coming. Stop yelling, ma!’ I pull my clothes out from under my pillow and start putting them on as fast as I can, trying to keep myself under the thin blanket to avoid being blinded by the daylight. Shorts (I think I’m too old to be wearing them, but I’m not allowed ‘big boy’ trousers yet. I’m only eight), long woolly socks (itchy), grey cotton shirt (washed so many times it’s starting to fall apart) and a grey woolly jumper (even itchier than the socks). I run into the hall, rubbing at my eyes, trying to get the sleep out of them. I hate

getting up early in the morning, especially on a Saturday. We have to go to school at the weekends sometimes, so they can keep an eye on us all and teach us new things like ‘how to put on a gas mask’ and ‘air raid drill’ (which is quite good fun, but the girls always cry because the insides of the masks stink.) At least I’m not one of the poor buggers who’ve been evacuated to East Anglia. I run onto the landing and hesitate for a second outside my mum’s room. She’s got a little sink in there, and I contemplate washing my face, but then decide against it and jump down the stairs, two at a time.

‘Come on, Ben,’ my mum says, ‘I haven’t got time to walk you to school today, I’ve got an extra shift in the shop and I need to be there by half eight. Your lunch is on the side.’ I sit down and my mum ruffles my hair. ‘Don’t forget to brush your teeth,’ she says, and then disappears out of the front door with a bang, leaving behind a small cloud of cheap perfume and a hint of coal tar soap.

My breakfast is the weekend special. One small egg, sitting in a blue and white striped eggcup (chipped on one side), one slice of thick buttered bread (cut into soldiers – of course), one steaming mug of tea. We only get four eggs a week: two for mum and two for me, but she lets me have all four (two for breakfast, two for tea) because I'm a 'growing boy'. I crack open the egg's head with my spoon and stab it with a bayonet of bread, dunking it until all the yolk oozes out down the sides of the shell and onto the plate, then I smear the rest of the liquid with another piece of bread, sit back and sigh with contentment. This is my favourite part of the day. The egg's a Gerry, and I'm the Brit, and I smash the enemy's head in and try not to think about my dad, who's been away for six months now and might not be coming back.

After the egg's done (and its shell-body thrown into the bin), I finish my tea and collect my lunch: jam sandwich (one and a half slices), four rich tea biscuits, tiny chunk of cheese and a bruised apple. I sling my

satchel over my shoulder and hop, skip and jump out of the house, slamming the door behind me. I haven't cleaned my teeth.

Straight away, I notice two things: There's a pile of horse droppings at the end of the path, and a girl with blonde pigtails is standing next to the front gate, swinging her schoolbag. I sigh again, not so contentedly. I'm supposed to scoop up the horseshit and put it in the bucket next to the back door. God knows what my mum does with the stuff, but she yells at me if I forget to collect it. Actually, I think she might burn it – the place always reeks when the fire gets lit.

I'll do it later.

'Morning, Ben,' the girl says. 'Shall I walk you to school?'

'If you like,' I tell her, and keep walking. She skips along to catch up with me. Flamin' Polly Henderson. Why are girls such a pain?

We walk down the lane and onto the main road, past my mum's shop (it's not actually her shop, but it's

the one she works at, and tries to impress the shopkeeper, Mr. Patterson, with her perfume and lipstick; hoping she'll get to work more hours and if that keeps him sweet, he might give her some extras to top up our rations; because I'm 'eating her out of house and home'). As we walk past number thirty three, I rap hard on the door twice, and keep walking. Thirty seconds later, Mick Stevens is puffing along next to me. He's a bit fat, and that really annoys me because I'm always bloody starving and I don't know where he gets all the extra food.

'Oi,' he says, whispering not very quietly, 'Here, have this...' he pushes something cold and hard and square into my hand.

'Chocolate?' I say, stunned. 'Where the hell did you—'

'Shhh,' Mick says. 'Keep it down, or everyone'll want some.'

Others have gathered and are walking alongside Polly Henderson, who's scowling at me because I've

ignored her again. The last time I was given some chocolate, I wanted to keep it forever. I broke it into little pieces and wrapped each one in a section of my hanky, and I ate one small morsel every day for a week. This time, I stuff the whole lot into my mouth at once before anyone else sees it. Two full squares of Bourneville. Mick is staring at me, open-mouthed.

I stare back. 'You better shut that,' I say, 'You'll catch a fly.'

There's a football match underway in the playground when we arrive. Three on one side, four on the other. Piles of jumpers and bags act as the goalposts. 'Oi, Ben,' someone shouts, 'come an' join our side, we're one short.' It's Cliff Wilson. He's rubbish at football but he always makes the effort. I finish chewing the chocolate and throw my satchel at Mick, who catches it in one hand. 'Well held, Mick,' Cliff Wilson shouts, 'Fancy coming on for Beefy?' Beefy Brownlee is always in goal, mainly because he's massive (even bigger than Mick), not because he's got

any skills. He can't catch for toffee and he grunts in place of speech. Mick waves his arm in a 'no thanks' gesture, and heads over to sit on the step. He's a right lazy sod. After all that, the bell rings before I can even get a kick.

