

Britain's Fight in WWII – By David Gray

This article looks at Britain's contribution to WWII from the British side at the time, and an appraisal of the 'British Tommy' from the American viewpoint. This article comprises a number of stories published in 1944 and 1945. Notes in [square brackets] are my own.

Daily Mail, Wednesday November 29th, 1944.

'OUR WAR EFFORT – GREATEST OF THEM ALL

Britain 'Sold Out' to Fight Way to Victory

"When the Huns get hold of this [Government White Paper] it will be a matter of fascinating interest to them. This will discourage them rather than give them valuable information. They will realise what a tough nut John Bull is."

[Brendan Rendall Bracken, 1st Viscount Bracken, was an Irish-born businessman, politician and a Minister of Information and First Lord of the Admiralty in Winston Churchill's War Cabinet. He is best remembered for supporting Churchill during his whole political career.]

'Great Britain's total war effort beats that of any other fighting nation. Mr. Brendan Bracken Minister of Information, pointed to that as the tremendous outstanding fact in the White Paper issued yesterday. The White Paper is going to be distributed all over the world, he told an international press conference.

"The Victorians were proud to be known as a nation of shopkeepers, but there have never been such shopkeepers as the British," he said. "No shopkeepers ever before have sold out their entire stocks in order to fight. We have sacrificed most of our Victorian inheritance. What was the treasure of our grandfathers has gone. And it has been well and gladly sacrificed.

Output First

When we stood alone against the might of Germany, we could not consider Treasury controls, what we wanted was output and more output."

He emphasised that we had not attempted to "mulct" [extract money by fine or taxation], the British Empire. "Canada is the only Empire country from which we have received reverse Lend-Lease," he said.

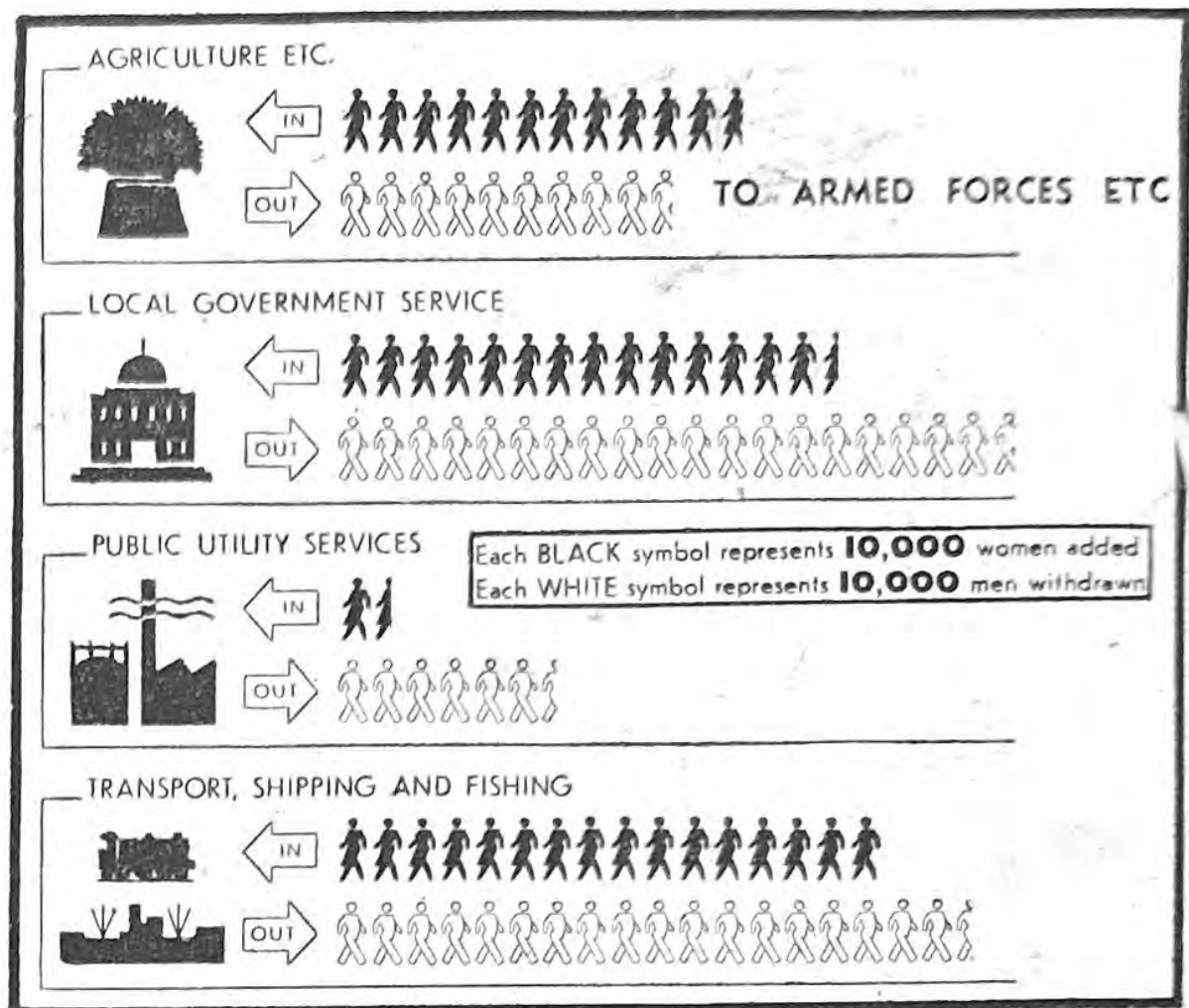
[Reverse Lend-Lease meant providing goods, services, and facilities to one country in exchange for or alongside the Lend-Lease aid received from them].

