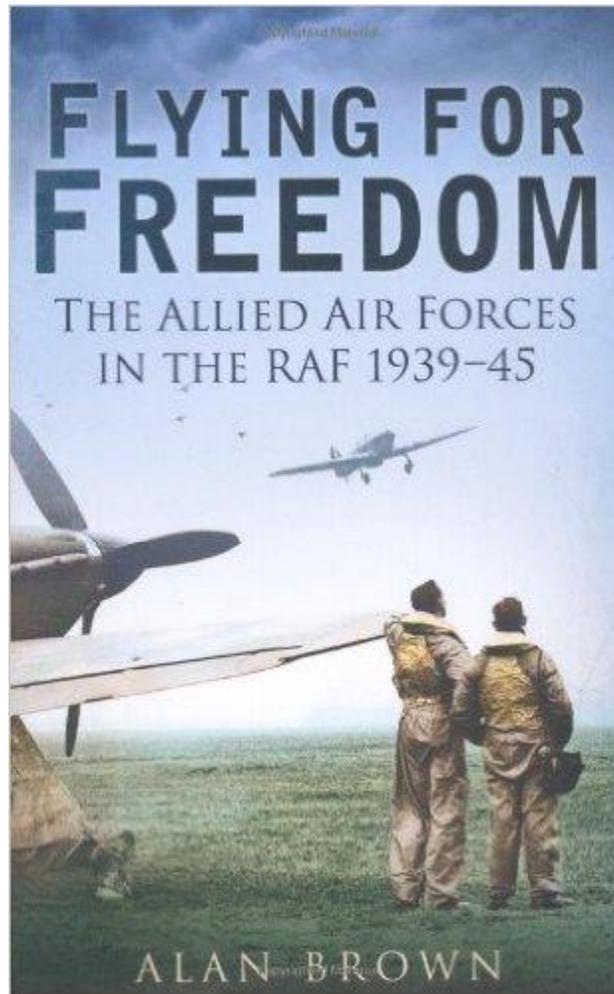


# *Flying for Freedom*



The History Press (2011)

Reprint edition of *Airmen in Exile* (Sutton Publishing, 2000)

Please note that references and commentaries provided here as footnotes in the Introduction are displayed as chapter endnotes in the published volume. The complete list of references and source origins are in the full edition.

## *The Unexpected Allies*

The summer of 1940 dealt a great many shocks to the government, people and armed forces of Britain. The German attack on France and the Low Countries in May was as sudden as any in the history of large-scale military operations, but although France was politically and militarily unprepared for such a trial, the belief that she could stand firm with British assistance was still the prevailing view among those men with access to the central direction of the war. That confidence had been wrecked along with the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk. As the allies fell back and were eventually swept from the continent by an apparently irresistible force, talk of a negotiated peace with the Germans was momentarily heard in the most powerful offices in the land. Such talk came to nothing, but amidst the confusion on the beaches of southern England and in the government, new voices were heard from men who had never dreamed that such a calamity could befall the western democracies. Some had sought refuge with the French when their own capitals had been overrun; others had come directly to Britain in the hope of stimulating resistance at home by their determination to stay free. All of them were simply overwhelmed by the magnitude of the defeat.

These were the governments of Norway, Belgium, Holland, Poland and Czechoslovakia. France, of course, joined the list when she too succumbed. In all cases, the experience of politics in exile brought out the worst in some individuals who used the instability to further their own political agendas, either to fix the blame for the defeat, secure power for the future, or simply to make trouble in settling old scores. But along with the men of words came men of arms, for in the headlong scramble to escape the Nazi scythe, tens of thousands of troops scrambled on to the boats and joined their political leaders in Britain. Men of foreign navies bravely steered their ships to British ports, and many courageous aviators risked capture at the hands of their own countrymen to fly their machines into British air space and deliver themselves for service once again. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1940, these men re-grouped and re-trained to pledge their committed energies to the common war effort, but in so doing they often became part of the wider political scene as their governments fought internecine battles or struggled to assert themselves with their British hosts.

This book is the study of only one part of that great allied force in exile, the airmen of the six European nations who found refuge in Britain and fought their war from British soil under the ensign of the Royal Air Force.<sup>1</sup> The presence of so many nationalities gathered together in one service arm was an entirely new experience for the British. The possibility that France might be defeated had never seriously been reckoned with, but it had happened all the same. Apart from coping with the shock of sudden solitude, the government and service departments had to devise ways of assimilating the allied personnel into the fighting corps; at the same time, they had to walk the thorny paths of exile politics. This meant that from the very beginning, the history of all the European exiles was inextricably connected to two British departments, the Air Ministry and the Foreign Office. Quite often the former would not act without the advice and agreement of the latter, and when the political activities of the exiled governments interfered with the military establishments nominally under their command - and we shall see how common an occurrence this was - it would be the Foreign Office which had the deciding voice. The two undertakings frequently collided, sometimes with hardly noticeable effects, at other times with explosive results which rocked the very alliances which these endeavours were trying to preserve. All parties found the experience to be a steep learning curve indeed, and there is much to be gained from studying these noble but often tempestuous friendships which, though they ended over fifty years ago, still have enough light left in them to illuminate aspects of Britain's interaction with Europe today.

In the following chapters, the essential characteristics, trials and triumphs of each of those alliances will be surveyed, the greatest emphasis being placed upon the British perception of each relationship, but the primary purpose of this introduction is to explore the overall political, social and military environments within which each separate relationship functioned. In the first place, the British Government had to create a mechanism which permitted the establishment of foreign armies on British soil; and having created that mechanism, ensure its smooth operation in times of crisis. Secondly, the presence of so many different nationalities at once raised numerous problems, all of them important, but none more

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<sup>1</sup> During the course of the war, squadrons of Greece and Yugoslavia were formed as the men and materials became available, but these units were based abroad. The essential focus of this present work is the relationship between the British and their allies stationed on British territory.

so than the lack of a common language and the very real dangers of falling morale and political treachery. Thirdly - and this was to be a consideration later in the war - the question arose of what was to be the policy after victory had been secured? Were the allied governments and their forces to be left to their own policies of reconstruction, or would programmes of closer association finally purge the continent of the German menace? These were issues of major importance; and as we shall see, the Americans felt that they also deserved a voice in the shaping of post-war Europe. The view from Washington was that Britain was too weak and too closely involved with the European powers to make objective decisions regarding the immediate peace, and through the experiences of the Anglo-European alliances we may glimpse the changing nature of 'the special relationship' and the onset of the Cold War.

