

Evacuation in WW2

Why was
Evacuation a
turning point in
World War II?



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Emily Leeming

Contents Page

Page 1 - Introduction
Page 2 - Why Were The
Children Evacuated?
Page 4 - The Evacuation
Plan
Page 6 - Evacuation



Propaganda

Page 8 - What you would
need on Evacuation Day?
Page 9 - Where the children
would have been evacuated



to?

Page 10 - Life as an Evacuee

Page 14 - Famous People and Evacuation

Page 15 – Conclusion

Page 16 – Bibliography

Introduction

In this project I will be talking about how evacuation was a turning point in

World War Two. To show how evacuation was a turning point I shall be discussing different topics which highlight the impact of people in Britain during the war. A turning point is a time at which a decisive change in a situation occurs, especially one with beneficial results.

The evacuation of Britain's cities at the start of World War Two was the biggest and most concentrated mass movement of people in Britain's history. In the first four days of September 1939, nearly 3,000,000 people were planned to be transported from towns and cities in danger from enemy bombers to places of safety in the countryside. Many of those people would have been schoolchildren.

The key areas I will be considering are why did evacuation happen? The government plan and how they persuaded people that evacuation was the best thing forward through this difficult time. Also, it is important to look at what this meant for children in terms of where they were evacuated to, evacuation day and life as an evacuee. The sources that I have used are from the internet, books and history magazines.



Why
were

the children evacuated?

The decision to evacuate millions of people specifically children by the government was a key turning point in the war because it reflected the fact that the government realised that in order to try and win the war Germany and Hitler would use different tactics like bombing key areas in London and the south coast.

Therefore, the risk of the enemy bombing was a key reason why children were evacuated because of the possible danger of loss of life and the serious impacts that this would have on the population.

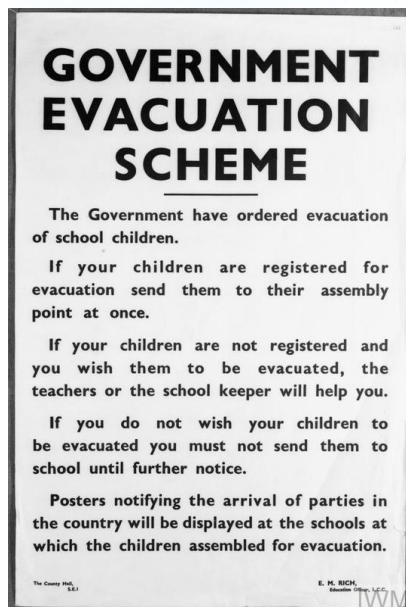
The evidence shows that the government thought enemy planes were going to target factories, shops and potentially were also going to hit homes and schools so children would be in danger. As a result the government came up with a plan of a mass movement of people to try and get everyone to safety and tried at the start of the war to empty the cities of children's and mothers. This plan was put into action on 1st September 1939 and was code named Operation Pied Piper. In the first three days around 800,000 children were evacuated which meant they were safe but then within a year around 60% had returned to their homes

because no bombing raids had happened. This was until the Autumn of 1940 when the blitz began, and the enemy planes would come each night and drop bombs onto the city. This is when evacuation was needed because children were getting killed from the air raids. The final wave of evacuation happened in 1944 when Germany attacked Britain with V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets.

Evacuation was designed to protect people, especially children, from the risks associated with aerial bombing of cities by moving them to areas thought to be less at risk like the country side. However, when evacuation was introduced most mothers or guardians were quite sceptical about sending their children away with strangers but when they realised the fear of attack and how dangerous this could be they started to consider evacuating their children to a different family. They also realised that whilst evacuation was voluntary lots of the schools were going to close so they had nowhere for their children to go.

At first some mothers went with their children to make sure everything was okay but then some mothers left their children on their own which was a very brave decision to leave their children with strangers, but it was the best solution

if they wanted their children to be safe.



The Evacuation Plan

The plan to evacuate was a turning point because of the impact it had on the home front during the war. This was the first time an official evacuation had ever been deemed necessary and was the biggest movement of people in British history. A key reason why this plan was a turning point is because the evidence shows that this experience of mass evacuation deeply effected the country and is

still very much remembered by those who lived in the war.

Before the war had started a committee led by John Anderson were already discussing with railway officials, Teachers and Police how they were going to do it. Local Billeting officers were given the task to find suitable homes for evacuees and they started interviewing possible host families.

