A Tale of Chivalry:

British Morale on the Home Front During World War II

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Abstract

The blitzkrieg devastated the British Isle, both structurally and mentally, yet the government and its people never let morale collapse. Survival, unity, honor and tradition ensured that the British would not surrender to the Germans based on Hitler’s terror bombings. This paper analyzes several diaries of Blitz victims as well as government documents regarding home front morale in an attempt to explain how Great Britain maintained public opinion during the Blitzkrieg. This document looks to the many issues during the bombings such as homelessness, lack of food, familial separation, and severe damages to the city, to further explain how morale was most affected. By examining these issues and the major events of the war the reader can understand why morale dipped up and down, yet remain unbroken.
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Introduction

The question whether or not a nation be desirable as an ally is likewise not so much determined by mass of arms but by the presence of a sturdy will to national self-preservation. The British nation will therefore be considered as the most valuable ally in the world as long as it can be counted upon to show that brutality and tenacity in its government, as well as in the spirit of the broad masses, which enables it to carry through to victory any struggle that it once enters upon, no matter how long such a struggle may last, or however great the sacrifice that may be necessary or whatever the means that have to be employed.

- Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 1925

Adolf Hitler claimed that the greatest attribute of the British nation was the “spirit of the broad masses”. During the Second World War, one of Germany’s greatest enemies was the people of the United Kingdom. Germany attempted to bomb England into submission by sending wave after wave of bombers, dropping massive payloads onto the city of London. In his attempts to destroy Britain’s spirit, Adolf Hitler proved his statement to be true. Throughout the war, the resolve of the civilian population would hold strong and endure, and it was reflected in everyday life. Strength, determination, and survival of the daily bombings ensured that Britain would not give into the demands of Hitler’s regime. Homelessness, hunger, separation, and fear did not constrict the nation and “Keep Calm and Carry On” became the mentality of the government and its people.

The Second World War did not begin overnight. The transition from daily life of peace to a life at war progressed gradually. In the summer of 1939, men and women bustled around the city of London, just as they had done for the past fifteen years after the First World War, and the city grew dramatically. About a third of the city had been built
since the turn of the century. Although life continued as it always had, the British government began preparations for airstrikes. The Air Raid Precautions (ARP) organization formed in 1924 to defend against an aerial attack on English soil. It was the ARP’s responsibility to prepare the city for an aerial attack as well as provide shelter, records damages, and organize fire stations. London was a very condensed city, made up of textile mills, warehouses, old Victorian buildings, and narrow streets and alleys making the entire city a ‘Fire Zone’.

Fire had already proven to be a problem in the city. In 1666 the “great fire of London” consumed nearly four fifths of the city. So naturally, the ARP began preparing the city for mass destruction as early as 1939. The data from the Air Ministry and the Home Office predicted that the German Air Force was capable of dropping 600 tons of bombs a day, 121 casualties per ton, resulting in quarter million casualties, three to four million psychiatric cases, three million people made homeless and half the buildings of London destroyed within three weeks. In retrospect these numbers were astronomically high. Nonetheless, the British government and the ARP were prepared for the worst.


3 Trench, London Before the Blitz, 5.

4 Ibid., 5.
Morale in the Early Days of the War

Great Britain declared war on Germany September 3rd, 1939, two days after they invaded Poland. However, there was a short period where neither side engaged in conflict. The people referred to this period as “The Phony War”. The majority of the people in Britain supported the war effort, because the military came to the defense of Poland and it’s people. Although Londoners began to fear the threat of an aerial attack, they “had and unshakeable confidence that Britain would win, that good would triumph over evil.”5 After months of no fighting people began questioning the ‘war effort at home’. The ARP had begun issuing blackouts even before the “Phony War” to help prepare civilians for life under the threat of attack. The blackouts interrupted life for the people of London as streetlights, car lights, and anything that could be visible by an attacking fleet were all banned during the active hours. The “Phony War” caused disdain among the civilian populations. Frank Whipple, a reserve policeman in training, in an attempt to cope with the expected public disorder stated:

“We were trained to use arms in case of an emergency in London. They took us out on the Metropolitan Police Range and we were firing old Canadian 1914 rifles. I remember saying to the inspector, ‘Who are we going to use these on, the invader?’ and he said ‘You’ll use them on Londoners if you have to. If they get out of control when the invasion and the bombings come you’ll have to use them on them’. I remember being quite shocked at the time.”6

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The government began to notice a severe dip in public opinion due to the Phony War and prepared police forces to deal with unruly citizens on the brink of war.

Although, the British had committed troops to France and Belgium, the majority of the fighting had not yet occurred. It was not until April of 1940 that the ‘Phony War’ ended. Britain attempted to stop Hitler’s conquest of Norway and failed. Public morale began to plummet dramatically following the events of May 10th, when the German Army invaded Belgium and Holland.⁷

The war was in full swing in the eyes of Londoners who were awaiting the first bombs of the *Luftwaffe*. Petty Officer Keighly of the 610 Squadron was blown off course and parachuted into a farmer’s field where he encountered an elderly man pointing a rifle at him. The farmer, unsure of Keighly’s allegiance, threatened the soldier claiming he was defending his country from the possibility of attack.⁹ As early as August 7th, 1940 the average citizen was ready for a German offensive. Although prepared for an attack, the people began to unwind. They began blaming their leader for poor leadership.