But in 1940, these were issues far from the practicalities of the time. The British government was faced with a situation which demanded immediate action, and the most urgent need was to give some legitimate stamp to the presence of the foreign armies on British soil. The device chosen was the Allied Forces Act, a hastily concocted piece of legislation based upon an earlier model, the Visiting Forces (British Commonwealth) Act of 1933. Under this latter piece, visiting governments would be legally responsible for the conduct of their forces while they were on British territory. This was just what the British government needed, a tool which gave them all the benefits of extra allies and hardly any of the responsibility. With a few modifications, the Allied Forces Act replaced the earlier instrument, and under the terms of Article One each allied government had full military jurisdiction over their service personnel.

But that was not how some sections of the armed forces interpreted it, for though the War Office and the Admiralty were content to allow the incoming forces the right to enforce their own military laws, the Air Ministry fought against national jurisdiction for the whole of the war. As far as the RAF were concerned, a man in their uniform irrespective of his nationality was entitled to serve under British military codes rather than his own national variants, which in the main tended to be less lenient and heavier on punishments.<sup>2</sup> This was not because of some

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of the Czechoslovak military codes can be found in British archives. A loose minute in the files of the Allied Administration Committee reveals that the penalty of death was applied to cases of mutiny under martial law, desertion to the enemy, cowardice in the face of the enemy, the surrender of a fortified position to the enemy, and the transfer of military materials to the enemy. By way of contrast, the Polish list was more severe. The death sentence could be awarded for murder, crimes against the state, treason, espionage, crimes against the

noble motive on the part of the RAF, though there were occasions when they stepped in to forbid excess punishment. Much more likely was the need to avoid giving the exiled governments the opportunities to demand independent status for their air forces, and there were two main reasons why they should pursue such a claim. First, after Dunkirk, the primary weapon in defence of the United Kingdom was air power. It was visible, active and highly successful; and the various governments sought to exploit the victories of their own pilots by having their national contingents declared independent of the RAF. The right to operate their own military codes in matters of discipline was perceived as a significant step towards that aim. Independence would have given them a highly potent propaganda tool to stimulate resistance at home and recruitment abroad; and, as a by-product, enhance their own positions as the guardians of national liberty. Second, having an independent air arm would reinforce their status as allies rather than 'associated powers', a much vaguer term used by the British when they felt uncomfortable about nominal alliances not formally recognised by treaty.

In the end, it was all about prestige. For wholly understandable reasons, each of the European governments which reconstituted on British soil suffered to greater or lesser degrees from low self-esteem, and one way of increasing it was to have an active service arm under their sole control. To be sure, most had army units recognised as independent forces by the War Office, but with some notable exceptions (especially the Poles and the Czechoslovaks in the Middle East), the army units based in Britain could do little but prepare for action when the day came, and that was not to be until 1944. In short, there were not enough medals being won on land; but in the skies, the exploits of the bomber crews and fighter pilots featured almost nightly on the radio and in the cinema newsreels. Governments hungry for prestige therefore turned naturally to these heroes as symbols of a freedom temporarily crushed, but by no means finished for good. The RAF high command were well aware of these issues, and from the very beginning they resisted every attempt made by all but one of the governments to withdraw their forces from the RAF structure and fight as independent allies. Sometimes they lost the struggle, as with the Poles and the French; on one occasion they simply granted

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national economy, sabotage, shamming, self-wounding, desertion in the face of the enemy, refusal to obey an order in the face of the enemy, the failure of a commander to hold on to an objective or to capitulate without good cause and the surrender of military materials. [FO 371/24373: Loose minute, June 1940].

independence, as with the Norwegians; and sometimes they held firm and got their own way, as with the Czechs, the Belgians, and to a certain extent the Dutch. In each case an entirely different set of circumstances obtained, and at times the mood turned bitter.

And yet it is easier to observe this intransigence than to explain it, for even now after much study, the motives are not entirely clear. We can be certain that a deep suspicion was held by many influential and powerful sections of the Air Ministry against virtually all foreigners who came into the country from occupied Europe; and we might argue that to put politically suspect people in charge of a bomber would have been bad policy. But since no conclusive evidence has yet come to light which might confirm that such a fear existed on a widespread basis, we must reject it as mere conjecture. Besides, no allied government even remotely entertained the idea that they might have full operational control over their air force, and each were content to allow their men to serve under the overall direction of the allied high command, which in practice meant the British until the Americans entered the war. It was probably this necessity to fight the air war as one unified arm which motivated the RAF to resist bids for independence until they were forced by political considerations to acknowledge them. Besides, it was quickly apparent to everyone that some of the groups, and in particular the Czechoslovaks, could barely function as national units without substantial help from British ground crew. The Air Ministry took the view that this alone disqualified any pleas for independent status or jurisdiction rights, since it was argued on many occasions that two military codes could not be reasonably applied in mixed squadrons.

But to return to the Allied Forces Act, this was one of those occasional pieces of legislation which was denied any realistic chance of debate in Parliament. The National Government had already decided that it should become law long before it reached the floor of the House of Commons, and in the event it passed through all of its stages in a single day, 21 August 1940.<sup>3</sup> Rising at 4.28pm, the Joint Undersecretary of State for War, Sir Edward Grigg,

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<sup>3</sup> The National Government was the longest serving coalition government in modern British history. It had originally been created in 1931 as a temporary administration to deal with the impact of the Depression, but it achieved such enormous public support that it survived through the recovery period and into the deepening crisis presented by the European dictatorships. For most of its life it was dominated by conservatives, and it had four prime ministers: Ramsay MacDonald (Labour), Stanley Baldwin, Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill (all Conservative). It was finally put out of office in July 1945 by Clement Attlee's Labour Party.

urged the House to support the Bill which would "give legal sanction to the establishment of no less than six foreign armies on British soil, to be trained under their own flags, under their own commanders, and under their own military law."<sup>4</sup> He then assured the honourable Members that civil crimes would still be dealt with by British courts, but in all other respects the responsibilities would devolve upon the allied governments.