Another key reason why this was a turning point is because the organisation required to move around 3 million people into the countryside was phenomenal. The focus of the country had to change as so many people were involved in making this evacuation a success. For four days from 1st September 1939 the country's major stations provided a route out of the city coordinated by teachers and volunteers. Children were tagged and allowed to carry a certain amount of luggage along with their gas masks. They did not have an allocated host family to meet them and were hand selected on arrival which led to the horrible experience of being last. The most presentable would be picked first while the sicklier and grubbier children were left until last. The phrase "I'll take that one" is remembered by evacuees as they were chosen.

Evacuation day was a turning point for many families and would affect their future relationships for the rest of their lives. The reason for this was because it would have been a long journey of mixed emotions as some children were excited for this new adventure whilst others were scared and didn't want to leave their homes. For the parents too, it would have been a difficult time as many were devastated to send their children away and didn't know when they would see them again. The evidence from many of the evacuee's accounts of the time highlight what a difficult period it was emotionally for them and will be remembered forever.

The plan did not take into account the people in the countryside's perception of what city children were like and this again had a social impact on how some children were treated as many thought that they were dirty and had no manners and were almost good for nothing.



Evacuation Propaganda

The plan to evacuate large numbers of the population particularly children was a



huge turning point in the Home Front war effort and as a result required the government to use a number of persuasive techniques to make it a success. A key reason for this is because they were asking parents to separate from their children and them hundreds of miles away which obviously many were reluctant to do. The evidence shows that one of the key ways the government tried to do this is by putting up posters everywhere. The posters were designed to persuade people to evacuate their children to safety. Some of these are shown below which were



techniques to make it a success. A key reason for this is because they were asking parents to separate from their children and them hundreds of miles away which obviously many were reluctant to do. The evidence shows that one of the key ways the government tried to do this is by putting up posters everywhere. The posters were designed to persuade people to evacuate their children to safety. Some of these are shown below which were

designed to encourage co-operation.

The second propaganda poster is showing a little boy trying to help out during the war. He is collecting rubbish and rubble from the streets which have been bombed. The boy is also shown with a sword in the side of his pocket. This is trying to show how he is trying to help in the war but, the police officer is telling the little boy “leave this to us sonny you ought to be out of London” this is trying to persuade people that the children are in danger and that they should be out of the city and into the countryside.

The third poster is showing us two children looking quite grubby sitting together, the text says above “send them out of London mothers”. This is very persuasive because, they have used sad images to help the mothers think that if they send their children away to the country side that they will be happier and safer. The government used lots of sad images to persuade the mothers to evacuate their children.

Whilst this initially proved successful by the end of 1939 when the expected bombing raids had not occurred, and people were starting to call it a “phony war” many parents who had agreed to the evacuation brought their children home again. The government tried to persuade them not to do this and highlighted the continuing danger by producing posters like the one below.

The first poster is showing Hitler as a ghost whispering into a mother’s ear. He was saying “take them back” the government used this poster because it is telling us that the mothers were doing the right thing by evacuating children and, if she takes them back Hitler will get them because they are in danger. The extract below shows that even the newspapers were also supporting evacuation by positively reporting the first wave of evacuation. This could have helped to encourage parents who were unsure whether to evacuate.

Daily Mirror's coverage

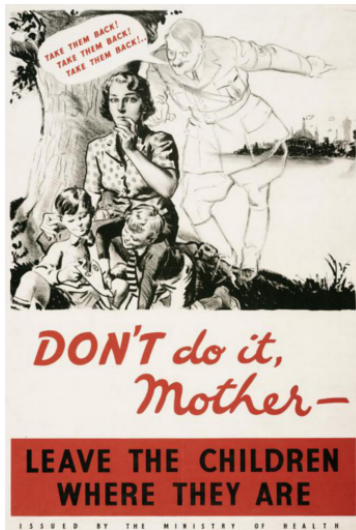
Saturday, 2 September 1939

No hitch on great adventure

Evacuation of schoolchildren from London went without a hitch. The children, smiling and cheerful, left their parents and entrained for unknown destinations in the spirit of going on a great adventure.

'I wish all our passengers were as easy to manage,' a railway official said. 'The children were very well behaved.'

At Waterloo, 80 per cent of the normal travellers saw nothing of the schoolchildren. After Earl de la Warr, President of the Board of Education, had toured a number of schools in West London, he said, 'If the arrangements at the other end for receiving the children are as good as at this end, it bodes well for the scheme.'



What would you need as an evacuee?

A key reason why evacuation was a turning point is because for many children they were starting a new life and they needed to be prepared for their journey. Evidence shows that they were given a list of all the things they needed, and they were also given name tags so the volunteers and billeting officers would know the names of the children who were boarding to be evacuated.

Some key things they would have to take were;

Boys: 2 vests, 2 pairs of pants, 1 pair of trousers, 2 pairs of socks, 6 handkerchiefs and 1 pullover jersey.