We've got Miss Miller. She's one of the young 'uns that always gets roped into the Saturday shift. She's pretty rubbish at teaching, but all the girls like her because she's got shiny black hair that she styles into lots of little twirls with a curling iron, and she's got lovely cheeks like Katherine Hepburn. Come to think of it, that's why the boys like her too.

Miss Miller claps her hands. 'Attention children!' she says. 'We're having the wireless on today...'

Polly Henderson's hand shoots up and she speaks before she's even told to. 'Why Miss?' she says.

Miss Miller looks flustered. 'Because...' she pauses. 'Because, the headmaster has told me that there has been a lot of activity in the air during the night, and if there are any announcements we need to be prepared.

He's says we'll find out quicker than if we wait for the air raid siren...'

Polly's hand is up again, and she's half out of her seat. 'Miss, Miss! Are we going to be bombed? My mother says if there's to be an attack then I've to go straight home, because my uncle who's not in the war because of his illness, he's...' she stops to take a breath, the words gushing out of her like a river about to burst its banks. She continues: 'He's built us our own air raid shelter in the cellar, and I've to go there.' She takes a deep breath and sits back down in her seat. Her face is purple, like a beetroot, and her breath is coming out in little puffs.

Miss Miller's face is a picture. She can never deal with Polly; the girl doesn't give her a chance to think her next thought. 'Okay, Polly,' she says. People start shifting in their seats, start to chatter. Miss Miller claps her hands again. 'Calm down everyone. Once we know any more, we'll decide what to do. In the meantime, we'll have the wireless on in the background and we'll

get on with the reading assignment you were set by Miss Jones on Tuesday.' At that, she sits down behind her desk, and starts to twiddle with the dials on the little wireless she's brought in. I look over at Mick, and mouth: 'Have you read it?' and he mouths back: 'No.' Then he grins at me, and his teeth are all coated with chocolate.

The reading assignment drags on for an hour. Someone's asked to read out the first chapter, and Polly's arm almost comes out of its socket. Miss Miller ignores her and asks Cliff to read it instead, and he takes this as some sort of affirmation that he's popular. I think she just picked him at random. Polly makes a huffing noise and slumps down in her chair. Cliff starts to read, and he stumbles over the first three sentences, and Mick Stevens gets bored and throws a paper plane at him. That starts everyone off; chairs are dragged across the floor and everyone's chattering and laughing, and Miss Miller is clapping her hands like a deranged monkey, but nobody's paying her any attention.

We've all forgotten about the wireless.

'Be QUIET, I said!' Miss Miller is banging a stick off her desk, and she stuns everyone into silence. We all stare at her, and she's trembling.

'Miss?' someone says. It might have been Cliff, but everyone's ignoring him now too, straining to hear the wireless. With a shaking hand, Miss Miller turns up the volume and we all sit transfixed, listening to the broadcast:

'Breaking news... there have been reports of enemy aircraft above Essex...' The signal breaks up a bit, and Miss Miller slaps the tuning dial until it comes back. 'Four enemy planes have been sighted, and reports are coming in that there have been multiple bombings across North Kent... Three planes have been destroyed by allied aircraft... One plane, thought to be an Me110 has been sighted at the edge of London. Two Spitfires have been deployed...' The signal crackles again and some of the girls start to cry.

Miss Miller stands up; she has to hold onto the desk to stop herself from collapsing. This is not good.

‘Right,’ Miss Miller says, trying to take control. ‘Let’s not wait for the siren. Get your things, and let’s go to the shelter.’ Nobody moves. ‘Now!’ Miss Miller barks. This is it then: they’re ready to attack London. Up until now it’s been mostly the poor sods in Kent who’ve had to suffer; now they’re coming for us. I feel dread and excitement at the same time. I hope my mum’s got the wireless on in the shop: I hope she’s already at the shelter. Everyone’s frantically stuffing things into their satchels and pockets, grabbing everything out of their desks. I don’t know why anyone would want to save their school books; we all hate the flamin’ things anyway.

Then we run out of time.

The mechanical drone of the siren begins: it starts with a low moan followed by a slowly ascending whine; then again, faster and finally, a constant screech. Everyone starts screaming. Everything we learned in

the drills has flown out of the window; children are running around the room with their hands over their ears. Miss Miller is sitting on her desk looking bewildered.

Then there's another noise.