In theory, this should have been enough to end the debate and lead to a vote which the government could not lose, but a few hardy souls decided to raise issues for the record which might better have been left unsaid. Miss Eleanor Rathbone asked if the allied powers were to be given the powers of conscription over their nationals who had made their homes in Britain, and if any provision had been made against racial and religious differences within the forces concerned. If not, would discrimination be permissible? Grigg fumbled this last point by stating that no specific provisions existed in the military codes concerned, but he saw no reason why it should become an issue. On the question of conscription, he answered with an emphatic "No". Miss Rathbone replied that this would mean that each man was technically a volunteer, and Grigg agreed with her.

In both cases, Grigg was unaware of the facts. He was promptly informed that four days before, the Dutch government had threatened a man with a charge of evading the colours if he did not report for service immediately. Was this not conscription? Grigg did not reply. Others argued that any man who chose to make his home in Britain deserved the protection of British law, and that no allied government had the right or the power to force him into military service if he chose not to volunteer. Behind this concept lay the very real and highly treasured British principle of asylum for political refugees. The British took the view that if anyone chose to leave his or her home nation on grounds of political, religious or racial incompatibility or persecution, and had been granted the right of residence in the United Kingdom, that individual was entitled to reject the commands of his former country, especially if it meant taking up arms for a cause which he or she might not support. Conscription was therefore 'off the menu', and though there were numerous cases of allied governments using unpalatable tactics to coerce

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<sup>4</sup> *Parliamentary Debates; 5th Series*; Vol. 364, cols 1350-1414. All subsequent references to the debate are drawn from this source unless otherwise indicated.

men into the ranks, the British broadly kept to the policy, particularly if the countries concerned had a history of anti-Semitism or severe political disorder.

This issue of racial discrimination also surfaced in the Commons debate on the Allied Forces Act. Colonel Josiah Wedgwood declared that the Polish Army in France had been recruited "more or less under duress", noting that Jews had been given the choice of internment or service. He then made the stinging comment that the Polish and German attitudes towards Jews were comparable, and that many had "learnt from bitter experience what it is to be under the Polish or Nazi heel." Supporting Wedgwood, Sydney Silverman added that "there is something on the Czech side too which needs a certain amount of care and attention."<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to soothe these concerns, Grigg only fanned the flames by quoting from a specific order issued by the Polish high command forbidding any anti-Jewish behaviour "humiliating to human dignity...upon pain of severe punishment".<sup>6</sup> An earlier call for an independent Jewish force was rejected by Grigg on grounds that they had no military system, codes or national government.

There was also the question of jurisdiction. Some members, clearly quite ignorant in regard to the military practices of their new allies, very much hoped that flogging would not once more disgrace a British barrack square. Others were concerned about the variations in military codes noted earlier, and the protests were strong enough to force Grigg into assuring

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<sup>5</sup> The available evidence promotes conflicting assessments of Czech and Slovak anti-Semitism. In a despatch from Prague in 1939, George F. Kennan noted that "the mass of the [Czech] people appear to have little or no interest in anti-Semitism", whereas the Jews "are the object of widespread resentment on the part of the Slovak population". [Kennan G F: *From Prague After Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton UP 1968): 'Despatch of February 1, 1939 to the Department of State on the Jewish problem in the new Czechoslovakia', *passim*.] On the other hand, an article dealing exclusively with Jews in the Czechoslovak armed forces examines a range of testimonies which indicate that anti-Semitic behaviour on behalf of the officer corps was rife, pointing the finger especially at General Sergij Ingr (Chief-of-Staff of the Czechoslovak Army in the UK and later Minister of National Defence in the Government-in-Exile). [Dagan A et al: *The Jews of Czechoslovakia* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984): Erich Kulka: 'Jews in the Czechoslovak Armed Forces During World War II', pp371-376.]

<sup>6</sup> Anti-Semitism in the Polish forces is admirably reviewed by David Engel who also examines the impact of *Jestem Polakiem*, a rightist periodical published by a faction within the Polish Government, which had strong anti-Semitic undertones and attracted criticism from the British popular press and various religious newspapers. During the Commons debate, Sydney Silverman observed that credits granted by the British presumably paid for the publication. Engel draws the valid conclusion that this and other evidence of anti-Semitic attitudes made the Polish Government "concerned about their negative public image in England and its possible political repercussions ever since the first month of the war." The British Government held similar views. [Engel D: *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939-1942*. (University of North Carolina, 1987) pp 70-77.]

the House that he would extract from each government a promise that the death penalty would not be administered if the crime would not attract a similar punishment in the British forces.<sup>7</sup> On the related question of conscription, he also pledged that no government would be given the powers to compel their nationals to fight, and he wriggled out of the Dutch example by suggesting that they had acted before any official statement had been made on the subject. The final compromise was an assurance that each and every allied serviceman would be given the opportunity to serve in the British forces if he chose not to don his own national colours, irrespective of the pressures brought to bear on him to do so. This was to be a challenge later taken up by General De Gaulle of the Free French, and one which the British lost.

The Allied Forces Act received Royal Assent the day after its passage through parliament. The limits of its scope and authority were to be severely tested and frequently reinterpreted, and it would seem from the evidence that it became progressively less important as the conditions of war changed over the years. It was, after all, an emergency measure. But this cannot be said of the policy to meet the educational and welfare needs of the incoming forces from the continent. It had been recognised very quickly, and especially by the Air Ministry, that if the allied personnel were to be of any use whatsoever, they would need to learn English at least to a point where they could understand and give commands. As a result, the task of linguistic training was thrown into the lap of the British Council, the initial agreement being that they would provide the teaching and the service departments would pay for it. As this was such a vital aspect of the assimilation of the allied forces, the British Council dedicated much of its own money and intellectual resources to creating effective courses of language instruction, but very soon it became apparent that the service departments regarded the programme with a much lower priority.

