

The Home Front



AIMS

- to remember at least three ways that war had a direct impact on civilians at home.

The Great War had a greater impact on ordinary Brits – or civilians – than any previous war. When it started, Britain was the only fighting country that relied on volunteers for its army – but more and more men were soon needed. In 1916, the government passed the Military Service Act. First, all unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 41 were called up to join the army, navy or air force. Married men were conscripted later. By 1918, over six million men had gone to fight ... and about one in ten was dead!

Women and war

With so many men fighting, women were needed to do their jobs. Before the war, no one would have dreamed of having female bus drivers, chimney sweeps or steel makers; now Britain needed them! Others found work in shipyards, drove ambulances and mended roads. Some became policewomen. In 1917, the Women's Land Army was formed to replace male farm workers who had gone to fight. For thousands of women, the war at last provided them with a chance to earn their own money, begin a new career and achieve some degree of independence. Later, in 1917, women could serve in the women's version of the army, navy and air force too. About 100 000 joined these organisations and some got really close to the fighting by working as nurses, cooks and driver mechanics.

By the end of the war, many men (including some politicians) were very impressed with the work women had done and were forced to change their views about the place of women in Britain. Many felt they had earned the right to vote! After the war, Parliament changed the voting laws and gave women over 30 the right to vote (but men could vote at 21).

FACT *Change for the better?*

In 1919, single women who married could carry on working as doctors and solicitors, instead of having to give up their jobs as they did before the war. But it was 1944 before female teachers who got married could keep their jobs! And women didn't get the same voting rights as men until 1928.

Source A ▼ *A female munitions factory worker.*



Source B ▼ Munitions factories had employed women before the war but now their work was appreciated more than ever. This poem makes reference to the fact that the dangerous chemicals in bomb making turned their skin yellow, gave some cancer and sometimes left women sterile.

The guns out there are roaring
fast,
the bullets fly like rain,
the aeroplanes are cavetting,
They go and come again,
the bombs talk loud,
the mines crash out,
No trench their might
withstands,
Who helped them all to do their
job.
The girls with yellow hands.

Source C ▼ Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, speaking in August 1916. What do you think he means by women's 'special claim'?

"It is true that women cannot fight with rifles, but they have aided in the most effective way in the war. What is more, when the war comes to an end, don't women have a special claim to be heard on the many questions which affect their interests? I cannot deny that claim."

Source D ▼ A comparison of the quality and output in factories of men and women in 1918. It is little wonder that Herbert Asquith said, 'How could we carry on the war without women? There is hardly a service in which women have not been at least as active as men.'

Quality

Metal – women's work better than men's

Aircraft woodwork – women equal to men

Bullet making – women equal to men

Shell making – women's work poorer than men's

Quantity

Metal – women's production equal to men's

Aircraft woodwork – women's production equal to men's

Bullet making – women's production equal to men's; in some cases, women produced 20% more than men

Shell making – women's production behind men's

Defence of the Realm Act (DORA)

This new law gave the government great power while Britain was at war. They could take over mines and railways and force workers to stay in jobs they thought were vital to winning the war. DORA gave the government control over the newspapers and radio too – all news had to be approved by the government before it was printed, so newspapers were filled with stories of heroic deeds and great victories ... while defeats hardly got a mention! Also, it came to the government's attention that drunkenness was a huge problem – so a law was passed that limited the times that pubs opened (a law that only changed in 2005). It also allowed beer to be watered down.

Rationing

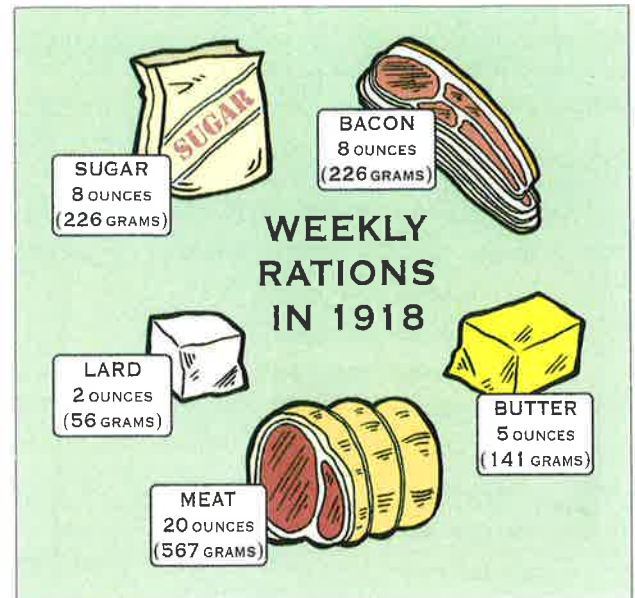
Much of Britain's food came from abroad by sea so the German navy tried to sink as many ships as it possibly could. By 1917, there was only six weeks' supply of food left in Britain! So the government started food **rationing** to make sure that food was shared out. Each person was allowed a set amount of meat, butter, sugar, bacon, ham and so on.

Attack from above

The invention of aircraft and **zeppelin** airships meant that people suffered as Britain was bombed for the first time. About 1400 people were killed during air attacks, mostly on the east coast in towns such as Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn. In June 1917, German bomber planes reached London and killed 162 people, including 16 children who died when their school was hit. This made the British very angry, especially with Germans living in Britain at the time (see **Source H**).