Christopher Tomlin a 28-year-old paper salesman said:

> I am afraid because I know the wrong men are at the helm. Haven’t we, can’t we, find more men of Churchill’s breed? Considering the millions there are in Britain surely there’s one man among them who can outwit Hitler. ¹⁰

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⁸ German Air Force

⁹ Home Intelligence Reports of Morale, April 7th, 1940. Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 10 Microfilm

¹⁰ Wing, Sandra Koa, ed. *Our Longest Days: A People’s History of the Second World War*, Christopher Tomlin, Diary Entry May 3rd, 1940.
On the same day that Germany invaded the Low Countries\textsuperscript{11}, Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as the Prime Minister of Great Britain. This showed two important factors regarding the nation of England; one being that its government truly listened to what its people wanted; Second, the people had faith in those “at the helm.” It is no doubt that people wanted Winston Churchill’s type of hard-nosed leadership and when he took office it had an immediate effect on popular attitudes toward the war.\textsuperscript{12} A 23-year-old shorthand typists and librarian, Doris Melling, said the next morning:

“Mr Chamberlain has resigned and Winston is to be PM. I think this arrangement is more satisfactory to all concerned. Dutch lines are holding well. The Allies have announced that they will take such steps as they consider necessary if open towns are bombed. At least, if the British don’t the French will.”\textsuperscript{13}

With Churchill at the head of the war effort, people began to backup the government’s decisions. When Churchill took office he began to reassign positions such as the Minister of Information, previously headed by Brendan Bracken.\textsuperscript{14} Under Churchill’s leadership, the British government started to recognize that it could rely on the public’s common sense with information regarding the war at home and abroad. This was much better for morale on the home front. Misleading information regarding the war from the government caused trust issues with the public. There was fear from within the Prime Minister’s office that people would reveal too much information to the enemy.

\textsuperscript{11} Term that the English use for Belgium and Holland

\textsuperscript{12} Mack and Humphries, \textit{London at War}, 22.


\textsuperscript{14} Maureen Waller, \textit{London 1945: Life in the Debris of War}, 71.
Hence the propaganda that followed. The MOI released posters that urged the public to be silent with information regarding ocean vessels and the location of cargo drops. The government asked the people to trust it and also told the public that they trusted them with knowledge of the war. It was an effort to unite the people and the government. Without a united home front England would fall under the coming barrage of German bombers.\footnote{15}{Maureen Waller, \textit{London 1945: Life in the Debris of War}, 72-73.}

Until the evacuation from Dunkirk on May 26\textsuperscript{th}, the British public responded to war efforts negatively when military campaigns failed. However the battle of Dunkirk was a unique exception. A British Expeditionary Force of 350,000 men was forced to evacuate because of repeated German attacks. For a short time when fighting halted the British attempted, and completed, a massive evacuation of troops. Using a makeshift fleet of civilian workboats and naval war ships, they crossed the channel and evacuated nearly 330,000 Anglo-French troops. Although the battle was a disaster militarily, it sparked positivity in Britain due to the massive amounts of propaganda being pumped into the publics hears and eyes. This created the mentality that even in the dreariest of times Britain would maintain a “never say die” attitude. With a righteous tone Christopher Tomlin wrote:

“The \textit{Daily Mail} tells how and why the BEF\footnote{16}{British Expeditionary Force} is hemmed in. I want to do something – I am ready to face the bloody Hun. I register on the 15\textsuperscript{th} of June and now await it with cold fury, sadness and determination. We will beat back the bloody swine or die. We will never surrender.”\footnote{17}{Wing, Sandra Koa, ed. \textit{Our Longest Days: A People’s History of the Second World War}, Christopher Tomlin, Diary Entry May 27th, 1940.}
It was clear that morale was at its high but it would be short-lived and followed by more devastation for the Anglo-French cause.

After Dunkirk, many British began to suspect an invasion, first by air. Yet Germany turned its war machine south to complete its conquest of France. This, of course, was not good news for the Anglo-French forces but it did buy the British valuable time to prepare for an air strike. The cogs of war began to turn in London, fast and steady. The government needed to replace military machines lost and left behind at Dunkirk. Factories began to pump out tanks, munitions, guns, and ships so that London could defend itself against the might of Hitler’s military. Production increased drastically and remained fairly high for weeks after Dunkirk. People were willing to work hard days and hours in response to Churchill’s speech to the House of Commons, most notably he said that the British “would fight to the last and never surrender.\textsuperscript{18}"

The German Army officially overran France, who signed an armistice on June 26\textsuperscript{th}. This event left Great Britain alone in its war against Germany. With no other ally, Britain was sure to receive the full force of Hitler’s \textit{Luftwaffe} and worse the landing army if air superiority was captured. Final preparations for an invasion were made, children were evacuated from the city to the country, shelters were created, early warning systems were initiated daily, and the Home Guard and regular army were preparing defense lines outside of London. More fearful, were the people of the German army. Yet, in the fog of panic and preparation the resolute of the British remained unshaken. Collin Perry was an 18-year-old boy who wrote in his diary on July 9\textsuperscript{th}:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{18} Wing, Sandra Koa, ed. \textit{Our Longest Days: A People’s History of the Second World War}. Doris Melling, Diary Entry June 5\textsuperscript{th} 1940
\end{quote}
\end{footnotesize}
“England today reminds me of David; Germany and her conquered lands of Goliath. The stream is the English Channel and the North Sea. It was David so small, who slew the giant Goliath with a tiny pebble – England is David.”