It's too late to get to the shelter. The plane is above us now, the roar of its engine is deafening; drowning out the screams. I'm standing beside Mick, and we look at each other and shrug. 'Under the desks!' Mick shouts. Not many people hear him. Some have run out of the room, trying to get to the shelter in the park. It's a five minute fast walk from the school: they've no chance. We hear the first explosion, sounds like it's right outside the front door, the noise is so loud. There's only a few of us left in the classroom now, including Miss Miller, who's still sitting on her desk, silent tears pouring down her face. I really hope my mum made it to the shelter. Mick and I crawl under our desks and roll ourselves into little balls. I feel a warm, pudgy hand reach out for mine and I take it and grip it

tight. The noise is all around us now. It might be dark, but I don't know, because I've got my eyes shut. Mick shuffles himself closer to me and shouts into my ear.

'I stole it, you know. From Old Patterson's.'

'What?' I shout at him, trying to make myself heard over the din.

He shouts back: 'The chocolate.'

I smile, and hug his body closer to mine. I think he's got his eyes shut too. There's another bang, and he jumps and I squeeze him tighter. My face is resting against his and I can feel the tears on his cheek. They're mixing with mine. I hear someone scream; maybe Polly Henderson. I wish I could hold her hand too.

Smoke now. Can't see it, but I can taste the metallic, charcoal tang and I start to cough. A thought pops into my head: I didn't collect the horseshit for my mum... Hope she doesn't need it. I hope Mr. Patterson looks after her.

Through my closed eyelids I see a bright flash.  
Too bright. Then a bang, much louder this time. It's  
right above us now.

Another bang.

Too loud.

Then...

## Epilogue

Broadcast from BBC Radio London, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1940,  
1700

‘At 1500 today, four raids crossed the Kentish Coast and one of these penetrated to the eastern outskirts of London, attacking targets in Upminster, Dagenham and Essex areas. These raids were heavily engaged and it is reported fighters destroyed about 20 hostile aircraft. One of these, thought to be a Me110, was shot down by a Spitfire over Canvey Island, after off-loading three bombs over a primary school in Upminster. The Spitfire pilot, Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey Mitchell, told colleagues, “We got the bastard. This is war.” Emergency services are still tending to the areas surrounding the Upminster school. It is not known if there are any survivors.’

## References & Further Information

### (1) Battle of Britain Campaign Diary

<http://www.raf.mod.uk/bob1940/august24.html>

#### Date: 24th August 1940

- Weather: Fine and clear in the south, drizzle in the north.
- Day: Airfield attacks in south-east; Manston evacuated. Heavy raid on Portsmouth.
- Night: Heavier attacks over wide area. Minelaying.

#### Enemy action by day

The main enemy activity consisted of six large raids which crossed the Kentish coast and in two cases flew up the Estuary towards London. A large number of enemy aircraft attacked targets in the Portsmouth area.

Preliminary reports state that our aircraft destroyed 40 enemy aircraft at the cost of 20 to ourselves but only six of our pilots were lost.

#### North East

Reconnaissance aircraft were reported off the East Coasts of Scotland and the Orkneys during the afternoon.

In the early morning there were two small raids off East Anglia and a target at Gorleston was attacked.

## **South East**

Between 0600 and 0800 hours, a series of raids totalling 80+ aircraft crossed the coast in the Dover-Dungeness areas and flew towards North Foreland and Gravesend. Fighters intercepted and dispersed these raids, destroying four enemy aircraft.

At 1000 hours, Dover was shelled and a little later about 100 enemy aircraft were plotted to Dover and Manston in which places were heavily attacked. Fighters again drove off the enemy inflicting a reported loss of three enemy aircraft.

At 1230 hours, about 50 enemy aircraft again approached Dover and Manston and were engaged by fighters. Enemy losses were estimated as seven aircraft.

Between 1300 hours and 1400 hours, about 30 enemy aircraft were engaged over the North Foreland and Deal areas.

At 1500 hours, four raids crossed the Kentish Coast and one of these penetrated to the eastern outskirts of London, attacking targets in Upminster, Dagenham and Essex areas. These raids were heavily engaged and it is reported fighters destroyed about 20 hostile aircraft.

At 1845 hours, 110+ hostile aircraft crossed the coast near Dover and Dungeness and penetrated to Maidstone but turned away on despatch of our fighters apparently without attacking any objectives.

## **South and West**

Activity up to 1600 hours was limited to reconnaissance in the Channel and in the Middle Wallop district. At 1600 hours, 50+ enemy aircraft approached Selsey Bill in a wide front and attacked objectives at Portsmouth.

## **By night**

Enemy activity was on a widespread and continuous scale over Southern and Western England, South Wales, the Midlands, East Anglia and Yorkshire.

London Central was under 'Red' warning for nearly two hours, and the City of London, Millwall, Tottenham, Islington, Enfield, Hampton, Kingston and Watford were attacked.