The British Council was, and is, one of the cornerstones of the United Kingdom's official presence abroad. Formed in 1934, the Council's initial aims were to promote the life, language and culture of Britain.<sup>8</sup> When war came in 1939, the Ministry of Information absorbed much of

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<sup>7</sup> A major example here would be cowardice. This was abolished as a capital offence in British military law in 1930.

<sup>8</sup> Donaldson, F: *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp 29-30. In his inaugural speech, the Prince of Wales described the Council as "a proper organisation to spread knowledge and appreciation of its language, literature, art, science and education."

the Council's promotional work in the affected countries and left it with a greatly reduced range of activities, essentially the education of refugees and the maintenance of Britain's cultural profile. Even these, so the Treasury thought, were "a luxury in wartime."<sup>9</sup> The sudden influx of displaced persons from occupied Europe enabled the Council to argue its case with more confidence. By insisting that the cultural welfare of these people fell within the remit of the Council, the Executive Committee successfully lobbied for a range of suitable proposals.<sup>10</sup> Yet this should not obscure the core function of the Council by creating the image that it was a benevolent, altruistic body posing as the conductor for all things wholesome, decent and British. By its own admission, its primary aim was "political, or at any rate, imperialistic", and it spent much of its time and its budget encouraging foreign nationals to "appreciate British friendship", which in practice meant the acknowledgement that London was the hub of the universe.<sup>11</sup> Content with its mission, the Council pursued these aims and its agenda with considerable success.

Things changed when the military men arrived after the fall of France. Reacting swiftly to the new situation, the Treasury convened a meeting on 28 August 1940 at which it was generally agreed that the Council would assume all responsibility for the cultural and educational needs of the foreigners now in the country. This meant that the direct teaching of English (as opposed to the indirect exposure to it) would now become part of the Council's portfolio of activities. To fund the programme, the Treasury allotted a further grant of £17,000. It was also agreed that the Council would teach the language to the foreign servicemen and internees, "but only when asked by service departments and the Home Office to do so, when

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<sup>9</sup> Eastment, D J: *The Policies and Position of the British Council From the Outbreak of War to 1950* (PhD, University of Leeds, 1982), p27.

<sup>10</sup> BW/68/3: 39th Meeting of the Executive Committee, 21.9.39. The scope of activities was to be selective, concentrating on only the most educated persons, and only those who were stranded or alone in the country. The main elements of the new scheme were the reunion of foreign nationals; further integration between refugees and British citizens; the procurement of free tickets for the theatre, cinema and concerts; and the organisation of 'receptions', lectures, recitals and cultural events particular to the foreign nationals such as traditional dancing and art exhibitions. (Donaldson, pp112-113.) It can be seen from this programme that the Council was by no means geared to catering for the recreational needs of the average soldier or airman who arrived bedraggled and tired during the summer of 1940.

<sup>11</sup> BW/2/47: First meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Teaching of English to Foreigners, 21.6.40. A further note complained that too many foreigners tended to learn English "for their own private purposes" and that "comparatively few care for culture and even fewer want to be anglicised."

these departments would bear the cost."<sup>12</sup> This implied that the Council could not act without a direct request from the service departments or without clearing its proposed actions with them beforehand. This was to cause problems, for the chain of supply and demand could be broken or kinked by difficulties in communication or resistance by the Air Ministry or the War Office.<sup>13</sup>

Evidence of this survives in the British Council files. Under the terms of the new financing arrangement, the Council invoiced the Air Ministry for £316 for services provided up to and including 9 September 1940. But decisions on the amount of teaching required by individual units were taken either by the unit commanders or the Education Officer at Fighter Command, Wing-Commander de la Bère. By November 1940, this officer complained to the Council that "many units in his Command had received no language teaching, nor had they any grammar books", in response to which he was informed that no authority had been forthcoming to appoint additional teachers or purchase new books, hence the Council politely referred him back to the Air Ministry.<sup>14</sup>

By Christmas 1940, the number of teachers employed on behalf of the RAF had increased from fourteen to only sixteen for a combined contingent of over 10,000 men, and while the Air Ministry paid for the newspapers, fictional and technical works, the basic stuff of teaching - specifically grammars in Polish and Czech - had been translated, produced and supplied at the Council's own expense. By January 1941, the bill had climbed to £2,110, representing services provided between the beginning of September to the end of December 1940. A cheque for the earlier amount of £316 finally arrived in February 1941.<sup>15</sup> In November

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<sup>12</sup> Donaldson, p114.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting in passing that the Admiralty had very little interest in language training for foreign sailors because most allied ships were self-contained units.

<sup>14</sup> BW/2/231: Correspondence, 9.9.40 to 5.11.40. De la Bère also expressed his sincere thanks for the work already done by the Council, "but his anxiety to have more language teaching is caused by the fact that a Czech squadron holds the record of 105 brought down last month, and he feels there must be many other Czech and Polish pilots who would be equally useful, but who must know some English before they can be let loose in the skies."

<sup>15</sup> BW/2/231: Invoice to Air Ministry, 9.1.41. The Council was deluged with pleas from Allied stations for books, films, magazines - anything which could either improve the men's command of the language or at least entertain them in some measure. In many cases, the Council met the costs from its own funds. It should also be noted that there are many letters of thanks from RAF stations all over Britain for the efforts made by the Council to meet all their educational needs.

1941, an internal note was issued concerning the unpaid invoice for £2,110 "which had been lost by the Air Ministry."<sup>16</sup>

In April 1941, the Air Ministry sent a summary of the present situation to the British Council. It included a revised list of the technical and general terms which it wanted taught to the allied aircrews as part of the general aim "to teach every allied officer and man to use the English language operationally and technically."<sup>17</sup> Thus far, the Ministry had employed five methods in the furtherance of this aim: (1) the widespread use of interpreters and the dispersal of such men into RAF units "where possible"; (2) the translated manuals supplied by the Council and linguaphone records of operational phrases; (3) the use of British personnel commanding either in the air or on the ground; (4) "use of specially selected allied personnel to lead in the air"; (5) the use of Allied personnel in operations rooms for radio communications. Each of these techniques had only limited success, concluded the Ministry, and this still left a force "that is not fully efficient and has little flexibility", and suffered from a lack of knowledge of operational language, an inability to absorb or read instructions, and the non-possibility of employment in composite crews, especially in bomber work. The British Council reacted with astonishment, for it seemed to them a bit audacious that the RAF should complain when it neither paid its bills on time nor seemed keen to develop the language programme at its own expense.<sup>18</sup>

It is tempting to blame the Air Ministry itself for these difficulties, but we must also bear in mind the pressures under which it operated during the second half of 1940. Even so, though we cannot level an accusation of outright negligence in regard to the language training of the allied crews, there is certainly a hint of indifference in their behaviour. Nor was this attitude confined to the Royal Air Force. By November 1940, the Council heard reports that men of the Czechoslovak Army "had been anxiously awaiting the supply of English teachers since August."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> BW/2/231: Internal memorandum, 10.11.41.