Girls; 1 vest, 1 pair of knickers, 1 petticoat, 2 pairs of stockings, 6 handkerchiefs, 1 slip, 1 blouse and 1 cardigan.

They would also have had to take food for the journey because some children would have to travel very far. They would have a mixture of sweet foods and healthy foods like sandwiches, packet of nuts or raisin, dry biscuits, barely sugar and apple.

The children were also expected to take their own soap, towel, facecloth and toothbrush with them. I think the reason they were expected to take so little with them is because they only had a limited amount of luggage they could have.

The children would also have little brown boxes with their essentials in such as, gas mask, pictures of their family, fav toy or teddy bear and a small amount of money.

When the children went they would have a label pinned to their coats and it would say where they were heading to, the name of the child, the child's home address and their school.





Elizabeth and her sister Margaret During the war



Where the children would have been evacuated to?

A key reason why the evacuation was a turning point is because, lots of the children lived in the cities where the bombing was targeted the most and this would mean them all leaving to go to the countryside. So, the parents had to decide whether they should evacuate their children or not which would mean big changes as to how people lived their lives.

A key reason why it would have been good is because it would take the children away from the danger that was going on in the city. There were many, many places where children were evacuated to most of them were in the United Kingdom, some like Canada and Australia. Some mothers decided to evacuate their children and some mothers decided to keep their children with them.

These are some children going to the train station waiting to be evacuated.

Most of the children would be evacuated to the country side which was the safest or one of the safest places to go because the Germans wouldn't drop bombs there as there were no places of interest.

Evidence from maps shows the places where most children went was Devon, Wales and Cornwall. The reason for this is because it was very far away from places like, London, Birmingham and Portsmouth.



This is the government's plan for evacuation

In Britain, 2600 children were sent overseas to places such as Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. At home, as many as 800,000 children, were sent to live in the countryside, away from the likely areas of attacks or invasions, for varying periods of time.

Life as an Evacuee

As has been highlighted evacuation was a turning point for lots of families in the war because parents were separated from their children living different lives and uncertain of the future. A key reason why life as an evacuee was different was because it was not what the city children were used to and they experienced things they had never seen or done before. The evidence from various evacuee accounts and photographs of the time show many children who went to the countryside had no clue what some things were like farmyard animals such as cows and pigs. Often, they had never ever seen fields and meadows and most

children were surprised and startled to see where milk came from. Lots of children were surprised to see vegetables growing in mud like carrots and potatoes. Some children hated it and were disgusted but others were excited and ready to get stuck in and try something new. Locals and evacuees went to school like normal and the locals and evacuees would play together. Most became friends, though some locals moaned and said it was unfair when the townies which is what they called the people from the city were given sweets and went to parties. Evacuees and their host families were often astonished to see how each other lived. Lots of the children from the city enjoyed staying in the countryside because it was a new and fantastic experience and they found new friends. Learning to bake, walks in the woods and the kindness of the hosts have been remembered as treasured memories and for many it was a life enhancing, mind broadening experience. For others it was harder to adapt and some children were treated badly by their host families which just made their childhood and misery at being away from home even worse. To try and ease the pain from being away from their parents, a special song was written for children in 1939 by Gaby Rogers and Harry Philips, entitled 'Goodnight Children Everywhere' and Broadcast every night by the BBC.

Goodnight Children Everywhere

Sleepy little eyes in a sleepy little head,
Sleepy time is drawing near.
In a little while you'll be tucked up in your bed,
Here's a song for baby dear.
 Goodnight children everywhere,
Your mummy thinks of you tonight.
Lay your head upon your pillow,
Don't be a kid or a weeping willow. Close your eyes and say a prayer,
And surely you can find a kiss to spare.
Though you are far away, she's with you night and day,
Goodnight children everywhere. Soon the moon will rise, and caress you with
its beams,
While the shadows softly creep.
With a happy smile you will be wrapped up in your dreams,
Baby will be fast asleep. Goodnight children everywhere.

Here are some examples of some people's experiences of evacuation good and bad and how it shaped their lives for the future.

Bill Reeds

I was 13 when I was evacuated from Chiswick. I went with my school to a

small town called Little Gadderson, between Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamstead. We walked, a long line of us, from school to the railway station, carrying our luggage and gas masks.

The train took us to Hemel Hempstead, where we were all loaded into a coach and driven to a more rural area. Then the bus stopped and we all piled out. There was a crowd of people waiting, and they would select the children they liked the look of. Then the bus, with us aboard again, would go another hundred yards or so and repeat the exercise.