Birmingham was visited continuously for over four hours and there were repeated raids in the Devon, Bristol, Gloucester and South Wales areas.

Raids were also reported in the Liverpool, Sheffield, Bradford, Hull and Middlesbrough districts, and in Kent, Hampshire, Reading, Oxford and East Anglian districts.

Minelaying is suspected off the Lancashire coast, in the Channel off Lyme Bay and Weymouth, and extensively off the Thames Estuary, East Anglia, the North Foreland and Flamborough Head.

Enemy aircraft also attacked Newcastle and the London area received a second visit.

It is reported that one He111 was destroyed by fighter action +1 probable.

## Statistics

### Fighter Command Serviceable Aircraft as at 0900 hours, 24th August 1940

- Blenheim - 63
- Spitfire - 238
- Hurricane - 408
- Defiant - 23
- Gladiator - 8
- **Total - 740**

### Casualties:

Enemy Losses		
By Fighters		
Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
11 Ju88	8 Me109	6 Me109
21 Me109	3 He111	3 Me110
1 Me110	2 Me110	3 Ju88
1 He113		3 He111
5 He111		
1 Do215		
<b>40</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>
By Anti-Aircraft		
Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
1 unknown		4 unknown
<b>1</b>		<b>4</b>

Own:

20 aircraft with 6 pilots and 4 air gunners lost or missing.

### **Patrols:**

Own :

187 patrols involving 985 aircraft.

Enemy:

It is estimated that during the night of 23rd/24th August, 200 aircraft were in action, and during the day of 24th August about 500 aircraft.

### **Balloons:**

Flying 1462, casualties 88 (82 repairable, 4 written off, 2 by enemy action)

### **Aerodromes:**

Manston unserviceable

North Weald, Abbotsinch and Hartlepool unserviceable during the hours of darkness.

### **Organisation:**

No changes.

## **Air Intelligence Reports**

Nil.

## **Home Security Reports**

Date: 24th/25th August 1940

### **General Summary**

Heavy attacks have been made by enemy aircraft on Ramsgate and Portsmouth today, and damage to these towns has been extensive, but casualties were fewer than expected. Several RAF stations have been attacked during the day and night with varying results.

From midnight on the 24th onwards, London and southern counties in particular Surrey have been bombed.

### **Detailed Summary**

#### **RAF Stations**

24th August

Manston Aerodrome was attacked at 1311 hours and set on fire; a further attack was delivered at 1539 hours, resulting in the evacuation of the RAF.

Ramsgate. A number of bombs were dropped resulting in damage to airport buildings and houses. ARP personnel were machine-gunned by two low-flying aircraft. Casualties not reported.

North Weald was attacked in the afternoon and a wireless station slightly damaged. Electric, gas and water mains suffered and road A122 blocked. Many casualties reported.

St Athan was attacked at 2100 hours. Several HE demolished part of the RAF hospital.

It is also reported that Castle Bromwich, Hornchurch and Gravesend have been attacked, but no details are available.

25th August

Driffield was reported to have been bombed at about 0130 hours. The Sergeant's Mess was hit and a searchlight bombed and put out of action. No casualties reported so far.

### Other Areas

24th August

Ramsgate. At 1138 hours, an attack was made which resulted in severe damage to the gas works and sulphur plant. Direct hits were made on military headquarters and Customs House. Mains were fractured and houses demolished with many casualties.

Portsmouth was attacked at 1623 hours and the damage in the city was heavy and widespread. Local rail services were affected and two naval units in the harbour were badly damaged. Approximately two hundred are

homeless and it is reported that there are at least 55 killed and 225 injured.

25th August

London and suburbs were attacked in the early hours and the following districts are reported as having been bombed: Canonsbury Park, Tottenham, Highbury Park, Leyton, Wood Green, Stepney, Islington, Enfield, Hampton Court, Millwall and others. A large fire was started at Fore Street spreading to London Wall. Neill Warehouse, West India Dock, was badly damaged by fire, and Warehouse Nos 3 and 4 are now reported to be ablaze. At 0240 hours, it was reported that the Imperial Tobacco Factory and Carter Patterson's Works in Goswell Road were on fire but only slight damage has since been reported.

The following places were also bombed: Malden, Coulsdon, Feltham, Kingston, Banstead and Epsom.

Birmingham. It is reported that the Nuffield and Dunlop Factories have again been bombed at 0003 hours, but no damage reported. Castle Bromwich Aeroplane Factory at Erdington was hit but no damage reported. The Moss Gear Co Ltd was hit with very slight damage.

Cardiff. It is reported that the main GWR line is unserviceable between Cardiff and west Wales owing to a train being bombed at Cardiff.

A gun site at Datchet, Buckinghamshire, was bombed at 0100 hours and the ammunition blown up.

Casualties on Ground by Enemy Action:

To RAF Personnel - no killed, 1 injured.