"With all other Dominions we have made financial arrangements much less favourable to ourselves than has the United States. For instance, the United States received a lot of goods and services scot-free from Australia. We get similar goods and services, but we pay for them."

[At the beginning of the war the Americans couldn't understand why Britain didn't behave like a feudal lord and just take everything they wanted from India, Australia, South Africa etc. They thought that Britain owned everything that the countries of the Empire possessed.]

"When the war started, we had large gold reserves in the United States. These have all been paid over and the money spent in building up American munitions industries. This expenditure of ours helped America to come into the war with her industries already on something like a war-footing. We are glad to have rendered this service to the United States as a small return for her tremendous generosity to us.

Below: "British women in thousands have marched in to the nation's industries so that men could march out for service at the fighting fronts. This diagram shows the numbers involved in each of four great industries."



Broken Homes

Finally – and this is the point you must never lose count of – because Britain's power and wealth are greatly due to overseas trade. We gave up our export business. We gave over the whole of our manpower to making and using the goods of war."

[Britain did give 100% effort to making the goods of war, but losing our export business was not done voluntarily, it was forced on us by the Americans. When Lend-Lease began in 1941, the total of what America sent to Britain was paid for by the American taxpayer. If Britain was to continue to export goods for profit, the U.S. government would find it very difficult to justify sending these goods over, paid for by the American people. In order for Lend-Lease to continue, the Americans insisted Britain

stop practically all exports while Lend-Lease was in operation. This is one major reason why Britain was broke at the end of the war. As Mr. Bracken said, Britain's power and wealth was greatly due to overseas trade.]

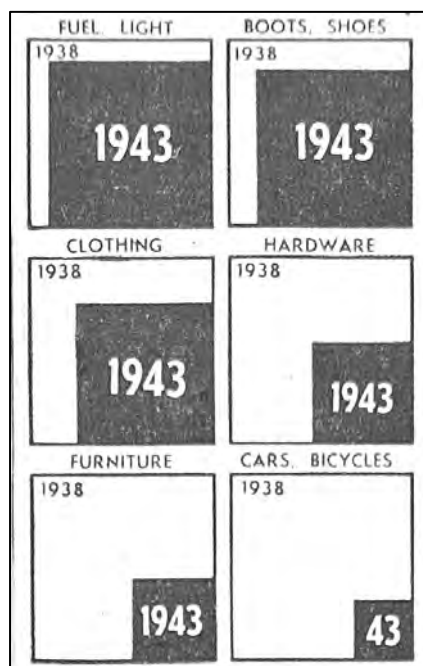
"What stands solidly behind these cramped statistics is the courage and unexampled sacrifices of millions of British people. Hardly a home in Britain has not been churned up by the war. There has been something like more than 22,500,000 civilian removals since war began. Families have been broken up and scattered all over the earth, fighting and toiling in factories.

Within Britain itself, homes have been uprooted by mass movements of population, there has been the exodus from the southern and eastern coasts, the evacuation of London, the direction of workers to factories far away. This has happened to people who, of all people in the world, are great lovers of their homes. All this had been carried out under hard living and working conditions. Up to the end of August this year more than five and a half thousand factories had been damaged by enemy action.

