

Second World War Handling Collection

Educational support materials for groups participating in this activity

This pack contains information designed to support teachers whose classes are visiting the RAF Museum and participating in the Handling Collection Activity. It is intended to provide information and suggestions for class lessons before and after the activity. All the photos and diagrams are available for reasonable reproduction to help with teaching.

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Additional images from the RAF Museum's collections can be found online at <http://navigator.rafmuseum.org/>

Second World War Handling Collection

Educational Background to the Handling Collection Activity

Links to the Curriculum

The Second World War Handling Collection Activity relates to a number of key areas of the National Curriculum. This section of the teacher resource pack discusses the historical and social factors which provide a background to the activity.

The Second World War

The Second World War for Britain started in 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. There were two opposing forces comprised of a variety of countries. The Allied forces included Britain, Poland, France, China, Russia, India, Yugoslavia, United States, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Burma, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Norway and Latvia. The Axis forces included Germany, Japan, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Italy. The members of both the Axis and Allied forces changed throughout the war some countries joining later or leaving earlier.

Axis forces initially appeared to be winning the war as they successfully occupied most of Europe, however this stretched their resources thinly and attempts to occupy further territory were successfully resisted, for example the Soviet Union was not defeated. Many of the occupied countries such as France and Belgium also resisted the Axis forces by sabotaging Axis bases and supply lines or helping allied air crew or prisoners of war to escape or evade capture.

The failure of the Axis air forces' campaign against the Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain prevented the invasion of Britain and provided the Allies with a suitable location to assemble forces for the D-Day landings. D-Day (6th June 1944) was to result in the liberation of France from the Axis forces. This was the beginning of the end of the Second World War. The war finally ended in 1945 when Japan, the last surviving member of the Axis forces surrendered.

The Blitz

Although the Second World War did not begin until 1939, Air Raid Precautions began as early as 1938. The development of aircraft technology had led to the increasing threat of air assault and Britain began to take measures to combat possible attacks. Britain began to clear hospitals ready for bomb victims, millions of cardboard coffins were made, 40 million gas masks were given out and people volunteered for the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) service.

It was not until the summer of 1940 that German night bombing raids on Britain started and the Blitz began. The first major daylight raid on London occurred on 7th September 1940. 350 bombing aircraft and 650 fighting aircraft were used to attack important areas such as London's docks and oil refineries, in this raid. The bombing lasted all through the night until 8th September, killing at least 400 people and injuring 1600 others. The Blitz continued until May 1941 when Germany turned her attention to the Soviet Union.

Remember that it was not just British cities that were attacked during bombing raids. The Royal Air Force (RAF) attacked German cities including Berlin, damaging buildings, destroying schools and killing citizens.

Air Raid Shelters

There were two common types of air raid protection, the Anderson Shelter and the Morrison Shelter. The Anderson Shelter was built outside in the garden. It was made out of corrugated iron and was half buried in the garden and covered with 40 - 50 cm of soil. The Morrison Shelter was used in the home. It was a strong metal mesh box which people could hide in. They would often keep it in the living room where it could be used as a table when it wasn't being used as a shelter.

Rationing

Before the Second World War, Britain imported about 55 million tons of food a year from other countries. After the war was declared in September 1939, the British Government was not able to import the same amount of food from abroad as German submarines started sinking British merchant ships. There was a worry that this would lead to shortages of food in the shops so the Government decided to introduce a system of rationing.

Everybody was issued with ration books. Ration books contained coupons that shopkeepers clipped out of the books when people bought food and other items. This controlled the amount of an item people were able to buy. Sometimes even if you had the correct coupons, you would not be able to buy everything you wanted because the shop would have run out. This led to huge queues outside shops when items such as sugar were in stock.

The Blackout

Britain was blacked out on 1st September 1939, two days before the outbreak of war.

Everyone had to cover their windows and doors at night with heavy blackout curtains, cardboard or paint to prevent any glimmer of light from escaping and aiding enemy aircraft during their bombing raids. This is because the bright lights of the city would make any city or town an easy target for bombs.

Street lights were switched off or dimmed and shielded to deflect their light downwards. Traffic lights and vehicle headlights were fitted with slotted covers to deflect their beam down to the ground.

The number of road accidents increased because of the reduced street lighting. A number of measures were taken to try and prevent these accidents:

- White stripes were painted on the roads and on lamp posts.
- People were encouraged to walk facing the traffic.
- Men were advised to leave their shirt tails hanging out so that they could be seen by cars with dimmed headlamps.

People were also injured in accidents during the blackout because they could not see in the darkness. Many people were hurt tripping up, falling down stairs or bumping into things.