To others - 102 killed, 335 injured.

Enemy Action by Shell Fire

Reports have been received that Dover and Folkestone were shelled at approximately 1000 hours on the 24th August. Four shells fell near Hawkinge Aerodrome (Folkestone), but little damage reported otherwise. The interval between the shells fired was about 8 minutes.

## **(2) Evacuations**

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWevacuation.htm>

In August 1938 Adolf Hitler began making speeches that suggested he was going to send the German Army into Czechoslovakia. The British government now began to fear a war with Nazi Germany and Neville Chamberlain ordered that Air Raid Precautions (ARP) volunteers to be mobilized. Cellars and basements were requisitioned for air raid shelters, deep trenches were dug in the parks of large towns and the government also ordered the flying of barrage balloons over London.

The government also made plans for the evacuation of all children from Britain's large cities. Sir John Anderson, who was placed in charge of the scheme, decided to divide the country into three areas: evacuation (people living in urban districts where heavy bombing raids could be expected); neutral (areas that would neither send nor take evacuees) and reception (rural areas where evacuees would be sent).

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War the government decided to begin moving people from Britain's cities to the designated reception areas. Some people were reluctant to move and only 47 per cent of the schoolchildren, and about one third of the mothers went to the designated areas. This included 827,000 schoolchildren, 524,000 mothers and children under school age, 13,000 expectant mothers, 103,000 teachers and 7,000 handicapped people.

The billetor received received 10s. 6d. from the government for taking a child. Another 8s. 6d. per head was paid if the billetor took more than one. For mothers and infants, the billetor provided lodging only at a cost of 5s. Per adult and 3s. per child.

The people who took the children into their homes complained about the state of their health. Research suggests that around half of the evacuated children had fleas or headlice. Others suffered from impetigo and scabies. Billetors were sometimes appalled by the behaviour of the evacuees. It is estimated that about 5

per cent of the evacuees lacked proper toilet training. One billetor reported about how when one six year old boy went to the toilet in the front room his mother shouted: "You dirty thing, messing up the lady's carpet. Go and do it in the corner."

Oliver Lyttelton, who allowed ten children from London to live in his large country house, later complained: "I got a shock. I had little dreamt that English children could be so completely ignorant of the simplest rules of hygiene, and that they would regard the floors and carpets as suitable places upon which to relieve themselves."

When the expected bombing of cities did not take place in 1939, parents began to doubt whether they had made the right decision in evacuating their children to safe areas. By January 1940, an estimated one million evacuees had returned home. A survey carried out in Cambridge suggested that the lack of bombing was the reason why four out of five decided to leave. Other reasons given were homesickness among the children, dissatisfaction with the foster home and the loneliness of the parents.

When France was invaded in May, 1940, children who had been sent to areas within ten miles of the coast in East Anglia, Kent and Sussex were transferred to South Wales. By the end of July nearly half of the population of East Anglian's coastal towns and two-fifths of the

inhabitants of Kentish towns on the coast had left for safer regions of the country.

When the Luftwaffe began bombing Britain in July 1940 another major evacuation took place. In a few weeks 213,000 unaccompanied children left Britain's large industrial cities.

The government also set up a Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB) which arranged for children to be sent to USA, Canada and Australia. In the first few months over 210,000 were registered with the scheme. However, after the *City of Bernares* was sunk by a German torpedo on 17th September, 1940, killing 73 children, the overseas evacuation programme was brought to a halt.

On the 7th September, 1940 the German airforce changed its strategy and began to bomb London and other British cities such as Liverpool, Birmingham, Plymouth and Coventry. Parents now were desperate to get their children out of target areas and between September, 1940 and December, 1941, over 1,250,000 were helped by the government to leave the cities.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evacuations\\_of\\_civilians\\_in\\_Britain\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evacuations_of_civilians_in_Britain_during_World_War_II)

Evacuations of civilians in Britain during World War II were designed to save the population of urban or military areas from Nazi German aerial bombing of cities and military targets such as docks. Civilians, particularly children, were moved to rural areas thought

to be less at risk. Operation Pied Piper on 1 September 1939, prior to the Battle of Britain, officially relocated more than 1.5 million people. Further waves of official evacuation and re-evacuation occurred from the south and east coast in June 1940, when a seaborne invasion was expected, and from affected cities after the Blitz began in September 1940. There were also official evacuations from the UK to other parts of the British Empire, and many non-official evacuations within and from the UK. Other mass movements of civilians included British citizens arriving from the Channel Islands, and displaced people arriving from continental Europe.