Regardless of the perilous conditions the English people faced, they managed to stay relatively calm, due in part to their confidence in the Royal Air Force (RAF).

The Luftwaffe had been bombing non-civilian targets for most of the summer and on August 13\textsuperscript{th}, they attacked the Royal Air Force Fighter Command. The RAF held the Germans off, while losing many pilots and aerodromes. This, however, was a boost in morale for the British people. They firmly believed that the RAF could defend the air.

Near the end of August, a few lost planes of the German air force dumped their payload unknowingly over London, fueling a retaliation bombing effort by Britain on Berlin. After England bombed Berlin, Hitler abandoned the true Blitzkrieg. Rather than fighting for air supremacy, the Luftwaffe would attack civilian targets like London. This was a political attack as much as a war maneuver, designed to cripple the morale of the civilian population. Once morale was crushed, Britain would be forced to negotiate terms with Germany to end the Terror Bombing and accept German Dominance. Hitler had used this same method of Terror Bombing on Warsaw in 1939 as well as Rotterdam. The Luftwaffe bombed the civilians into submission until their will to fight was gone. Then with air supremacy the German Army would come in and take control over the crushed cities. Both attacks resulted in surrender to the new German regime. However,

\footnote{Collin Perry, \textit{Boy in the Blitz} (London, England: Leo Cooper, 1972) 8. July 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1940.}

\footnote{Collin Perry, \textit{Boy in the Blitz} (London, England: Leo Cooper, 1972) 8. July 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1940. Wing, Sandra Koa, ed. \textit{Our Longest Days: A People’s History of the Second World War}, Doris Melling Diary Entry August 28\textsuperscript{th} 1940}
Great Britain differed from Warsaw and Rotterdam, they were across the English Channel which was well guarded by the superior British Navy. Regardless of naval superiority Hitler would attempt to Terror Bomb England.

Yet the morale of the people was unbroken. Due to the fact the RAF had held the Germans off so well during the attacks on military targets, citizens assumed that the RAF was capable of out fighting the German pilots altogether. Even in the beginning of civilian bombings, the British held a positive mentality simply because they believed in the RAF. Doris Melling wrote, “Simply terrific. Felt very calm and not the least frightened.”

However, on September 7th the feeling of superiority died out. On a hot Saturday afternoon, several hundred planes bombed the East End of London. The destruction was the most severe to date, hitting the economically poor region of the city. The mass attack continued into the evening killing 430 people and injuring 600 more in East End alone. The death and destruction made tens of thousands of people homeless and would eventually be known as Black Saturday.

**The Blitz**

Black Saturday ushered in the blitz like a thief in the night. A thief that brought with it utter destruction and chaos. Although the ARP had been expecting a major attack they did not anticipate the sheer force that came with the bombs of the *Luftwaffe*. The storm of German bombers caught the British off guard completely, the fire brigade for example declared the fires at the docks “uncontrollable” losing several warehouses filled with goods and exports. Emergency services scrambled around the city after the

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21 Wing, Sandra Koa, ed. *Our Longest Days: A People’s History of the Second World War*, Doris Melling, Diary Entry September 4th, 1940
bombings and nearly broke down. Nurses were not prepared and ambulances did not reach their destinations due to the massive amounts of debris in the streets. Late after the bombings, victims wandered the streets of East End bewildered to the fact that there were no supplies or food to aid them. Bodies littered the streets and the Home Guard continued to dig many more bodies from the wreckage. Overall, the Germans had succeeded in their attempts to shake the public.\textsuperscript{22}

While the government was indeed prepared for air attacks, they misinterpreted the data gathered from the Spanish Civil War (where German military might was first tested). The preparations made before Black Saturday assumed that raids would be quick and destructive and occur in the daylight. This assumption caused many Londoners their lives and homes, as shelters were not prepared to sustain terrified people overnight with food, water, or any comfort. Feeling abandoned and helpless East Enders, who received most of the bombings from September 7\textsuperscript{th}-11\textsuperscript{th}, began to panic in the early days of the blitz. The government and media carefully concealed the mass panic and destruction from the majority of the nation and instead focused on what positivity they could. Stories of heroism and resistance were essential to keeping public morale from collapsing.\textsuperscript{23} The Home Intelligence reported, “In dockside areas the population is showing visible signs of its nerve cracking from constant ordeals.” Days following the reports indicated that people were panicked at the sound of air raid sirens and ran around “madly for shelters

\textsuperscript{22} Mack and Humphries, \textit{London at War}, 44.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 48.
with white faces.” The government attempted to overcome the mass hysteria through the use of strategic and calming propaganda.

