

HISTORY : The historian and the memories of WW2 in the UK

Topic: The Battle of Britain: a RAF exclusive victory ?

Document 1: The Royal Air Force according to Prime Minister Churchill.

The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world (...) goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

All hearts go out to the fighter pilots, whose brilliant actions we see with our own eyes day after day; but we must never forget that all the time, night after night, month after month, our bomber squadrons travel far into Germany, find their targets in the darkness by the highest navigational skill, aim their attacks, often under the heaviest fire, often with serious loss, with deliberate careful discrimination, and inflict shattering blows upon the whole of the technical and war-making structure of the Nazi power.

Excerpt from Churchill's speech on August 20, 1940 delivered at the House of Commons, London.

Document 2: The Battle of Britain debate.

« *The Royal Navy did not win the 'Battle of Britain': But we need a holistic view of Britain's defences in 1940* »
by Christina Goulter, Andrew Gordon and Gary Sheffield, all 3 military historians.

« In truth, the notion that in John Keegan's words 'some 2500 young pilots had alone been responsible for preserving Britain from invasion' has long been disputed by historians. As far back as 1958 Duncan Grinnell-Milne made the case for the principal role of the RN [Royal Navy] in preventing invasion, and two years later Captain Stephen Roskill, the British Official Historian, argued for the primacy of 'lack of adequate [German] instruments of sea power' and the knowledge of their use in the thwarting of Operation Sealion. A few years later Telford Taylor produced what is still probably the most thorough study of the question, in which he integrated [put together] the air and maritime dimensions [aspects]. Wing Commander H.R. Allen, himself a Spitfire pilot, published in 1974 a controversial book on the subject. Allen defined the Battle of Britain widely, to encompass more than just the air battle, and concluded that the importance of the air and maritime dimensions had been respectively exaggerated and underestimated. »

Article published in 2006

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/worldwar2/theatres-of-war/western-europe/investigation/battle-ofbritain/sources/docs/4/>

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Topic: The UK and the Holocaust during WW2: a heroic action ?

Document: The Kindertransport emerging memory at the end of the 1980s.

In 1988 Bertha Leverton, a Kindertransport child living in London, began to plan a local 50th anniversary reunion of the Kindertransports. The news spread and the local gathering became an international reunion. In June 1989 over 1,200 people, Kinder (as they now called themselves) with spouses and children, arrived from all parts of the United Kingdom, Israel, the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries including Nepal. They came to see and find old friends, to rejoice in their survival, to thank the people of Britain, to say Kaddish for the thousands of parents who with the strength of love had sent their children away to live, with the inner knowledge that they themselves might not. The majority of Kinder had never seen their parents again. In a letter read at this first major reunion of Kinder in England, Baroness Thatcher, then the Prime Minister of England, wrote "I am pleased and proud that the Government of the time offered you refuge and help, following the dreadful persecution you suffered in Germany and Central Europe. You came to us as homeless children and grew up to enrich the life of this country with your courage and fortitude."

The North American Kinder returned enthused from the London reunion and wanted to maintain their new and renewed associations. Eddy Behrendt in New York conceived of and, with the help of a few others, formed and launched the Kindertransport Association in 1989. Approximately 2,500 Kinder had emigrated to the United States and Canada, and the response was immediate. Hundreds of Kinder and their spouses and children joined the new organization.

http://www.kindertransport.org/history06_London.htm

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Topic: Is the memory of WW2 a tool to break the union of the UK ?

Document 1: Examples of Official Posters during the Blitz in the UK.



Document 2: Poster in favor of Scottish independence, 2014