<sup>17</sup> This list of "operational and technical language" included such terms as "PBI" (Poor Bloody Infantry); "FA" (Football Association); "in the drink" (to ditch an aircraft in water); and "NBG" (No Bloody Good). During the following month, the Council suggested to the Ministry that such colloquialisms as "it lies plumb on your route" might confuse the learners, but the Ministry replied - reasonably enough - that this was the type of language the foreign crews would hear all the time so they had to get used to it. [BW/2/231: 2.5.41]

<sup>18</sup> BW/2/231: Memorandum from the Air Ministry to the British Council, 23.4.41.

<sup>19</sup> BW/2/51: British Council Advisory Committee on Foreigners in Great Britain; Minutes of 7th meeting, 7.11.40.

An internal memorandum also referred to a plea from the Czechoslovak Military that "the lack of mental food for the Czech Army is causing them despair." There was even talk of writing directly to Churchill.<sup>20</sup> Upon enquiry, the Council was told directly by the War Office that "any cultural or educational work amongst the allied armies is not required on anything more than a trivial scale."<sup>21</sup> It was not until April 1941 that a suitable working arrangement had been established, and even then there were delays in its implementation.<sup>22</sup>

It is clear from these scant letters and memoranda that the work of the Council did not feature high in the list of priorities of either the Air Ministry or the War Office, despite the valuable and sometimes valiant efforts of the Council in all other spheres.<sup>23</sup> By January 1942, a survey conducted by the Czechoslovak Air Force Inspectorate indicated that the average level of English held by all ranks was a little under 58%. This figure had been calculated from the end-of-year written and oral tests conducted with the officers and other ranks of 310 and 312 fighter squadrons, and it roughly corresponds to the modern day equivalent of intermediate-level, good enough to make oneself understood but far from any real fluency.<sup>24</sup> Almost certainly, the tendency for the men to associate with their own countrymen, thereby obviating the need for speaking English, would have affected their ability or motivation to learn, but it seems that British policy must bear some of the responsibility for these relatively low levels of achievement after one and a half years of exile.

But these problems were very real for the men involved, and anyone who has been to a foreign state with little or no knowledge of the language can relate to the sense of isolation this produces. In material terms, however, they lived identically to their British counterparts. They wore the same uniform (in itself a desirable thing to have, especially after the Battle of Britain); they ate the same food, slept in the same bunks, flew the same planes and shot at the same enemy. In most cases they also received the same pay, though this did not always apply if a

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<sup>20</sup> BW/2/229: Memorandum to the secretary-general, A J S White, 12.11.40.

<sup>21</sup> BW/2/229: Correspondence of 28.1.41. White further admitted that this attitude was causing no little resentment amongst the Allied governments.

<sup>22</sup> Donaldson, pp 116-7.

<sup>23</sup> Donaldson, pp 112-123. See also, BW/2/51 (Advisory Council on Foreigners in Great Britain), and BW/2/45 (Resident Foreigners Hospitality Committee). Both of these files contain exhaustive information on the cultural activities of the Council from the outbreak of war to December 1942.

<sup>24</sup> ČsL VB 131/CI-3/1/76: Examination Results, January 1942. The full range of results moved from 5% to 95%.

squadron was regarded as a fully national unit. Nevertheless, pay levels in all the allied squadrons were roughly equal, for to have too great a disparity would have seriously impacted upon morale.

The service departments also displayed an indifferent attitude when it came to the social welfare of the men. The British Council received several complaints that little or nothing was being done to entertain the allied servicemen, and approaches made to the War Office and the Air Ministry for ideas and assistance met with either silence or carefully worded excuses. Consequently, many private individuals took it upon themselves to lend a hand. Some retired teachers gave English lessons for nothing; others, especially the wealthy, opened their country houses and organised cinema shows, football matches, dances and concerts for allied personnel who happened to be stationed nearby. Somewhat embarrassed by this display of charity, the War Office appointed Sir Thomas Cook MP as a roving welfare officer to tour the air and army camps and report on conditions and general morale. He liaised with the Women's Volunteer Service and the YMCA who in turn ran clothing drives, book rallies, bring-and-buy sales and other events to raise money to provide home comforts for all of the allied contingents. Cook did an admirable job, and both the British Council and the Foreign Office received many letters of thanks from commanders of allied units. Only once did he cause brows to furrow with one of his lengthy reports. Having visited 310 (Czechoslovak) fighter squadron at RAF Duxford, he wrote: "The men's immediate needs are being well catered for by voluntary women's bodies in Cambridge", in reaction to which a senior Czech officer pencilled in the margin "Please explain".