## **Government Evacuation Scheme**

The Government Evacuation Scheme was developed in the summer of 1938 by the Anderson Committee and was implemented by the Ministry of Health. The country was divided into zones, classified as either "evacuation", "neutral", or "reception", with priority evacuees being moved from the major urban centres and billeted on the available private housing in more rural areas. Each area covered roughly a third of the population, although several urban areas later bombed were not classified for evacuation. In early 1939, the reception areas compiled lists of available housing. Space for 4.8 million people was found, and the government also constructed camps for a few thousand additional spaces.

In the summer of 1939, the government began publicizing its plan through the local authorities. They had an underestimated demand; only half of all school-aged children were moved from the urban areas instead of the expected 80%. There was enormous regional variation of more than 15% of their children, while over 60% of children were evacuated in Manchester and Liverpool. The refusal of the central government to spend large sums on preparation also reduced the effectiveness of the plan. In execution over 1,474,000 people were evacuated.

### **Operation Pied Piper**

There was a steady flow of evacuees during June 1939. The official evacuation was declared on August 31, but began on September 1, two days before the declaration of war. From London and the other main cities, the priority class people boarded trains and were dispatched to rural towns and villages in the designated areas. With the uncertainties over registering for evacuation, the actual movement was also disjointed—evacuees were gathered into groups and put on the first available train, regardless of its destination. School and family groups were further separated in the transfer from mainline trains to more local transport. Accordingly, some reception areas became overwhelmed. East Anglian ports received many children evacuated from Dagenham. Some reception areas received more than the expected number of evacuees and others found

themselves receiving people from a priority group or social class different from what they had prepared for.

Almost 3.75 million people were displaced, with around a third of the entire population experiencing some effects of the evacuation. In the first three days of official evacuation, 3.5 million people were moved—827,000 children of school-age, 524,000 mothers and young children (under 5), 13,000 pregnant women, 7,000 disabled persons and over 103,000 teachers and other 'helpers'. Host keepers were often put to inconvenience, especially by many children who seemed to be vulnerable to stress symptoms such as enuresis and other ailments (some estimates have been put between 4% and 33%). A further two million or so more wealthy individuals evacuated 'privately', some settling in hotels for the duration and several thousands travelling to Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia and the Caribbean.

Other prominent groups also evacuated. Art treasures were sent to distant storage; the National Gallery collection spent the war at a quarry in North Wales. The Bank of England moved to the small town of Overton and in 1939-1940 moved 2,154 tons of gold to the vaults of the Bank of Canada in Ottawa. The BBC moved variety production to Bristol and moved senior staff to a manor near Evesham. Many senior Post Office staff were relocated to Harrogate. Some private companies moved head offices or their most vital records to comparative safety away from major cities.

The government also undertook measures to save itself. Under "Plan Yellow", some 23,000 civil servants and their paperwork were dispatched to available hotels in the better coastal resorts and spa towns. Other hotels were requisitioned and emptied for a possible last ditch "Black Move" should London be destroyed or threatened by invasion. Under this plan, the nucleus of government would relocate to the West Midlands—the War Cabinet would move to Hindlip House near Worcester and Parliament to Stratford-upon-Avon.

Some strained areas took the children into local schools by adopting the World War I expedient of *double shift education*—taking twice as long but also doubling the number taught. The movement of teachers also meant that almost a million children staying home had no source of education.

### **Other evacuations**

A second evacuation effort was started after the fall of France. From 13 June to 18 June 1940, around 100,000 children were evacuated (in many cases re-evacuated). Efforts were made to remove the vulnerable from coastal towns in southern and eastern England facing German controlled areas. By July, over 200,000 children had been moved; some towns in Kent and East Anglia evacuated over 40% of the population. Also, some 30,000 people arrived from continental Europe and, on 20 June–24 June 25,000 people arrived from the Channel Islands.

Men of German (and later Italian) origin were interned from 12 May 1940. Many interned were refugees from Adolf Hitler. By July, almost all of these men under seventy were held in military camps, mainly on the Isle of Man. At first, unnecessary mistreatment was common. For many interned persons the conditions in the camps were not especially unpleasant. These conditions were soon reversed.

In May 1940, the Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB) was created to organise the evacuation of children to the Dominions, primarily Canada, plus South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. A surprising 210,000 applications were made by July when the scheme closed. However, shipping shortages quickly slowed the evacuation. After the sinking of the *City of Benares* on 17 September 1940, the entire plan was scrapped. Only 2,664 children were moved. About 13,000 children had been privately evacuated overseas.

When the Blitz began in September 1940, there were clear grounds for evacuations. Free travel and billeting allowance were offered to those who made private arrangements. They were also given to children, the elderly, the disabled, pregnant women, the ill or those who had lost their homes (some 250,000 in the first six weeks in London). By the combination of all the state and private efforts, London's population was reduced by a little less than 25%. As bombing encompassed more towns, 'assisted private evacuation' was extended.