The problem with propaganda and hiding the truth was that citizens begin to distrust the authorities in charge and fear that the government could not keep them safe. Widespread looting also contributed to the fear that the government was not there for the people, which of course was covered up by media as well. However, Prime Minister Winston Churchill made a speech on September 11th in an attempt to raise spirits. Churchill’s speech focused on the nation’s rich history of defense and survival against any and all invaders. He reiterated that people should take tremendous pride and care in their nation and be ready to do their duty at any and all costs. The speech moved many in the nation and spirits began to lift once again. Churchill’s speech began a new policy toward the public. Telling people exactly what was going on both home and abroad and reinforcing them with a sense of pride, honor, and perseverance through propaganda became common. The Home Office papers of the Prime Minister recorded that the biggest mistake that the government made early on was that they did not trust the people.  

Although the speech moved many Londoners, the Home Office still feared that morale was on the verge of collapse. East Enders who did not abandon the city began to seek refuge in the city’s tube systems. Local authorities never sanctioned the tube stations

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24 Home Intelligence Reports of Morale, filed September 9th, 1940. Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 10 Microfilm

25 Churchill At War: The Prime Minister’s Office Papers 1940-1945, Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 216. April 7th, 1942. Microfilm Reel
as official shelters and tried to prevent people from using them early on, but the massive crowds simply pushed through workers and city officials. Although this seemed staggering to the government early on, they began to see “the beginning of an attitude of self-reliance and community initiative that was to help build a new spirit of resistance in the next, and critical, weeks of the blitz.”

In the next few weeks, the British began to put up more resistance to the Germans air offensive. Anti-aircraft weapons constantly fought back the waves of German bombers. Largely ineffective against the bombers, the constant gunfire did however improved people’s attitudes toward the war. Frank Edwards recalled in his diary:

“What a night, what a life! At 8.10 the sirens sounded heralding the nightly blitz. Guns started banging away and we went down our cellar…AA (Anti-Aircraft) guns were banging away, one moment sound as though they were outside the front door, and a few seconds later a bit further away.”

Although the people were not much safer with the AA guns, they kept an upbeat attitude in a time of disaster as exemplified in Frank Edwards’s diary.

In the coming months of the blitz, the nation would certainly be tested. Throughout late September and into the early spring months of March constant bombings and air raids kept citizens on their heels and the Home Guard and fire service in constant defense. Yet, a sense of community and patriotism helped to keep morale on the upswing. The months of October and November were certainly not easy for the people of London but they were united in their resistance to the Germans and it helped the war effort. Hitler

26 Mack and Humphries, London at War, 53.

27 Wing, Sandra Koa, ed. Our Longest Days: A People’s History of the Second World War, Frank Edwards, Diary entry September 25th, 1940.
could not defeat Great Britain without defeating the RAF or its superior naval fleet which guarded the English Channel. Nor could he crack the morale of the British population. Without air superiority and the ability to land his army by defeating the British Navy, Hitler could not invade the British Isle.  

It is not to say that the British withstood the blitz and beat the Germans at this point in the war. Hitler was still bound and determined to bomb the British people into submission through terror bombing but his plans of invasion were stumped without air supremacy, oncoming winter, and the might of the British Navy. The British continued through the autumn and winter, with bombings nearly every night, all the while coping with the many problems that the blitz brought. One particular night took a dramatic toll on the resolve of the British people. On the evening of October 15th, 1940, the Germans sent twice as many bombers as they usually had. The massive bombing lasted from dusk till dawn killing 400 people and injured close to 9000. The bombings had been the most destructive in a single night since the first days of the blitz.  

The bombing of October 15th shook the British people to their core foundation. They had started to believe that Britain would outlast the German bombardment. Propaganda had told people everyday throughout the war that they should “keep calm and carry on” and that “London could take it” yet the toll it took on peoples’ lives did not diminish. Herbert Brush stated in his journal after the events in October:  

“What seemed so amusing was the contrast of grim-faced men digging for bodies when, over their heads in the branches of a tall tree, hung four women’s coats, a

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shirt and some curtains. The sight of the dangling clothing seemed funny. Wasn’t, of course – just tragic.”

What people feared most of all was that no place was safe, the bombs that fell that evening destroyed several tube shelters. The Home Intelligence reports recorded “a lowering morale” and people felt that “in a few months time there will be little left of London or its people.”

The next major attack came on December 29th, 1940. The Luftwaffe dropped hundreds of incendiary canisters in the heart of London. That night, the fireguard had not been on watch, resulting in a massive fire that became uncontrolable. Eventually, the fire service men were able to use water from the Thames River to fight back the flames that had just consumed the most historic area of London. Although the night was devastating to Londoners, the next morning St. Paul’s Cathedral was standing and safe (See Figure 6). The survival of the cathedral became a symbol of resistance and survival.