The people who performed these prodigies of labour," Mr. Bracken reminded, "were fed on a monotonous ration and a dull diet, and have had a constant worry about coupons for this and that.

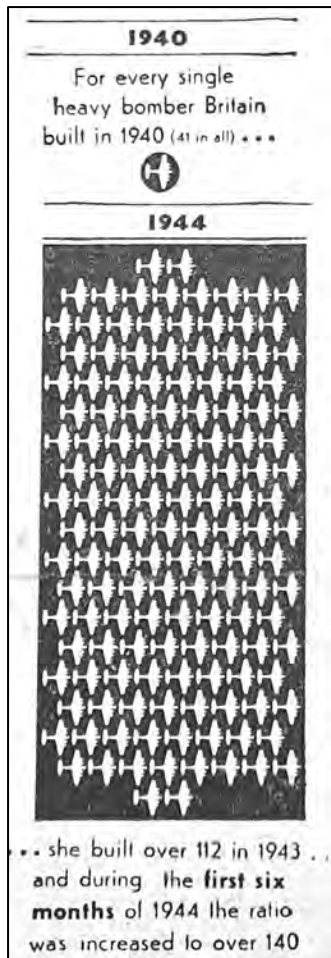
A lot of unfair criticism has been directed against John Bull's war effort. We don't want to blow our own trumpet, particularly if anyone else will do it for us. Critics who have not gone through the agony of Britain under bombing and dull monotonous food ought to live here and they would not be quite so vocal.

Something like a revolution had happened in Britain during the last five years and in it the Treasury had played the part of an urbane and painless Robespierre. Taxation had reduced the number of people with incomes above £5,000 a year to a handful. There was hardly any Forsytes now for a novelist to put in a saga. Only a very strong and great people could carry these burdens. What they have been able to do in these heroic years is a measure of the part they will play in re-building the world."



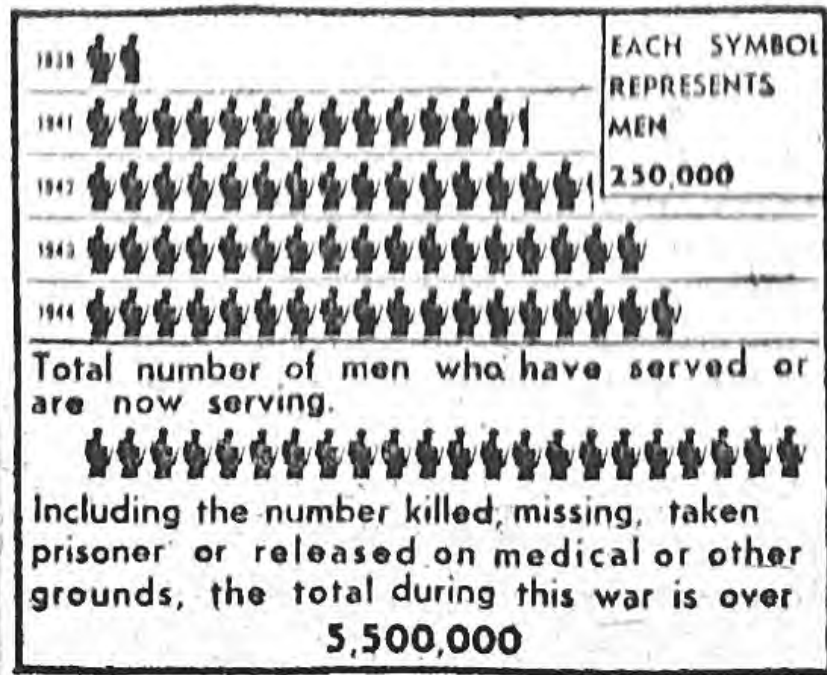
Left: What civilians spent on home needs in 1943 compared with 1938. This diagram is based on 1939 prices and do not allow for wartime inflation values.

To an American questioner, Mr. Bracken said that Britain's war production was greater per head than that of Russia, adding, "The Russians do not believe in producing figures. They take the view that the war is too secret a matter for anyone. It is a remarkable thing that the filthy Germans have been unable to get any information from the Russians."



Left: The amazing growth of bomber production, the largest item in Britain's biggest war industry.

Below: The growth of Britain's armed forces in five years.