London proved resilient to bombing despite the heavy bombardment. The destruction in the smaller towns was more likely to provoke panic and spontaneous evacuations. The number of official evacuees rose to a peak of 1.37 million by February 1941. By September, it stood at just over one million. By the end of 1943, there were just 350,000 people officially billeted. Still, the V-1 attacks from June 1944 provoked a significant exodus from London. Up to 1.5 million people left by September—only 20% were "official" evacuees.

From September 1944, the evacuation process was officially halted and reversed for most areas except for London and the East coast. Returning to London was not officially approved until June 1945. In March 1946, the billeting scheme was ended, with 38,000 people still without homes.

### **(3) Air Raid Shelters**

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWshelters.htm>

In August 1938 Adolf Hitler began making speeches that suggested he was going to send the German Army into Czechoslovakia. The British government now began to fear a war with Nazi Germany and Neville Chamberlain ordered that Air Raid Precautions (ARP) volunteers to be mobilized. Cellars and basements were requisitioned for air raid shelters, deep trenches were dug in the parks of large towns and the government also ordered the flying of barrage balloons over London.

The government also made plans for the evacuation of all children from Britain's large cities. Sir John Anderson, who was placed in charge of the scheme, decided to divide the country into three areas: evacuation (people living in urban districts where heavy bombing raids could be expected); neutral (areas that would neither send nor take evacuees) and reception (rural areas where evacuees would be sent).

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War the government decided to begin moving people from Britain's cities to the designated reception areas. Some people were reluctant to move and only 47 per cent of the schoolchildren, and about one third of the mothers went to the designated areas. This included 827,000 schoolchildren, 524,000 mothers and children under school age, 13,000 expectant mothers, 103,000 teachers and 7,000 handicapped people.

The billetor received received 10s. 6d. from the government for taking a child. Another 8s. 6d. per head was paid if the billetor took more than one. For mothers and infants, the billetor provided lodging only at a cost of 5s. Per adult and 3s. per child.

The people who took the children into their homes complained about the state of their health. Research suggests that around half of the evacuated children had fleas or headlice. Others suffered from impetigo and scabies. Billetors were sometimes appalled by the behaviour of the evacuees. It is estimated that about 5

per cent of the evacuees lacked proper toilet training. One billetor reported about how when one six year old boy went to the toilet in the front room his mother shouted: "You dirty thing, messing up the lady's carpet. Go and do it in the corner."

Oliver Lyttelton, who allowed ten children from London to live in his large country house, later complained: "I got a shock. I had little dreamt that English children could be so completely ignorant of the simplest rules of hygiene, and that they would regard the floors and carpets as suitable places upon which to relieve themselves."

When the expected bombing of cities did not take place in 1939, parents began to doubt whether they had made the right decision in evacuating their children to safe areas. By January 1940, an estimated one million evacuees had returned home. A survey carried out in Cambridge suggested that the lack of bombing was the reason why four out of five decided to leave. Other reasons given were homesickness among the children, dissatisfaction with the foster home and the loneliness of the parents.

When France was invaded in May, 1940, children who had been sent to areas within ten miles of the coast in East Anglia, Kent and Sussex were transferred to South Wales. By the end of July nearly half of the population of East Anglian's coastal towns and two-fifths of the

inhabitants of Kentish towns on the coast had left for safer regions of the country.

When the Luftwaffe began bombing Britain in July 1940 another major evacuation took place. In a few weeks 213,000 unaccompanied children left Britain's large industrial cities.

The government also set up a Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB) which arranged for children to be sent to USA, Canada and Australia. In the first few months over 210,000 were registered with the scheme. However, after the *City of Bernares* was sunk by a German torpedo on 17th September, 1940, killing 73 children, the overseas evacuation programme was brought to a halt.

On the 7th September, 1940 the German airforce changed its strategy and began to bomb London and other British cities such as Liverpool, Birmingham, Plymouth and Coventry. Parents now were desperate to get their children out of target areas and between September, 1940 and December, 1941, over 1,250,000 were helped by the government to leave the cities.

#### **(4) Tube Stations**

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWunderground.htm>

People in London also used tube stations during the Blitz. People would buy platform tickets for a penny halfpenny and camped on the platforms for the night.

They were popular because they were dry, warm and quiet. The government, fearing that the overcrowded platforms would hamper troop movements, attempted to stop the public from using the tube stations as shelters. The people refused to give them up and the government was forced to back down. In some cases underground stations were closed down and given over to the public to use during air raids.

The tube stations were not as safe as people thought. High explosive bombs dropped by the Luftwaffe could penetrate up to fifty feet through solid ground. On 17th September 1940, a bomb killed twenty people sheltering in Marble Arch station. The worst incident took place at Balham in October 1940 when 600 people were killed or injured. The following year 111 people were killed while sheltering at the Bank underground station. One night 178 people suffocated at Bethnal Green station after a panic stampede.