The British Council soon found itself deeply involved with another facet of the welfare provision, the national organisations or 'hearths'. Beginning with the establishment of the Ognisko Polskie, or Polish Hearth, these national centres would act as meeting places for allied personnel where they could enjoy a taste of home. In theory they were to be the financial responsibilities of the allied governments, but from the start many were heavily supported by the British Council. In the case of the Czechoslovak Institute, the projection for the financial year 1941/2 envisaged a £2500 subsidy, taking into consideration an expected income of £300 from subscriptions and donations, and a further £100 from overnight room rental. Food and

drink would be sold on a limited-profit basis.<sup>25</sup> By 1942, that estimate had increased to £4820 as the probable subsidy required to keep the Institute viable in 1944. The Belgians, Dutch and Norwegians paid half of the running costs of their own national houses, while the Greeks and the Yugoslavs donated £250 and £300 respectively. The Poles and the Czechoslovaks, however, were noted as offering "odd amounts only", with the latter being specifically flagged as being "unreliable".<sup>26</sup>

With such heavy British Council support came a good deal of British Council influence, and very soon the original conception of these national houses as places where civilian and serviceman alike might relax in familiar surroundings soon gave way to the Council's view of what every good foreigner should be exposed to. The houses tended to organise functions which emphasised 'civilised culture' rather than rest and relaxation. Programmes of events which have survived show that the entertainment was very much geared towards the higher thinker. Classical music recitals, literary readings, poetry discussions, historical lectures and similar arrangements formed the staple cultural diet of visitors to the national houses in London.<sup>27</sup> But there were few dances, and though on balance the houses dealt with military and civilian clients in equal numbers, activities and amenities tended to be biased towards the latter.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, in 1943, the British Council commissioned work on a short film entitled *Safe Custody* which was to be based on the activities of the national houses. Part of the resumé concerning the Czechoslovak Institute stated:

We see a young Czechoslovak student reading a newspaper, then he discards it for a medical book. He has found a haven to pursue his studies in the Czechoslovak Institute, a club with British foundation where Czechoslovakians in Britain can enjoy some of the traditional teachings of their own country. We see the Librarian at work in the Library with its rare copies of immortal Czechoslovakian books. Then we look over the shoulder

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<sup>25</sup> BW 27/3: Undated fiscal projection issued before April 1941.

<sup>26</sup> BW 108/1: Estimate of expenditure, 17.11.42. This file contains the general records of the National Houses in London.

<sup>27</sup> HO 294/72: Copies of the monthly programmes are held in this file.

<sup>28</sup> BW 27/3: Letter of 8.10.41 from the British Council to the Food Office at Caxton Hall.

of a Czechoslovakian officer who is studying a notice-board where we see announcements of concerts, lectures, meetings.<sup>29</sup>

If this oozing sentimentality truly represented the British Council's perception of the Czechoslovak Institute, and it seems a plausible conclusion to assume that it did, then it is no surprise that most service personnel tended to move through it rather than support it in any meaningful sense. In effect, the national houses were little more than tools of the British Council in its mission to promote British culture, only it had a relatively captive audience and chose to maintain its profile by acting as financier, protecting its investment by packing the controlling directorates with its own people.<sup>30</sup> Taken entire, the Council did its best to educate and accommodate all the émigrés - political, civilian or military - from all of the countries which had succumbed to occupation, and it did so with the consent of the government and with funds provided by the Treasury. Yet it is hard to shake the impression that the average man in an allied unit was largely left to fend for himself in terms of his entertainment. If he came to London looking for gaiety or careless distractions from the pressures of war, he was unlikely to have his needs satisfied at the national house of his countrymen.

In essence, the allocation of comforts and welfare was bound up with the greater concept of morale. Ever since Roman times, and probably beyond, army commanders have been keenly aware that high morale in any fighting force is crucial to its efficiency. No less aware of this were the Air Ministry, but it took them a couple of years to really formulate their perceptions of allied morale, and how to maintain it, into a policy document of great depth and considerable length. Unfortunately, space does not permit a full examination of its many fascinating and varied clauses, but what follows should convey the overall sense of the document and, more importantly, the British view of their new allies as it developed over two years of collaboration and close observation.

The preamble to the document acknowledged that time had passed since the "urgent atmosphere" of 1940 and the subsequent tensions generated by the 1941 air raids; that now,

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<sup>29</sup> BW 108/1: Unsigned and undated resumé, but probably issued in early 1943 judging from its position in the file. The proposed narrative for the other main National Hearths was couched in similar terms with similar images.

<sup>30</sup> All of the source files used in this section contain numerous references to the Council officials who directed the affairs of the national houses in London.

after two and half years, the various allied air forces were fully engaged in the combined war effort.<sup>31</sup> This was followed by a broad declaration that "history revealed no precedent to guide the Government or the Service in their planning for the reception, acceptance and operative effect of the allied air forces." This could be interpreted as an almost apologetic caveat, but the object of its inclusion was to introduce the five basic principles which time and experience had now permitted to emerge as the guiding philosophy of the Air Ministry in its relations with the European exiles. These were:

- The Principle of Nationality - the preservation of national, and as far as possible, air force identity; the retention of national traditions and customs, rituals, religion and culture.
- The Principle of Legality - the recognition of the right to be subject to their own national or service laws; the equal obligation to be subject to British and service laws [sic]; the balance of justice under such dual legislation.
- The Principle of Equality - the recognition of absolute equality [to include pay and conditions, ranks, trades, training, vocations and service.]
- The Principles of Concentration - as opposed to indiscriminate dispersal of allied air forces through the Royal Air Force; the avoidance of disintegration due to over-dispersal; the advantage of coherent national integral units.
- The Principle of Construction - the ultimate creation of independent self-contained national air forces for future national use in Europe; the formation of all-allied units towards that end; the final reconstruction of national air forces on their withdrawal from Britain.<sup>32</sup>

It must be emphasised here that these were the absolute rules as far as the Air Ministry and Air Council were concerned when it came to the administration, deployment and use of all the allied air forces then on British soil. Broadly speaking, most of them were adhered to, and we can be certain that from 1942 onwards, all major Air Ministry decisions were made in the light of these principles. The document was circulated to all of the allied air force headquarters in early May 1942, and we can only speculate what the various Inspectorates made of the rather syrupy rationale: "These five tenets shall be the soil upon which allied morale can grow;

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<sup>31</sup> ČsL VB 121/CI-2d/1/175: 'The Maintenance of Good Relations and Allied Air Force Morale', p1. Oddly, no copy of this document surfaced during the research for this study in British archives, neither in the files of the DAAC/DAFL or the Air Council.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp 1-2. Some lesser elements have been omitted from this list to conserve space.

whether it flourishes or wilts is determined by what it has to weather and the treatment it receives."

But whatever one makes of the quality of the poetry, the document was certainly considered important by the Air Council because the appended instructions required it to follow the allied squadrons from station to station. Also included was a recapitulation of the existing practices in regard to the command structure within the allied air forces, focusing upon the argument that "morale at the top is as important as morale 'among the troops'."