Gas Attacks and Gas Masks

Gas was a very nasty weapon that could be dropped from aeroplanes. There were several types of gas and they were all poisonous. Many soldiers had been gassed during the First World War. It was feared that if gas was dropped on Britain it would kill many men, women and children.

The Government decided that it would be a good idea to issue everyone with their own gas mask. 40 million gas masks were given out. These masks were made of rubber and were easy to put on but had to fit tightly around the face to prevent gas from getting in. They were not very comfortable and would quickly steam up inside. There were special ones for children, made of red rubber. They were made to look like Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse; even so, children did not like them very much as they were uncomfortable.

Poisonous gas was detected by painting the tops of pillar boxes yellow with a special kind of paint that would change colour if there was any gas in the air. This would act as a warning to everybody in the street. Gas masks had to be carried at all times in their cardboard case. Some cinemas would not let a person in without their gas mask. However, the Germans did not drop any poisonous gas and soon people tired of carrying their gas masks.

Evacuation

It soon became apparent that some parts of the country were going to be attacked more than others, mainly cities such as London and Coventry. Plans were made for children living in these areas to be sent to safer parts of the country (and sometimes even other countries). This process was known as evacuation. Children below school age had to stay with their mothers whether they were evacuated or not, but those children old enough to attend school were strongly advised to be sent away. Evacuation was not compulsory.

The families that took in children from the evacuated towns and cities were known as foster families. When the evacuated children arrived they would have a health check and then foster parents would collect them to take them to their new homes. This would be the first time that many children had been to the countryside. The children would write back home to let their parents know that they were alright and to tell them their news. Foster parents would be paid 8s 6d (about 43p) per week for every child that they looked after.

The Royal Air Force (RAF)

The Royal Air Force was formed in 1918 from the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. After the First World War, the number of personnel and aircraft in the RAF was drastically reduced, leaving it underpowered when compared to other European air forces such as the German Luftwaffe. It was not until just before Britain entered the Second World War that the RAF began to build more aircraft and employ more personnel. The Second World War was a time of rapid expansion for the RAF but even with this expansion they were still poorly equipped to deal with the Luftwaffe attacks during the Battle of Britain. Do not miss the 'Our Finest Hour' show in the Battle of Britain Hall, for more information about the Battle of Britain. Despite overwhelming odds the RAF were able to hold off the Luftwaffe until there was no possible chance of a German invasion.

The RAF also mounted a strategic bombing campaign against Germany. There were a number of daylight and night time raids on various military targets, attacks on civilian targets began after bombs were dropped on London. This first bombing of London is often thought to have been accidental. The bombing campaign caused increasing damage as technology developed and more aircraft were built. Famous bombing raids such as the Dambusters' Raid were of great strategic importance and served to boost British morale. Visit the Bomber Command Hall to learn more about the Dambusters' Raid.

Today the RAF is still going strong, playing an important part in relief missions and wars around the world. Visit the Milestones of Flight Hall to see some of the RAF newest aircraft.

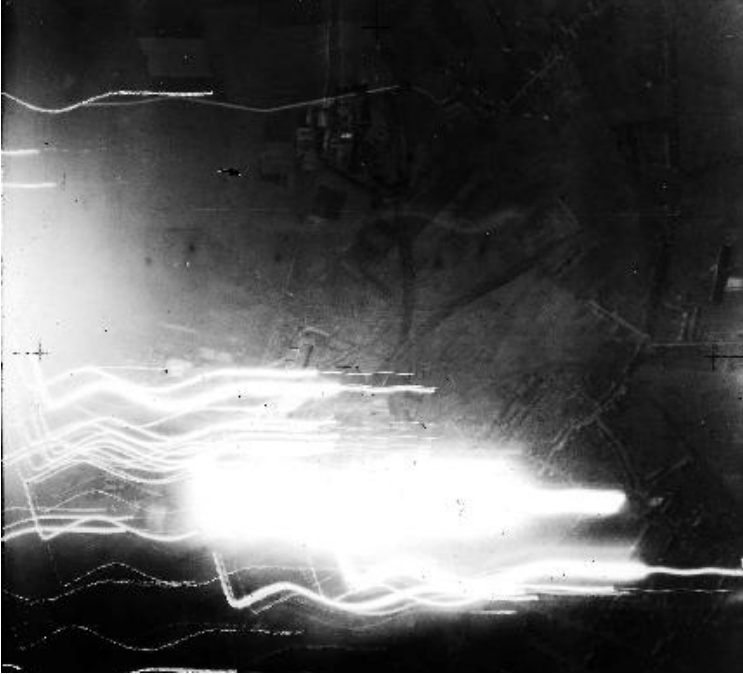
Teacher Resource Pack:
Second World War Handling Collection



Result of a German flying bomb attack on a row of semi detached houses.



