**Section européenne**

**Terminales – 2015**

**G1 – Historians and World War II Memories**

**The People’s War**

**Source 1: Churchill speech, May 13, 1940 - given in the House of Commons**

On Friday evening last I received from His Majesty the mission to form a new administration […] A war cabinet has been formed of five members, representing, with the Labour, Opposition, and Liberals, the unity of the nation. It was necessary that this should be done in one single day on account of the extreme urgency and rigor of events […].

I say to the House as I said to ministers who have joined this government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many months of struggle and suffering.

You ask, what is our policy? I say it is to wage war by land, sea, and air. War with all our might and with all the strength God has given us, and to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy.

You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word. It is victory. Victory at all costs - Victory in spite of all terrors - Victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival.

**Source 2**

During the winter and spring of 1940-41 German bombers raided the industrial areas, towns and ports of Britain, day and night, and the awe-struck world wondered for how long the British people could take it. But the nation had something more than its stiff-upper-lip courage to keep it going. Britain had the most inspired war leader this country has ever produced, Winston Churchill. His commanding, bull-dog spirit, his brilliant gift of fiery eloquence and his superb skill in the strategy of war, time and again rallied the people and brought them through the terrifying experiences of this war.

Source: *History of the World for Young Readers*, 1965.

**Source 3: Historian who challenged the popular conception of British national unity during the Second World War (June 12, 2008).**

Calder made his mark with *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (1969), a work which drew on oral testimony and a mass of neglected social documentation to show that while it was the Many as much as the Few who sustained the drive to victory, the popular image of national unity against the foe was largely a myth, with strikes commonplace, the government often unpopular and Churchill frequently disparaged. The book won him the John Llewellyn Rhys prize in 1970 and has remained in print ever since as the definitive account of life on the "Home Front".

In a follow-up work, *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991), Calder examined how the German bombings generated ideas and images of plucky and stoical suffering and resistance that defined post-war Britain's sense of itself; but it also showed that the "chirpy Cockney", "all pull together" stereotypes were partly propaganda which hid the reality of an inequality of suffering due to deep social divisions, and concealed unheroic stories of opportunistic looting and rape.

Source: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/2119621/Angus-Calder.html

**Source 4**

Imagine a typical suburban street, which had lived by the golden rule of ‘keeping itself to itself’, suddenly being plunged into forming warden and first aid posts, savings groups, fire watching teams, make-do-and-mend parties; and when coal grew scarce, sharing the cooking and evening fires. No wonder that within weeks of continuous raids, communities were forged whose friendship and loyalty was so absolute that they not only survived the worst that the enemy could throw at them, but emerged with a faith in each other that was as unexpected as it was inspiring.

Source: Anne Valery, *Talking About the War*, 1991.

**Source 5**

The presence of at common enemy must have helped Britons feel more united than ever before, but too much emphasis can be put on this. Class distinctions were certainly not totally eradicated: and, as George Orwell once noted, the hardships of rationing were ‘to put it mildly, tempered for anyone with over £2000 a year’. He also noted that you could only get an important job if you talked with the right accent. Nor does the image of a united nation take account of the black market that ﬂourished during the war or of looting or of the crime rate, which jumped in 1940 and remained high throughout the war.

Source: Robert Pearce, *Contemporary Britain*, 1914-79, published in 1996

**Source 6**

From first to last, his part in winning the war was greater than any man's — British, American or Russian. He was fertile in resource, inexhaustible in argument, and a spur and stimulus to bold action of any kind. As prime minister, Churchill oversaw every department of the country’s life and moulded it into an instrument of total war. This gigantic man fired the whole nation with his passionate indignation, pugnacity [readiness to ﬁght], impatience and refusal to admit defeat. Without him there would have been no triumph.

Arthur Bryant, *The historian*, 1959.

**Source 7**

Surveying the situation in July 1945 it was hard to argue that Britain had won in any sense save that of avoiding defeat. He had destroyed the awful tyranny of Hitler, but what had risen in its place? At the end of the war Churchill was, once again, faced with what looked like an attempt by one power (USSR) to dominate Europe, an odd result for so much expenditure of treasure and manpower. Churchill stood for the British Empire, for British independence and for an anti-Socialist vision of Britain. By July 1945 the first of these was on the skids, the second was dependant solely on America and the third had just vanished in a Labour election victory.