On January 5th, 1941 the New Year brought with it a new low for morale. The dip in morale was a result of inadequate services in the shelters and the repression of political movements, particularly the communists. However, the government acknowledged that repression was not an efficient way of dealing with discontent but rather they should focus on fixing the issues in the shelters. Bad weather resulted in a shortcoming of

30 Wing, Sandra Koa, ed. *Our Longest Days: A People’s History of the Second World War*, Herbert Brush, Diary entry October 26th, 1940.

31 Home Intelligence Reports of Morale, filed October 29th, 1940. Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 10. Microfilm


33 Home Intelligence Reports of Morale, filed January 5th, 1940. Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 10. Microfilm
bombings for the next month, which allowed the government to tackle the problems in the shelters. People became more content with life after the barrage diminished. Meanwhile, adequate and updated shelters helped to improve the conditions they lived in.\textsuperscript{34} As better weather arrived in the spring, so again did the Luftwaffe. Regardless, the Home Intelligence Office noted that people were, “very appreciative” of the “new welfare services.” and that “people did not take so long to recover as in the early days of the blitz.”\textsuperscript{35}

Lastly, on May 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1941 the most severe raid in the war occurred on the city of London. Massive fires throughout the city destroyed hundreds of buildings and the civilian death toll was 1436, more than any other raid. The House of Commons, Westminster Abbey, and other important government offices were hit during the attack. The huge raid could very likely have allowed Hitler to invade England if it had came in the autumn month. However, civilian morale was at a point in the war that it was not going to be beaten down after all they had been through. In fact, the May 10\textsuperscript{th} raid, as destructive as it was, was the final blitz on London. Germany abandoned its massive attacks to focus on their own home front, now being threatened by the Russians. The people of London survived the onslaught of German bombs, ready to take on the war. June 22\textsuperscript{nd} England was no longer alone in the war, and the nation and its people had done their part to remain strong and persevere, even before America’s entry in to war.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{34} Mack and Humphries, \textit{London at War}, 91-2.
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\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 93. Home Intelligence Reports of Morale, filed March 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1941. Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 10. Microfilm
\end{flushleft}
Issues in the Blitz

The blitz on London brought with it extreme duress, caused not only by bombs but also a slew of new problems. In order to warn people against the waves of bombers, early warning signals and sirens were developed to warn citizens to take shelter immediately. The government provided shelter and rest stations for bombed out victims who became homeless. The Ministry of Supply set up food and water stations so people would not go hungry on their limited rations. Meanwhile, the government evacuated 750,000 children to the British countryside to keep them out of harms way. Regardless of all the precautions taken, the people of London suffered greatly and were under immense pressure.

Shelters and the Homeless

Black Saturday ushered in a new idea of what the war brought to the home front. Homelessness became one of the most crippling aspects of life. Bombs destroyed thousands of homes and left thousands more in need for repair. The government was challenged with housing the people who were left homeless. For those who had reasonable wealth, homelessness was only a matter of losing a financial resource. The wealthy were able to spend money to replace or repair their homes and stay in hotels or with relatives. As for the thousands in East End who received the blunt force of the blitz early on, becoming homeless was much more of a challenge. Housing the homeless was a completely different challenge for the government than simply providing shelter for
people. The government created rest centers for people without adequate housing or finances to live on. Rest centers were almost always overcrowded and uncomfortable yet the East Enders took pride in their resilience and efforts toward the war.\textsuperscript{36} A member of the Women’s Voluntary Service wrote to a friend in America regarding the East Ender attitude the morning after a bombing:

“Very little in the way of smiles and jokes but there was also very little in the way of the defeatist kind, in fact when I say there was very little, I should say there was none. There were very few complaints also in spite of the fact that many of the people whom I took in the car from place to place were without any possessions at all except what they had in a small paper bag.”\textsuperscript{37}

While forcing thousands out of their homes is ideal for crippling morale, it did not shatter the home front’s resolute as intended.

Housing the homeless was a key component in keeping morale up while preventing homelessness was important to people’s overall protection. Shelters, designed by the ARP, such as the ‘Anderson’, were used as preventative methods of death (See Figure 5). The government was also inclined to provide public shelters and reinforce basements for people who did not qualify for a home shelter. The government was reluctant to use the cities tube system\textsuperscript{38} for public shelters early on. They feared that the tubes would be bombed out, killing massive amounts of people and causing dismay among the civilian population. In many cases they were right when the tubes were destroyed people panicked. Although the government did not sanction the use of tubes as

\textsuperscript{36} Bell, \textit{London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz}, 60.

\textsuperscript{37} Margaret Gaskin, \textit{Blitz: The Story of December 29, 1940}, 39.

\textsuperscript{38} British term for subway tunnels
shelters people nonetheless used them as a cheap and reliable shelter. Regardless of their position, the government aided those who used tubes as shelters by providing septic and water services during night raids.  

Overall, people did not rely heavily on the government’s shelter provisions. In fact, only 4% used the tubes, 9% used public shelters, and 27% used domestic shelters. The majority of London used their own homes as shelters or used no shelter at all. People that refused to use shelters did so on the grounds that they must assert positive morale in everyday life and resist the raids.  