Senior RAF personnel at RAF Digby, 1945 shaking hands with King George VI. King George VI is wearing the Marshal of the RAF uniform.



Result of an RAF incendiary bomb attack in Germany. The light from the fires started by the incendiary bombs creates a target for aircraft carrying high explosive bombs.



Prisoners of War, watching aircraft activity above them in Germany, 1943.

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Activities for the classroom

Links to the Curriculum

The Second World War Handling Collection relates to a number of key areas of the National Curriculum. This teacher resource pack is intended to provide some suggestions for classroom activities for a variety of subjects.

History Activities

Activity: Think about what life would have been like for people serving in the RAF during the Second World War. What sort of jobs did they do? What would they have experienced? How did they feel about the families they left behind? Do you think RAF personnel experience the same things today?

Activity: Imagine you work for MI9 during the Second World War. Your job is to design escape and evasion aids for RAF aircrew, such as the button compass or the escape boot. What ideas can you think of? How would they work?

Research: Find out what life was like during the Second World War. Try talking to your elderly relatives and their friends, what happened to them during the war?

Research: What happened in your local area during the Second World War? Were there any bombing raids? Can you find any buildings that have survived the Second World War? Try talking to some of your community's older people; do they have any memories of the Second World War?

Activity: Look at the jobs people could do on the Home Front during the Second World War e.g. Fire Watching, Women's Land Army, Air Raid Warden, Women's Voluntary Service or the Home Guard. Would you like to do any of these jobs? Why?

English Activities

Letter Writing: Write a letter to the person who led your activity or to the Education Team at the RAF Museum, to tell them how you felt about your trip and what you learnt.

Creative Writing: Write a first person account of what it feels like to live during the Second World War. Why not write about how you felt during a recent air raid or how it feels to have a father fighting with the RAF.

Role Play: Act out a typical wartime scene in small groups. Themes could include building an Anderson Shelter, sheltering from a bombing raid, travelling during the blackout or a father going or coming home from an RAF posting.

Poetry: Look at some poems written by people during the Second World War (some examples are included in the additional resources). What emotions have the authors tried to express in them? How do you feel about the Second World War? Try writing your own poem about it.

Art Activities

Activity: Draw or paint a picture showing the damage done in a bombing raid. Try to convey how you feel about air raids.

Science Activities

Activity: Look at how aircraft fly. What are the forces involved? Try designing a paper aeroplane.

Activity: Look at different materials RAF uniforms could be made from. What properties do they need to have? Should they be warm or cool to wear? Does this depend on where the RAF personnel are based?

Activity: Look at how incendiary bombs work. How does burning affect the materials in trees and houses? Can these changes be reversed?

Activity: Look at the Blackout. Why were some materials used to block lights from windows instead of others?

Activity: Design your own air raid shelter. What materials will you use to build it? Think about what properties the shelter needs to have, strong or weak, gas proof or not?

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Additional Resources

WAR POETRY

Airmen

The Airman has nothing to say about this.
The moon is rising and she is not his,
Or wings are caking with malignant ice.

Distant the point where different language speaks.
The hours are minutes and the years are weeks.
The slow gulls wander; and the tracer streaks.

Has nothing to say, and this is done.
At night the long youth of the flaring gun;
Against the great raiders, the great sun.

Returning now the dawn lets him be safe:
No one has really asked him for his life,
Eating eggs and bacon with a fork and knife.

Brian Allwood 1920 - 1944 (RAF Airman)



Lost

They went down, burning, somewhere over Brest,
and Spitfires levelled off to take revenge.
The Hampdens bombed, wheeled went back into the west.
Below them, the uprising sea was stark and strange.
.....This is the way they went, early in September,
Shot from the deep sky while others turned.
They fell, and are a sadness we remember
each time we count those crashed, those not returned.

Herbert Corby 1911 – Present (RAF Corporal)

Parachute Descent

Snap back the canopy,
Pull out the oxygen tube,
Flick the harness pin,
And slap out into the air,
Clear of the machine.

Did you ever dream when you were young
Of floating through the air, hung
Between the clouds and the gay
Be- blossomed land?
Did you ever stand and say,
"To sit and think and be alone
In the middle of the sky
Is my one most perfect wish"?

That was a fore-knowing;
That you knew some day
To satiate an inward crave
You must play with the wave
Of a cloud. And shout aloud
In the clean air,
The untouched-worldly-things-and-mean air,
With exhilarated living.

You knew that you must float
From the sun above the clouds
To the gloom beneath, of a world
Of rarefied splendour to one
Of cheapened dirt, close-knit
In its effort to encompass man
In death.

David Bourne 1921 – 1941 (RAF Pilot Officer)

