

“Evacuation was a great success”

Do you agree?

Overall, the evacuation of children from all the major urban areas of Britain, was a success as it saved potentially thousands of lives.

Government planners estimated that there would be 600,000 deaths within the first few days of the war. Therefore the government felt they had to act fast, they evacuated; 827,000 children, 524,000 mothers with young children, 13,000 expectant mothers, 7,000 blind/handicapped and 103,000 teachers, all within the first weekend after the official outbreak of war. The government wanted to show that they were being proactive and not reactive.

However, bombing did not start until months later, the period between the official outbreak of war and the first air raid was known as the phoney war. This was a huge mistake made by British intelligence.

The evacuation itself did not go at all smoothly or to plan. The evacuees were sent to reception centres where they were placed with local families. Many evacuees found that they could not settle in the countryside. The people from the country were appalled by the children's bad hygiene. Some people reported children 'fouling' gardens, lice-ridden hair, and bed-wetting.

Source B which as a photograph of children happily walking down a road, the caption above tells us that this is a picture of a group of children walking to the train station, in London, September 1939. This source is limited, as it only tells us one scene, and not what the people are actually thinking, this photo could easily have been staged.

Source D again another photograph, issued by the government, also limited in its usefulness this photo could have been released by the government as propaganda, a way to promote evacuation. The photo shows 'happy' children at bath time at one of the reception centres.

The majority of children where not happy about being evacuated, some hated the idea. Source C contrasts with source D. A teacher accounts the walk to the station with the convoy of children, "All you could hear where the feet of children and a kind of murmur, because the children where too afraid to talk". This source tells us that the trip to the station was not at all a glorious occasion as Source B shows.

The evacuees would go around the house urinating on walls, they would never use the toilet. The evacuees took no notice when told that this was wrong and many houses "stunk to high heaven".

However, not all evacuees where lower class, many of them where familiar with the countryside. Even so, it was just as hard for them to settle into the countryside as it was for the other children. Source G, a passage from a Novel entitled "Carries War" enforces this. In the passage the foster parent tells the evacuees to get their slippers, and the evacuees try to explain that they did not have space to pack them but tell the woman "we haven't any". The woman became embarrassed and presumed that they are poor and could not afford slippers, the children giggled to themselves.

The government thought that they did not have time to phase in the evacuation process, and offer counselling to those upset. They acted fast and succeeded in their

aim to save lives, keep morale in the cities high and ultimately rule victorious over Hitler and his fascist Nazi regime.