Even in the hardest days of the blitz (November 1940) Isabelle Granger stated firmly in a letter to her Canadian friend, “It is impossible to live in a constant state of emergency. One of the things Nazism is up against is a normal way of living: I intend to cling to it. It is possible to disregard the raids up to a point, we have learned to do it, to lead a happy life and see a lot of out friends.” Staying positive in the middle of a bombing was not an anomaly in World War II Britain, Jeannie and Winnie Bowman took shelter in a public East End shelter later recalled:

“Practically no talk of horrors at all, the air raid wardens, in bedroom slippers mostly, went and fetched beer from the pub, which was miraculously still intact, tea and water. The women who had been up all night in this horror were amazingly clean, it was a thing that astonished Jeannie and me that they all appeared to have found something clean to put on and have given themselves a hearty wash...All weak I did this work, and the more I saw of those people the more I wondered. I’ve always loved them and got on with them, but I’ve never known just how grand they were before.”

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39 Bell, London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz, 60  
40 Bell, London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz, 60  
41 Ibid.  
42 Gaskin, Blitz: The Story of December 29, 1940
Regardless of the “horrors” that the blitz brought to the people of London, people remained calm and acceptant of their situation, and often reveled in their resistance to the Nazis.

**Food Shortage and Rationing**

Homelessness and destruction of property affected Londoners greatly but they accepted their fate because they understood the consequences of war. They persevered regardless of their conditions as proud citizens who would never give in to the Germans. Although homelessness had lasting impacts on the public, other factors of war tested the endurance of the British people. Food shortages brought discontent to many Londoners who had to give up imperial delicacies for carrots and potatoes. Equally disturbing to the people was the system of rationing, which was considered unfair by many. The Ministry of Food propagated an idea of “fair for all,” an idea that the public did not fully support simply because the system of rationing was not viewed as such.

Food rationing affected daily life in London dramatically. As soon as the war started the British government became responsible for the supply and distribution of staple foods. Citizens were urged to register with grocers and retailers for such foods as butter, bacon, sugar, and meat. “After the fall of France in the spring of 1940, food supplies were in danger of falling dangerously low and the government implemented an extension of rationing due to Great Britain’s dependency on imported foods.”

As the blitz continued over the skies of England and in the English Channel rationing increased and extended to most foods. Margarine, preserves, cheese, and even canned goods were

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low in supply. Consistent bombardment and food shipments to troops made the home front harder to feed. Nonetheless, the government and local authorities did their best to keep people fed throughout the blitz.\footnote{Ibid., 69.}

The national government implemented food schemes in order to keep it as fair as possible. The “fair for all” idea was essential to promote to the public so to keep morale from dropping. They created a feeding program for workers that would provide them with meals in the workday, which could be paid for by rations. The Ministry of Food created the Milk Scheme, which was designed to provide mothers (also expecting mothers) with free or subsidized milk. Robert Boothby, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food claimed that these programs had lasting effects on the population and would “stand the test of time.”\footnote{Bell, \textit{London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz}, 70.}

Local authorities set up feeding centers and stations where people could pay for affordable meals. Local kitchens and feeding centers exemplified British unity. The first feeding center was set up on the Isle of Dogs in September of 1940 and in two weeks the London County Council had twenty-seven more stations and kitchens set up. By 1943, 242 cafeterias were in commission. Although there was unity among citizens, there was a struggle between the government and the people in regards to food shortages and rationing.

When rationing was implemented and shortages increased, people were forced to change their diets and thus their way of life. Before the war a working class diet consisted
of fats, eggs, and sugar but after the war began grains, potatoes, dairy products, and vegetables became the norm. These were dramatic changes in flavor that people were not keen to. The change in diet is the basket that the Ministry of Food placed its eggs. They focused their propaganda on the change in foods, proposing that by eating these foodstuffs they were contributing to the war effort. The propaganda also focused on the idea that rationing was a “fair share for all”.\textsuperscript{46} Many citizens did not want to accept the change in diet and were not fans of rationing in general, such as Mrs. M. Morris a nurse who recalls being hungry at work:

“We dash about all day and I am always hungry. There are times particularly in the forenoon when I feel so faint from hunger that it is impossible to carry out my innumerable duties. Our food ration is totally inadequate – 1 oz. cheese, 2 oz. butter per week and one egg each fortnight, and of course our one orange each month. … Serving the patients lunches is a painful experience. It is exquisite agony to have to serve food wen one is so hungry.”\textsuperscript{47}

Although people understood the necessity for rationing many others did not believe that rationing was fair for all. Women generally received less rations than men unless they were expecting mothers and manual laborers received extra rations as to keep up their energy levels. Equally frustrating to citizens was that retailers and restaurants often overlooked rationing limits for their favorite clients or to sell food on the black market. Edie Rutherford furious with the system of rationing writes:

Lately I have several times had pitying looks from folk to whom I have admitted that in rations I get exactly what I am entitled to, and no more. No matter ho Lord

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

Woolton schemes, unscrupulous folk can outwit him, shopkeepers as well as public, and he never will get a fair distribution while such people exist.\textsuperscript{48}

Many thought that the rationing system and distribution of food was unfair throughout the war, thanks to people who abused the system and the constant propaganda telling people what to do. The Ministry of Food tried to change public opinion through propaganda but it failed, resulting in up and down attitudes toward rationing and food shortages.