A census held in November 1940 discovered that the majority of people in London did not use specially created shelters. The survey revealed that of those interviewed, 27 per cent used domestic shelters like Anderson Shelters and Morrison Shelters, 9 per cent slept in public shelters whereas 4 per cent used underground railway stations (4 per cent). The rest of those interviewed were either on duty at night or slept in their own homes.

## **(5) Rationing**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A533918>

### **World War Two Rationing in Britain**

During the Second World War, (1939-45), there were a lot of shortages of *essential* foodstuffs, not just luxuries. Supplies started to become short and some items impossible to obtain, especially imported goods such as tea, bananas, oranges and grapes. It was to be six or seven years before any of those fruits were seen again. Then butter, lard, sweets, cakes, flour and sugar became hard to get too, followed by meat and fish.

### **Ration Books**

Ration books were issued to each person containing tokens which could be saved up or used at the owner's discretion. The shopkeeper would remove the tokens before he issued the goods.

There were different kinds of ration books. The most common was the buff-coloured one. These were issued to adults and school-age children. Green books were issued to expectant mothers as they had extra tokens. The possession of this book would 'give away' the woman's secret. People were much more private about their personal circumstances in those days, and a pregnancy outside of wedlock was considered scandalous.

The tokens had no monetary value, they were merely a means of ensuring that everybody got a fair share of what was available, and to try to prevent stockpiling.

The tokens were for food, and later, also for clothing.

It was on 8 January, 1940 (four months after the war started), that food rationing came into force.

To start with, the rations were (per person per week):

- Butter or lard: 4 ounces (113.4 grammes)
- Sugar: 12 ounces (340.2 grammes)
- Raw bacon or Ham: 4 ounces (113.4 grammes)
- Eggs x2
- Cooked bacon or Ham: 3.5 ounces (99.3 grammes)

Meat rationing started 11 March, 1940.

## **Shortages**

As the war went on, bread became in short supply. Queues would form outside shops very early in the morning because even if people had coupons, there was no guarantee that shops would have sufficient bread for everyone. Rumours would circulate that a certain shop was expecting a supply of butter or meat and immediately women would form a queue outside that

shop. Many shops opened for only two or three days a week because of food shortages.

## **Clothing**

Eventually coupons became necessary for clothes. This affected women more than men because they couldn't get silk stockings (there was no nylon nor any tights back then). The ingenious women did all sorts of things to make it look as if they were wearing silk stockings - like staining their legs with tea, a mixture of sand and water, or even a thin mixture of gravy colouring; and then making a line down the back of their legs with eye liner - to look like a stocking seam!

Patches were sewn on the elbows to make jumpers<sup>1</sup>, cardigans and jackets last longer. These became quite fashionable and popular. Special clothing, such as a bridal gown and bridesmaids' dresses, would be passed around a family to be worn again, rather than using up the precious clothes coupons.

Bartering became a way of life, and there was an illegal black market.

## **Exceptions**

- **Pregnant women** were allowed more food tokens.
- **Nursing mothers** were allowed more milk.

- **Infants** up to one year were included in their mother's green book.
- **Children aged one year to five years** - mothers of these children sometimes had 'extras', a few extra vegetables or a cracked egg, slipped into their shopping baskets by kindly shopkeepers.

Children aged over 5 years had their own books of tokens.

## End of Rationing

Rationing did not end with the war. It was years before the country was rebuilt and life got back to normal. Some things like sweets were still on ration in 1953.

Quote from a schoolgirl during the war:

*I remember my uncle fetching back some bananas when he came home on leave. He gave me one and I took it to school. Everyone crowded around me and my teacher showed it to the whole class. It seemed like a priceless treasure. I was a very popular girl that day. Everyone wanted me to open it and eat it, but I wouldn't. I took it back home with me and left it till it went black, but it still smelled so good. Even now I can't smell ripe bananas without evoking that memory.*

## British Restaurants

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationing\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationing_in_the_United_Kingdom)

Restaurants were exempt from rationing, which led to a certain amount of resentment as the rich could

supplement their food allowance by eating out frequently and extravagantly. To restrict this, certain rules were put into force. No meal could cost more than five shillings; no meal could consist of more than three courses; meat and fish could not be served at the same sitting. Establishments known as British Restaurants supplied another almost universal experience of eating away from home. British Restaurants were run by local authorities, who set them up in a variety of different premises such as schools and church halls. They evolved from the LCC's Londoners' Meals Service which originated in September 1940 as a temporary, emergency system for feeding those who had been bombed out. By mid-1941 the LCC was operating two hundred of these restaurants, during 1942 to 1944 they numbered in the thousands. Here a three course meal cost only 9d. Standards varied, but the best were greatly appreciated and had a large regular clientele. Similar schemes were run in other towns and cities.

\* \* \* \* \*