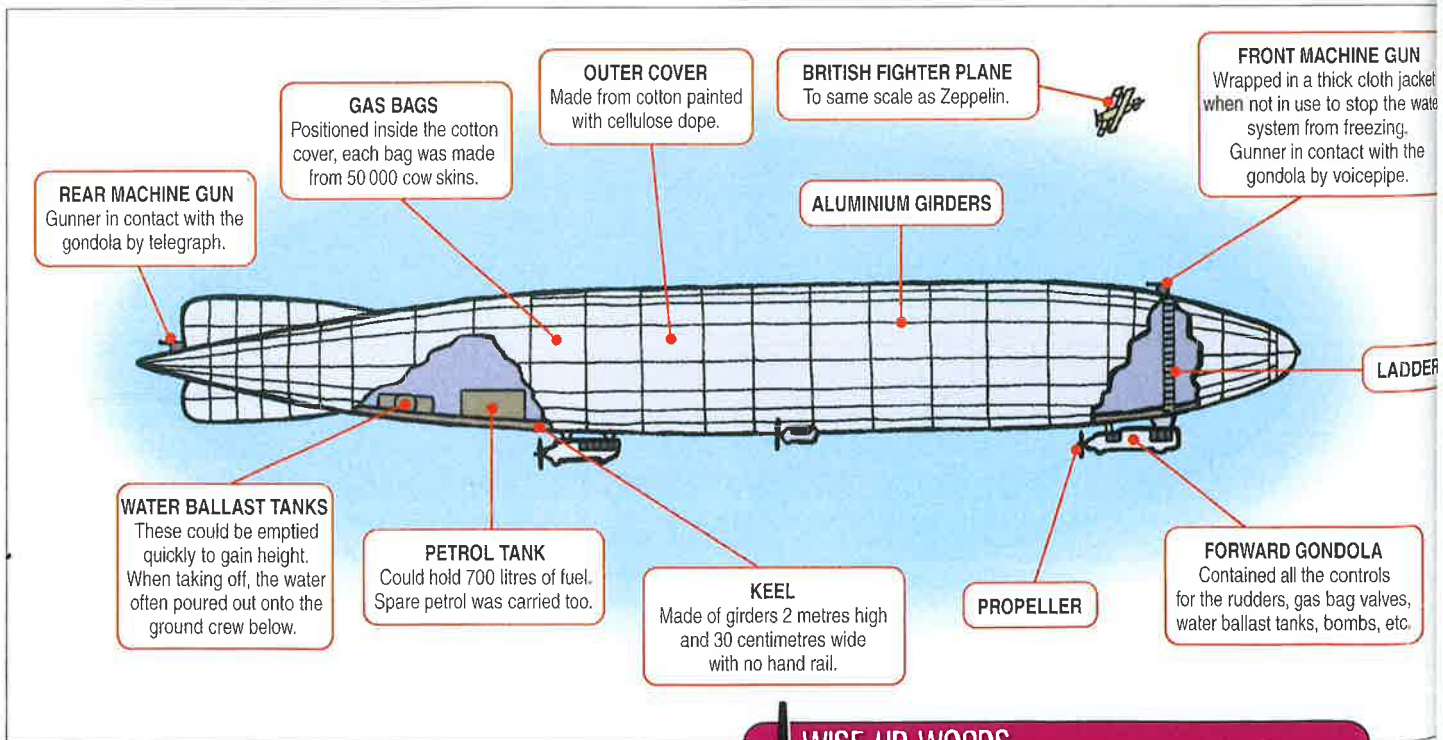
Source G ▾ Zeppelins were about 200 metres long (two football pitches) and could carry 27 tons of bombs. In total, they made 57 raids on British towns, killing 564 people and injuring over 1300.

Source E ▾ Weekly rations in 1918.



Source F ▸ This note was dropped on British towns from German airships. Why do you think they dropped these notes?

"You English, we have come and will come again soon, kill or cure, Germany."



WISE UP WORDS

- rationing
- zeppelin

Source H ▼ There were dozens of attacks like this all over Britain. In Keighley, Yorkshire, for example, an Irishman accused a German butcher (who had lived in Britain for 15 years) of poisoning his meat pie. The butcher responded by punching the Irishman in the face. Later that night, the Irishman returned with an angry mob and set the German's shop on fire! In fact, the government itself was so worried about Germans living in Britain that it had 30 000 of them arrested and sent them to holding camps. The Trading with the Enemy Act even confiscated German-owned business totalling £58 million. Some worried immigrants changed their names to blend in more; the writer Ford Hermann Hueffer became Ford Maddox Ford, for example. Most famously of all, King George (who had German ancestors) changed his surname from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to ... Windsor!



WORK

- 1
 - a List at least four ways in which women helped the war effort.
 - b Describe at least two ways in which women might have changed by doing this.
 - c Why do you think many men were forced to change their views about women after the Great War? Try to use some of the sources (A–D) as evidence in your answer.
- 2
 - a What did DORA stand for?
 - b Explain why the government introduced the measures it took under the Defence of the Realm Act.
- 3 Look at **Source E**.
 - a Explain what is meant by the term 'rationing'.
 - b Why did Britain have to ration during the war?
- 4 Look at **Sources F and G**.
 - a What was a Zeppelin?
 - b Why do you think that Zeppelins created so much fear among ordinary British citizens. Give at least two reasons.
- 5 Look at **Source H**.
 - a Describe what is happening in the photograph
 - b Why do you think this attack, and many like it, took place?