\textbf{Families in the Blitz}

Homelessness and the lack of food changed the way people lived and perceived the war, but did not shake the resilience of the British population. However these were not the only trials that would test the strength of the nation. Early preparations for the war involved evacuating 750,000 children to the countryside of England.\textsuperscript{49} A strategic government decision to prevent childhood fatality and mental trauma also resulted in a significant dip in moral particularly for mothers. Families in the blitz experienced a drastic change in the fundamental structure of the family, which would have major impacts on day-to-day life and attitudes toward the war.

The war brought great stress to the fundamental nature of families, specifically the working class. Fathers were being sent over seas to serve, mothers were being mobilized to work, children were being evacuated to the countryside, loss of homes caused great distress, families were often confined to shelters for long periods of times,

\textsuperscript{48}Wing, Sandra Koa, ed. \textit{Our Longest Days: A People’s History of the Second World War}, Edie Rutherford, Diary entry January 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1943.

\textsuperscript{49}Mack and Humphries, \textit{London at War}, 14.
and extreme rationing and shortages made resources scarce. All the while the government had public concern for the family to reflect middle class values. These stressful factors contributed to the daily struggles families endured throughout the war and they had major impacts on the morale of the nation.  

Due to low birth rates in the late 1920s and ‘30s the government was concerned with the welfare of its young population both their physical health as well as mental health. They strongly encouraged evacuation at the onset of war in an attempt to get children to the safety of the countryside or to Canada. This plan was flawed however. It revealed poor government planning in the beginning of the war and it focused middle class attention on the poor regions of the city. The mass evacuation also had consequences with morale. Mothers and families who were separated from children at a moments notice were saddened to see their children leave their side at the onset of a global war. J.R. Frier recalls in the early days of the war, seeing mothers after their children have departed, “Saw several red eyes in the town, which had been flooded with parents from London all day.” Although mothers were saddened to see their children leave, many folk believed this to be a better alternative than to have the children in the middle of a bombardment.

The government strongly promoted “the family as the key institution that would enable the British to surmount the crisis of war, but also to represent Britain as ‘one big

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family’’’52. Bombed out East enders were often evacuated to the West End, while many middle class workings schemes set families up in poorer regions, resulting in a mingling of classes that helped to unify the nation. 53

The stresses of shelter life were evident among families during the war. Being forced to live in cramped conditions and relying on very little resources made life hard yet people managed with what they had. The government promoted the family as essential to winning the war and staying united and people reluctantly obliged under the most unfortunate circumstances. Although children evacuation cause distain among mothers it was beneficial for their safety early on. In conclusion, families persevered through many problems yet remained remarkably intact after the war.

State of Morale as reported by the Home Office

The state of public opinion and home front morale had been a subject of concern through the entire war. Such so, that the Home Intelligence Office issued weekly reports pertaining to the actions and thoughts of the people. These reports were top secret and only circulated amongst the many governmental departments of wartime England. While these reports were read by many, other departments found them to be inadequate and ineffective. Yet they were a useful tool for creating policy and assessing the welfare of the people in the middle of the Blitz. 54

52 Bell, London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz, 111.
53 Ibid.
54 Churchill At War: The Prime Minister’s Office Papers 1940-1945, Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 216. Microfilm Reel
The Home Office changed its policy of keeping up morale due to the high fluctuation in public opinion in the early months of the air raids. The old plan involved the high use of propaganda that defended the government and its many departments’ wartime decisions. It also refrained from telling the public about wartime problems and concerns in Europe. The early reports record low dips in morale that had the government in fear of public collapse. These reports suggest that the government’s methods for keeping people calm were failing. Discontent among the people continued with each major bombing and the government was forced to change its policy.  

A new policy was implemented that still actively used propaganda but rather than defending the governments decisions against the people, the plan focused on what the people wanted and what they were thinking. The government also took a new look at what the public had problems with. A major problem of the people had been the lack of information they received regarding wartime activities. Early in the war the government was reluctant to tell people of the failures abroad and disasters at home in fear that the people would lose a sense of hope and give up. Although the government grossly misinterpreted its people, they began to trust the public with more knowledge of the war.  

The Home Intelligence office produced morale reports weekly while the Home Office rarely meddled with public opinion. This was due, in part, to the hefty workload

55 Churchill At War: The Prime Minister’s Office Papers 1940-1945, Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 216. Microfilm Reel

56 Churchill At War: The Prime Minister’s Office Papers 1940-1945, Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 216. Microfilm Reel
put on Winston Churchill’s desk. The war itself, industrial output, and simply governing as the Prime Minister made it difficult to focus solely on particular issue. However, as home front morale fluctuated, the man at the helm became more and more invested in the people’s opinions. Most frequent addresses to public morale were when they reached low points. After months of tweaking the policy regarding public opinion the Home Office weighed in April 7th, 1942. 57

First and most importantly the Home Office and the Prime Minister wanted to emphasized that the document released was only of personal impressions regarding morale. There was no mathematical formula or equation to calculate how high and low morale was. Rather the reports that had been issued by the Home Intelligence were of a subjective manner. The report looks back at the bombing raids from 1940-42 and attempts to provide reasoning behind the poor morale as well as reasoning for refusal to surrender. The Home Office claimed that:

“The wide spread feeling of frustration and bewilderment is felt to be largely due to a belief that the people are not being sufficiently taken into the confidences of the government. The natural reaction to this is a loss of public confidence in the government. This public belief may be ill founded but that is immaterial to the issue.”