Below: These drawings by Illingworth show how British arms, equipment and food – supplied free to the United States under reverse Lend-Lease – keep American forces fighting for common victory on every battle-front. The facts come from President Roosevelt's report to congress in November 1944.

The British punch in U.S. war effort



Daily Sketch, Saturday April 7th 1945 (Arthur Morley, Special Correspondent in New York)

"Salute to Britain – By America

Monty's Men Steal the Headlines



—Drawing by Kim.

"... The British Tommy—patient, indomitable, tough little man... has twice defeated in savage combat the best troops of the German Army."

The valour of British troops and civilians is winning fresh tributes over here despite the proud and anxious preoccupation of most Americans with the fighting progress of their own gallant sons.

Montgomery's men are now frequently displacing the Yanks in the huge headlines which herald for Americans their daily dose of war news. Editors and commentators are showing renewed interest in the military prowess and progress of the British forces.

One striking tribute comes from the *New York Times*, whose military correspondent, Hanson Baldwin, has written a prominently featured article stressing the importance of the role played by Britain in the war.

"The British Tommy – patient, indomitable, tough little man – was again the spearhead of the attack as Montgomery's 21st Army Group drove deep into North Germany," says Baldwin.

Burma to Berlin

"Until the crossing of the Rhine by the 21st Army Group, troops of the United Kingdom who have

fought this war from Burma to Germany had not recently been in the headlines, but Tommy has been fighting all the same. During the recent drive on the west bank of the Rhine through Goch towards Weeze, which led to the elimination of all German strongholds west of the Rhine, the Canadian First Army got the spotlight, and the available Canadian divisions fought with great bravery, but the British have always made up the bulk of that army – about 70% of it – during the recent north Rhine offensive.

There are at least four British Corps in Europe. Of fifteen divisions comprising these corps four are armoured, but the bulk of British divisions on the Continent are infantry. 'Tommies' who make up these crack outfits of the British crown are less ebullient, but perhaps more patient, than Americans. For them the great victories in the west, mean the joyous end of a long, long trail."

The Glowing Vision

"Many Tommies have been in uniform five and a half years, and a great many lost their homes and families in the war, but they have steadfastly clung to the vision of victory, and now at last they see the end of their long trial by endurance."

The *New York Times* also gives a description of British equipment and uniforms for the benefit of American readers, and adds: "Such men with such weapons have done and are doing a gallant job in the struggle against totalitarianism."

The Tommy – gallant and enduring – has already hung his washing on the Siegfried Line, and now, deep in the Reich, is still playing his full part in the final chapter of the war against Germany."

The Newspaper specifically commends the commandos and airborne infantry as being "among the toughest and most aggressive troops serving. The ideal British paratrooper," it is said, "consists of 50% physical fitness, 49% courage and 1% madness."

The *New York Herald Tribune* devotes a three-column article to a tribute to British civilians, and more especially to Londoners, who have been active participants in the war ever since Dunkirk. It says:

Transient Visitors

"London has been spared nothing that the violent ingenuity of a barbaric enemy could devise, but she has not let down the cause of freedom." The article goes on to chide Americans who briefly visit London, spend a few days in some expensive hotel, and say they see no signs of suffering.

"To those who stood by their bombed homes during the hardships and sometimes horrors of the past five years more credit is due – more admiration even – than a transient visitor from the United States is likely to bestow."

The *Times Sunday Magazine* this week gives two pages to the highest praise of British and American fighters by Drew Middleton, the well-known American correspondent at S.H.A.E.F. [Strategic Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force]. Middleton says vehemently that the Germans have not been beaten by machines but by men. The British Tommies and American Doughboys have proved themselves the finest fighting men on the European battlefields. He adds: "The British Army, driven from the Continent five years ago, has returned and has twice defeated in savage and costly combat the best troops of Germany."

The Proud City

Current issues of the influential magazines *Time* and *Newsweek* both led their accounts of the West Front fighting with full stories of the British operations. In Boston, the *Christian Science Monitor*, which has a nationwide circulation, devotes three full pages to colour pictures of London. "The Proud City."

These extracts I have given above do not represent the fruits of a long search through American publications but of reading a few newspapers and magazines that happen to be on my desk. They demonstrate the often-forgotten fact that thoughtless or even sinister criticisms of Britain by Americans are generally more than counter-balanced by expressions of sincere appreciation. Britain's friends over here are neither mute nor inglorious.'