When it was my turn to be selected, I was very fortunate. Jackie Gilbert, a boy I knew quite well, and I were picked by the James people, who owned the local butcher's shop. Along with the husband and wife, there were three daughters, all very friendly, and we were treated exceptionally well, probably a lot better than I had been treated at home.

I had a very good time, doing things that were different from anything I had ever done before. Living in the country was wonderful. The food was quite good – including rabbit pie. It didn't seem as though we were on rations at all.

John Matthews

To escape the Blitz I was sent to Devon. I was eight years old. There, between the main beach at Paignton and the next, Goodrington Sands, is a headland, which in those days had just a few large mansions on it. I and another boy, about my age, were taken by the billeting officer to one of these houses, inhabited by a wealthy widow and her servants. She refused to come to the door, and the maid who answered, a sour woman dressed in a black-and-white uniform, made it quite clear that they wanted nothing to do with scruffy urchins from the East End. But during the war there was an emergency order that made any spare bedrooms available as army billets or for evacuees, so they were forced to take us.

The result was that we were kept locked in our bedroom when not at school. It was a small room with a window looking out onto the sea. There was no book or radio. Fortunately, it did have a small table and two chairs. We used to sit on the floor and read ourselves by sliding in our socks under the door. We had a rug on the floor. When the old lady had to do as the schools were closed to the kitchen, where we stood and were given a Marmite sandwich and a mug of cocoa. We never got any cooked meals. When we complained we were hungry we were told to consider ourselves lucky – there was a war on.

On one Sunday afternoon we were allowed out into the back garden, which had a croquet lawn. We had no idea what croquet was, but we bashed the balls around and then discovered that in the corner was a pillar which could be turned. We found out that it was a windmill. We had so we gave one another rides to see how fast we could go. It was a bit of a nuisance that we had to be seen from the house, because we were always in the bedroom again.

This is a poster recruiting women to help with evacuation services. Lots of teachers would sign up for these jobs because they would have nothing to do as the schools were closed

This is a poster for the dates and days the trains would be leaving to take the evacuees from London to the country side.

Children like this dirty and grubby would most likely be picked last as an evacuee



Famous People and Evacuation

Evidence shows that Evacuation affected everybody. A key reason for this is that this experience could have happened to you no matter how famous or rich you are.

This is highlighted in a newspaper article by The Telegraph Which discusses an actor called Michael Caine's experience of Evacuation.

It talks about a key reason why Michael Caine hated WW2 is because he was evacuated and unfortunately, he was one of those children who ended up with a horrible host family. Today Michael Caine is a very famous actor and is much known for his amazing performances. However, when he was evacuated as a young boy he had quite a scary ordeal. He had been billeted to a family in the



countryside who seemed very nice but, when they wanted to go away for a weekend they locked him and another boy in a cupboard until they came back and only let them out in time to go to school on the Monday. His mother found out about it within about a fortnight and took him home straight away. As he commented in the article this left him with serious trust issues for the rest of his life. "I have never trusted an adult until a great deal of investigation has gone into them".



Even the Royal family who were obviously based in London had to consider evacuation. A man called Douglas Halo suggested to the royal family that Elizabeth and her sister Margaret should be evacuated to Canada. This did not happen because her mother, queen at the time told Douglas that if her daughters go then she will have to go to. However, she would not go without the King and she knew he would never leave the country because he thought it was cowardly and wanted to stay with his people. So instead the whole family remained in London and helped significantly with the war effort at home.

Conclusion

The evacuation of an estimated 3.5 million people in Britain was definitely a big turning point in World War 2. The government were forced to react to the threat of German enemy bombs dropping on the country and its civilians and therefore had to come up with a radical plan to protect people. The evacuation which began on



the 1st September 1939 was the biggest movement of people in British history and saw for the first-time people, mainly children having to move from their homes in the cities where most of the danger was and go live with strangers in the countryside. The implementation of the plan was complicated and not something that had ever been tried before so required new levels of organisation for it to be a success. The government also had to think differently on how they promoted evacuation and persuaded the people to evacuate the cities.

As a result, the impacts of evacuation were significant not just at an organisational level but also personally for people. It ended up reshaping an entire generation of youth who would otherwise have had a very different family life. For most children life as an evacuee proved to be a positive experience and once the shock of leaving home had gone away many enjoyed their time in the country and the activities and lifestyle this involved. For some however it was just too difficult as the stress and unhappiness at being away from their families was too much. Also, personal accounts show that there were

many unlucky and unfortunate children who got given to host families who neglected them and treated them very poorly which sadly had an effect on them

for the rest of their lives.

Overall, I think that it is clear that without Operation Pied Piper the death toll in Second World War would have undoubtedly been much higher particularly for children and therefore it proved to be a success and a definite turning point for the war effort at home.

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