John Charmley, *From Churchill: The End of Glory*, 1993

**Source 8: Down the Memory Hole in British Schools: Winston Churchill**

FURY erupted last night after Sir Winston Churchill was axed from school history lessons. Britain’s cigar-chomping World War Two PM — famed for his two-finger victory salute — was removed from a list of figures secondary school children must learn about. Instead they will be taught about “relevant” issues such as global warming and drug dangers. […]

The decision to axe Churchill is part of a major shake-up aimed at dragging the national curriculum into the 21st century, it was claimed last night.

[…] Churchill — voted the greatest ever Briton — goes off the required lessons list, along with Hitler, Gandhi, Stalin and Martin Luther King. Though Churchill's apparent demotion is the most appalling, it's hard to imagine what any history teacher might say about the 1940s and 1950s without mentioning the names of the others.

*Source : free information website Newsbusters.org*

**The Blitz spirit’s memory**

1. Read sources 2, 3 and 5 and explain why we can say that there was a shift in historiography.
2. Read source 4 and demonstrate that the collective memory of the Blitz spirit resisted this challenge.

**Churchill’s memory**

1. Read sources 2, 6 and 7 and explain why we can say that there was a shift in historiography.
2. Read source 8 and demonstrate that the collective memory of Churchill resisted this challenge.

**Source 9: Why is there no London monument for the Blitz?**

The Blitz began on September 7th, 1940, seventy years ago today, when London was attacked by 300 German bombers. It lasted three months as London was bombed for 57 consecutive nights. Up to 20,000 Londoners were killed, many thousands were wounded and 3.5 million houses were damaged or destroyed. And yet, astonishingly, London – a city of a thousand statues – still does not have a single worthwhile monument to the citizens who suffered the Blitz.

The story of the Blitz is a familiar one, and while the ‘Blitz Spirit’ narrative can be trite and over-mythologised, there was undoubtedly some truth to it. Yet while London has a Monument for the 1666 Fire, it still does not properly commemorate those who experienced the Blitz. There’s a small park in Wapping, a minor plaque by St Paul’s, near the firefighters monument, one in St James’s Churchyard on Piccadilly, and dozens of plaques to individual explosions. But there is no single iconic statue or monument prominently placed and devoted to the citizens of London. The Museum of London now contains a stunning WWII tribute. The Blitz room is a single stark shadowy space, with an unexploded bomb hanging from the ceiling. The walls show still images of the Blitz, while survivors recount their experiences on audio. It’s incredibly moving, but it isn’t enough.

Why doesn’t London pay sufficient tribute to its Blitz Spirit? I asked Jane Furlong, project coordinator of the UK National Inventory of War Memorials, and her answer boiled down to one word:  politics. Furlong told me: ‘As with all memorials, it’s down to whether individual groups or people want to commemorate something. Also, is there a need of it among those who lived to tell the tale? There are lots of service veterans who want to make sure what they did is never forgotten and a memorial is the best way to do that and so they can go away and organise and make sure it happens. It is all down to having that desire; the community needs to take the lead.’ Of course, that didn’t stop the Animals In War memorial from getting built, but they managed to enlist the high-profile support of patrons such as the Princess Royal, Kate Adie, Vera Lynn.

If London is to get the Blitz Spirit memorial it deserves – a dignified sculpture in a prominent public place, dedicated to all Londoners who experienced the Blitz – it requires somebody to take the initiative. And that, ironically, would chime against the spirit of the Blitz in the winter of 1940-1941.

Peter Watts (*Sunday Times* and  *Times* journalist) on his blog “The Great Wen”, September 2010

NB: Kate Adie is a BBC journalist, well known for reporting from war zones.

Vera Lynn is a singer, songwriter and actress whose musical recordings and performances were enormously popular during WWII, she is known as the “Forces’ sweetheart”.

**Oral work:** introduce source 9, then answer the title’s question

**Word box:**

awe-struck = impressionné, stupéfait

stiff-upper-lip = flegme, stoïcisme

fiery = fougueux, impétueux, explosive

foe = ennemi, adversaire

disparage = dénigrer, décrier

plucky = courageux, qui a du cran (familier)

chirpy = gai, enjoué (familier)

looting= pillage

mend = réparer

spur = éperon, stimulant

on the skids = sur la pente, déraper

axe= couper, supprimer, réduire de manière drastique

chomp = mâcher (bruyamment)

demotion = rétrogradation

national curriculum = programme scolaire national

shift in historiography = changement, déplacement, dans la manière d’écrire l’histoire

trite = banal, galvaudé, rebattu

stark = nu, désolé

boil down = réduire, se résumer à

The Great Wen = London