Although the government believed itself to be considerate to the people, the public believed otherwise resulting in a dip in morale. It was because of these allegation that the government was forced to change its policy. 58

57 Ibid.
58 Churchill At War: The Prime Minister’s Office Papers 1940-1945, Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 216. Microfilm Reel
The document looked to many spheres of influence on public opinion primarily focusing on propaganda. It was the wide felt belief of the home office that “Strain of two and a half years (of bombing) has permanently reduced automatic resilience.” They felt that a solid and “carefully laid plan of publicity and explanation, whether or not [we have] victories in the field,” the exception being, any situation that could risk massive loss or national unity. The plan for maintaining morale was previously based on defending the government’s decisions; the report indicates a change in attitude and policy to focus on creating a positive state of morale. The state of morale’s basis evolved to correctly appreciate public thought.59

The report called for a new method for reporting public opinion. The Home Intelligence office was still in charge of recording the information, but they were encouraged to share that information and discuss it with any concerned government departments. Equally important was that departments were to be required to work with the Intelligence office to produce a precise weekly report. The last component of the new system was that a report be issued to the Home Office and its cabinet less frequently, while being more thorough about its contents. Similarly to the new reports, a new unified form of governing regarding the creation and distribution of propaganda was implemented. This enabled each department to work closer together and plan more efficiently.60

59 Churchill At War: The Prime Minister’s Office Papers 1940-1945, Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 216. Microfilm Reel

60 Ibid.
Continuing in its planning and overview of public opinion was the discussion of Armed Forces news, a very sensitive subject to simply spew to the public. The Armed Forces officials in charge of relaying wartime news to the government were hesitant to give information to the media and often worried about the security of their forces. However, the government was in full support of trusting people with information. Therefore the government had to insist less censorship on the media in hopes of boosting morale. The basis for their argument was that the public services were better equipped to relay military information to the public given their training and aptitude in the field. “If a trained publicist cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear he can at least interest the public in pigskin,” a statement made in the report suggesting that the public services were far more skilled in the art of public relations.61

The report concludes, that the problems of morale so far derive from public discomfort in the government. The people did not feel their government trusted them and the result of that was people began to distrust their government. The report notes that after policy shifted morale began to become steadier and thus less likely to break. Although the report was issued after the major bombings, it discusses the problems that caused much discontent. It also explained more efficient and positive ways for the government to boost morale, all the while asserting the position that the people and government needed to be unified and trust one another to keep a positive state of morale constant.62

61 Churchill At War: The Prime Minister’s Office Papers 1940-1945, Unit 9, Item: PREM 4/40 Reel 216. Microfilm Reel

62 Ibid.
Conclusion

The people of Britain kept a level head during the blitz. Although, morale would dip, the people never let it falter completely. It is important to note that many of the boosts in moral can be attributed to the British Government’s efforts. They kept a mindful eye on the morale of the country. They tried their best to ensure that mass panic did not occur and when it did they tried to rein it in. Using propaganda, surveillance, and trust in their citizens, the British government found ways to keep people calm and they were always aware of their conditions. While morale took a downward turn in the autumn and winter of 1940-41, proper government action and trust in the people ensured that morale did not falter.

Britain withstood the blunt force of the Blitzkrieg thanks also to the resilience of the civilian population and the strength of its navy. The government reinforced old English ideas of chivalry against an evil tyrant to keep people calm. They trusted that the people would fight and survive to the last man, women, and child. People trusted the government to provide the protection they needed to survive. Proper preparations and precautions before and during raids, and a great home defense system kept people housed, safe, fed, and also ensured faith in the government. To survive, the nation needed to remain united and resolute regardless of the devastation. In conclusion, the government reinforced the people of England to hold on to age-old traditions of honor, strength, and survival to unite as a nation and withstand the Blitzkrieg.
Appendix

Figure A.1: Map of London, England 1940
Figure A.2: Keep Calm and Carry On Propaganda Poster

Figure A.3: September 7th, 1940 Devastation, Winston Churchill on Looking

Source accessed: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11175676
Figure A.4: Taking Refuge in the Tubes

Source Accessed: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-1294420/Blitz-Diary
LifeUnder-Fire-Second-World-War-An-exclusive-extract-Carol-Harriss-newbook.html
Figure A.5: Anderson Shelter

Source Accessed: http://www.bigginhill-history.co.uk/andersonwhatis.htm
Figure A.6: St. Paul’s Cathedral December 29th, 1940


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