

Why did the british
evacuate children
from britain's major



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In 1939 the British government decided to evacuate children from the major cities. On the first of September the evacuation began. It was called 'Operation Pied Piper'. A main reason for evacuation was because the government knew that the war would be a 'total war' and there had been a major advance in air technology bringing bombing to the major cities which would kill in huge numbers. To prevent this from harming young innocent children they moved them out of the way to the countryside with villagers known as hosts. The evacuation process was voluntary and 1. million children were evacuated (c735, 000 of which were travelling alone).

Evacuations were for children school aged. They went with friends and siblings, their mothers or other responsible persons accompanied children under the school age, expectant mothers and disabled people were also evacuated. The country was divided into three different types of zones; first being 'evacuation areas' in which were expected to be heavily bombed, second was 'reception area' which were mainly countryside areas safe from bombing, the third zone was the 'neutral area' which could suffer light attacks.

Evacuees were sent to the 'Reception areas' of Britain as they were thought to be safe from bombings. Another important, long term reason for evacuation was the legacy of the first world war. During early ww1 there were bombings from the air via zeppelins these bombings were along the coast the zeppelins could level buildings in seconds but they were highly vulnerable from ground fire as their gigantic size was easy to shoot at. Zeppelin bombings continued throughout the war. In 1917 the Germans used Gotha Bombers on London killing men, women, and children.

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The Gotha bomber was a highly successful heavy bomber. As the war continued everyone was trying to improve air technology and by 1939 aircraft designs had got more complex and could fly lower and for a lot longer, this worried the government as they knew that with the new planes they would be able to reach anywhere and would bomb all the major towns and cities bringing danger to everyone. The government knew this would be a huge threat to the public as well as their industries and defences.

These advancements in technology also meant that air-raids were infinitely harder to defend against. Stanley Baldwin, a government minister, stated in 1932: " I think it is as well for the man in the street to realise there is no power enough that can prevent him from being bombed. The bomber will always get through". This shows that the British government were worried about what was to come should war break out, and encouraged the government to move the children from these main targets (such as London, Liverpool etc)

The government and the public saw the devastation and destruction caused by The Bombing of Guernica (April 26 1937) and knew that it would be on the same scale or even bigger. In 1936, a civil war began between the Nationalists and Republicans in Spain. In the war, Hitler supported the Nationalists and their leader, Francisco Franco. The bombing of Guernica came during this civil war, and caused destruction and public death (c1000 but in recent research it was much less).

The bombings came in three waves of terror, killing innocent civilians and destroying the town. This affair was public so everyone got to see the terror

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that was brought with the bombings. This brought terror to the public; the British newspapers reported the disaster as 'ghastly', they said that it was usually market day which tells the public that the attack was planned out so that civilians died. In addition, buildings that were damaged included a school containing young children and a hospital containing wounded of the civil war.

This showed Hitler's ruthlessness in foreign policy and disregard for civilian life. This made it apparent to the British government that the need to protect civilians, particularly children, was great. The Bombings at Shanghai were also public so that everyone could see the devastation caused by air. The complete destruction of the town showed the advance in plane technology and showed how easy it was to strike on the innocent unknowing public.

This scared the British as they saw many disturbing sights from what's left after the attack such as the photograph of a poor baby sitting on the train track after the attack, injured, dirty and crying*. The attacks were on very populated areas such as the train station, it killed tens of thousands of people in a few minutes, this showed how little time they would have to escape and what would happen to them, their homes and most of all there children.

The government created a film convincing parents to evacuate their children this piece of propaganda was called 'westward ho' it was made by the bbc in 1939, this film showed evacuation as a fun and exciting time for children, this made the parents feel less anxious and more happy about evacuation the film made everything look joyful and thrilling, it didn't show children

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crying or being upset (which they were bound to do as they were leaving their parents for the first time and they didn't know when they would be back). The families of the evacuees carefully said goodbye and gave their child a hug and off they went happily.

In the film it repeats the word safety to make sure the families feels safe. In the film they go to a nice school and a 'hearty meal' and go in 'twos or threes so they're never alone'. The journey is said to be quick and easy and the children feel like it's ' a great adventure' and it's said that there is a 'spirit of adventure and a spirit of holiday' these all make the process seem fun and just like a holiday, which makes the parents feel secure as everyone enjoys a holiday. The film also shows a world map focusing on northern Europe.

Mothers from Norway, Holland, Belgium and France tell that they did not have time to evacuate their children and encourage the families in Britain to do so this would make the mothers feel guilty if they did not evacuate there children, it made them feel like they weren't protecting their child if they didn't, also in the film it shows a soldier saying ' if we know our children are safe we will fight better' this is encouraging to the mother as she will think her husband will fight much better and approve of her decision to send their children to strangers.

Throughout the film language is used very cleverly and to persuade and put the mothers mind at rest. The film worked and many people did send their children off for evacuation. Another reason for the government evacuating children was that even children should help in the war effort. They did this by getting out of the way and not keeping their mothers at home when they

could be out working and earning money or building things to put towards the war: with children out of the way mothers didn't have to worry about their children and this made women a lot more independent and they enjoyed it.

Finally, the trigger cause for evacuation was the Munich Agreement (in hindsight sometimes known as the Munich Crisis). Although Chamberlain claimed that there would be 'Peace in our time', evacuation plans were set in motion immediately after Chamberlain returned to Britain. This may have been because the British government realised their policy of appeasement had failed, and that war was inevitable. Soon after, this was proved to be the right decision as Germany invaded Poland and Britain declared war on them.

In conclusion, there were several long and short-term causes of evacuation. The main reason the government evacuated children from the major cities in the early years of ww2 is because of the public fear, the fear of being bombed without any warning like in Guernica and Shanghai; they were not prepared and had no warning and as a result many died including children. They saw the public display of destruction in the towns and they didn't want it to happen to them.

The government created the propaganda film to encourage the process which worked but they could of made it compulsory for all as some of the children who didn't died as a result. The evacuation saved many lives and worked, but it had difficulties such as some children didn't get on with their parents when they returned, they lost their parents, hosts treated their evacuee badly, some hosts didn't get on with the evacuee's mothers, but

only a few people went home due to this. The majority stayed and had a good time during their stay, and evacuation saved potentially thousands of children.