With regard to the welfare and morale of the other ranks, the general policy was 'keep them busy'. The Ministry identified certain key factors as dangerous to morale. These were: enforced inaction due to a variety of causes (i.e. adverse weather, cancelled missions, lack of enemy activity etc.); geographical dispersal (the separation of squadrons away from concentrated formations or a particular locality); the stress of redeployment to another station or Group; bad war news; and problems associated with leave (where to go, what to do, and who to do it with). All of these elements, claimed the Ministry, had a greater impact on allied crews than native squadrons.

Inaction was to be mitigated by providing "entertainment, shows, dances, games, competitions, lectures and even serious educational or cultural training for those so disposed." Geographical dispersal was not strictly a matter which lay within allied hands, for it was a command decision made at Group or Command level. Even so, the Ministry argued that "the more we are together, the happier we will be", and permitted small, localised adjustments to be made in favour of allied squadrons if the principle of concentration was served. Much the same thinking applied to redeployment, the theory here being that a squadron move forced the men to come to terms with a new environment, possibly even a new dialect of English to wrestle with, and certainly a new station commander who might or might not be disposed towards working with allied crews. On the subject of bad war news, again some form of entertainment was recommended to overcome "an unusually heavy mood of depression", but emphasis was to fall on the engagement of "prominent allied people" to give lectures on the war situation or arrange morale-raising tours of arms factories or shipyards. With leave, the document noted that men tended to "stay local" or spend their time in areas where their home

nationals were concentrated. No solution was offered for the problems arising here, but the Ministry drew attention to the various hospitality organisations which would advise and assist any man who approached them. The important factor was to draw the men away from the station or camp if possible, for it was accepted that leave - if well spent - was an invaluable boost to morale.<sup>33</sup>

The document closed with a short paragraph on 'Tolerance', for the Ministry understood that the maintenance of good morale was ultimately dependent "upon a tolerant and sympathetic understanding" of the plight of the allies who were so far from home. Nevertheless, the Ministry required no outstanding concessions to be made. In its own words: "This is no plea for 'wet-nursing', it is no plaint for weakness, but rather for increased strength. If anyone who is working with allied personnel feels so die-hard English that he can see nothing good or useful in a 'foreigner' then he were better not employed with them." This was undoubtedly directed at British station commanders or other officers who were likely to come into contact with allied squadrons, and we shall see that this clearly demonstrates that a change of heart had taken place in the two years between the arrival of the men in 1940 and their contribution to the war effort since then. Failing that, it was nothing more than a piece of glib propaganda designed to bolster the morale of the allied commanders who read it.

The average British station commander coped in his own way with the new allies on his turf, and he frequently sent back reports on their behaviour, morale and efficiency to Command headquarters. In virtually all cases, these tended to be either highly complimentary or at least benign criticisms, but occasionally we catch glimpses of that raw imperialism which, or is, so quintessentially British. Many of the early reports focused on the distinctions between the Czechoslovak and Polish pilots. The station commander at Warmwell in October 1940 noted that the Poles were "keen and enthusiastic about flying for its own sake and would rather fly and fight than do anything else." Of the Czechoslovaks, he wrote: "They are as hardworking and conscientious as Polish personnel but not usually so good from the flying point of view and the pilots I have met seem to be less enthusiastic than most fighter pilots." The station commander at Exeter also had slight reservations about his new comrades: "The Czechoslovaks

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp 7-10.

without exception appear keen. They have not the terrific hatred for all things German that the Poles have, but they certainly do not compare unfavourably with British pilots in their offensive spirit. Their morale is good, but not so striking as that of the Poles." Of the Poles themselves, he observed: "The Polish pilot appears to be almost British. He talks about the same things, enjoys similar jokes, grumbles about the food, and drinks very moderately but makes the most of the party. His manners are better, especially towards women and his superior officers, but he eats less daintily and does not play cricket."<sup>34</sup>

From 1942 until the Normandy landings in 1944, the Anglo-Allied relationships fell into a routine and a pattern rarely broken by any new developments. After that date, most minds turned towards victory in Europe and the liberation of the occupied territories, but with those pleasant thoughts came a whole plethora of new political and military problems. Two major initiatives dominated the scene after Normandy. The first was a paper issued by the Chiefs of Staff known generally as COS 120, and the second was an umbrella term used to describe a range of separate yet broadly similar individual agreements known as Mutual Aid. Both instruments were directed towards sustaining and improving the post-war inter-allied relationships, though it was to be COS 120 which caused the most problems.

On 30 June 1944, a little over three weeks beyond the invasion of occupied Europe, Churchill commissioned a policy review concerning all the allied powers then fighting to liberate their homelands from the Nazis. It drew its common title - COS 120 - from the simple fact that it was the 120th paper produced by the Chiefs of Staff Committee that year, but it was correctly known as 'The Equipping of the Forces of our European Allies.' It had two objectives: (1) to act as a basis for producing estimates in preparation for allied re-armament at the war's end; (2) to ascertain the extent to which demands on British manpower could be reduced by utilising the forces of the European allies in the occupation of Germany.<sup>35</sup>

As a paper which reveals much about the predicted conditions in Europe after the defeat of Germany, including the likely political scenario as the Red Army advanced, the document is of great value to the strategic and political historian. For example, the Chiefs of

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<sup>34</sup> ČsL VB 119/C1-2d/1/75 [VHA Archives, Prague]. Reports, September-December 1940.

<sup>35</sup> Various copies of COS (44) 120 exist in British files, but the main version, complete with appropriate commentary, may be found in CAB 80/44.

Staff tentatively forecast that the war against Japan would go on for another two years beyond the defeat of Germany, and that it was quite possible that German armament factories would need to be rapidly restored and pressed into service to meet the munitions demand. The likely military position of France was also closely considered, and the COS accepted that the Americans would require an equal voice in the re-equipping and training of post-war French forces. Indeed, the COS believed that such a presence would be greatly in Britain's strategic interest, and this is something worth recalling when the squabbling began over the French Air Force in 1945. The arguments for the long-term provision of British assistance in the liberated territories are also interesting. It was estimated that the home weapons industry might enjoy contracts sufficient to supply up to 400,000 men for two years, these forces being split between those necessary to ensure each nation's domestic security, and a share of the occupation liabilities in Germany itself.

Visions of a Soviet hegemony clearly dominated much of the planning behind COS 120, for the Poles, Czechoslovaks and Yugoslavs were to have their fighter squadron capability considerably enlarged as defensive screens against a sudden Soviet thrust. In the west, France was to receive double the amount of fighters she had been operating from European airfields, as was Belgium. Holland would see an increase to four fighter squadrons instead of the one which formed late in the war, but it was part of the overall strategy that these three nations would participate in the occupation of Germany, therefore an immediate increase of fighter capability was an obvious necessity. Only Norway would see a small addition to her fighter defences; the two fighter squadrons which fought so gallantly during the war would be joined by a third. Squadrons of heavy bombers were also targeted for delivery to some of the European allies, as were transport and reconnaissance aircraft with full facilities for training and maintenance provided as part of the package.

This, however, was only the plan, and we shall see how wide of the mark some of it was when the halcyon vision was warped by the situation on the ground. In essence, it was the British way of reaping the peace, and though the United States generally agreed with the principles and estimates laid down in COS 120, they still had plenty to say when it conflicted with their own plans in 1945. Besides, the whole scheme rested squarely upon the ability of

the British to supply the aircraft concerned; and, of course, the willingness of the allies to be so equipped when the dust had settled and there were opportunities to think about alternatives. Nevertheless, as we move through the various chapters, references to COS 120 occur from time to time, and it is interesting to watch the cold realities of 1945 unfold in its fading light, first cast while the bridgeheads in Normandy were still being consolidated.

The other programme running alongside COS 120, and was to some extent designed to act as the precursor for post-war rearmament, was Mutual Aid. The Mutual Aid protocols signed with the allies in 1944 committed each nation to supplying the British forces with facilities and supplies upon the liberation of their homeland until such time as the Germans were driven out altogether. This was correctly termed "reciprocal aid" in the jargon of the Foreign Office as it went some way to repaying the British government for the costs incurred equipping and training some of the allied forces during their exile in Britain. Some of the governments had huge resources from which to draw their expenses - Norway and Holland being two good examples - but others, such as the Czechoslovaks and the Poles, needed extensive financial credits to fund their war effort. Indeed, so meticulous were the men at the Treasury in keeping the books, the Czechs were presented with a bill for £177,236 twelve shillings and ninepence for fighter ammunition used in the two years from their arrival in the summer of 1940 to the end of the tax year in 1942.<sup>36</sup> By the middle of 1944, the Czechs were owing around £5.5 million, but this pales into insignificance when compared to the Polish debt of more than £80 million.<sup>37</sup> Mutual Aid was therefore little more than a gesture of support; and besides, political considerations in 1945 made much of it irrelevant anyway. Strong nerves at the Treasury contemplated £100 million write-offs with scarcely a visible sign of concern in their frequent notes to the service departments, but when it became clear that a lot of the money would never be refunded, the potential marketing opportunities implicit in COS 120 became all the more attractive.

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<sup>36</sup> The VHA archives in Prague are full of such data. Within three weeks of the first two Czechoslovak Hurricanes to be lost in the Battle of Britain, an invoice for £13,140 to cover aircraft costs and training fees was sent to the Czechoslovak authorities. To be fair to the British, however, the allies themselves insisted on such accurate accountancy to balance their own budgets.

<sup>37</sup> FO 371/42299: Treasury figures, 11.6.44.

Such were the major policies and articles of legislation which applied to the foreign airmen in Britain, but before we move on to examine each nation by turn, a few words must be recorded concerning the primary focus of the present study. More than anything, this entire work is an examination of official Britain's reaction to an unprecedented situation. France had not been expected to fall, therefore there were no contingency arrangements to administer the air and land units formed on British soil by the governments and servicemen of the occupied nations. They were, indeed, unexpected allies, for if things had gone according to plan they would have fought their war on the continent alongside a resolute France. That turned out not to be the case, so the British had to cope with things as best they could. Some might agree that they coped fairly well and assimilated the allies into the structure of the Royal Air Force with remarkable efficiency given the difficult circumstances. Others might feel that the entire relationship was based more on tolerance than a genuine spirit of alliance and friendship.

But although many of the views expressed by some of the British make for uncomfortable reading, it is vital to remember that the officers and men of the allied squadrons were seldom selected for individual criticism. Many medals were won, many friends were lost, and the Royal Air Force grew very fond indeed of these stout warriors who refused to give up the fight for their homes. Rather, most of the conflict took place at the higher level, usually with the allied governments or with the high commands, for this was the area which generated the greatest tensions. The men on the ground or in the air simply got on with the job, and from the dismal days of 1940 right through to the glorious relief of Victory in Europe, they displayed nothing but bravery and dedication to the common cause. They lived and died as airmen of their own countries fighting from the heart of another, and all the foreign veterans' associations are tenacious in preserving those far off links with the RAF as defining moments in their respective aviation histories.

Finally, and despite all of the horrors which they had witnessed, the perilous escapes, and the long years in exile during which so many terrible things were heard about conditions at home, we must also note that they displayed a fine sense of humour. Like their British colleagues, they sought laughter wherever they could, for in laughter they might find that extra ounce of comradeship which was so important when the news was bad or the pressures of exile

grew hard to bear. Most jokes were usually directed at their political representatives, or at the British for their stuffiness. Language problems gave them no end of fun. One highly popular story, said to have originated with one of the Dutch squadrons, was set in a disciplinary hearing in which the British commander accused the allied pilot of cowardice in the face of the enemy. "You were told quite clearly that there were bandits at three o'clock," said the CO, "and yet you immediately flew back to the station. Why?" Came the nonchalant reply, "Because it was only half past one." Another story, this time Polish, poked fun at the British class system. A young lady of high society had volunteered to serve in a tea-wagon, and on the first day she encountered a Polish pilot who had obviously gone to great lengths to master the slang for 'a cup of tea and a sandwich'. After several attempts to understand the chap's requests, she turned to her more roughly-hewn workmate and said: "This fellow keeps asking for 'a cuppa cha and a wad'. Do you think he knows any English?"

***End of Introduction***