

Strength And Casualties of the Armed
Forces And Auxiliary Services of the United Kingdom.
1939-45



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of the
Armed Forces and Auxiliary Services
of the United Kingdom
1939 to 1945

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to Parliament by Command of His Majesty
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INTRODUCTION

This paper gives statistics of the number of men and women who served in the Armed Forces and auxiliary services of the United Kingdom and of the casualties suffered during the war. The figures relate only to British subjects usually domiciled in Great Britain and Northern Ireland and to those British subjects and other persons elsewhere who individually enlisted and served in the Armed Forces and Auxiliary Services of the United Kingdom. They do not include men and women who served in units and contingents of His Majesty's Forces, other than those of the United Kingdom, or in Allied units and contingents under British or Allied Commands.⁽¹⁾

SECTION I.—NUMBERS SERVING IN THE ARMED FORCES AND AUXILIARY SERVICES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Armed Forces

2. On 31st August 1939, the strength of the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom (Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force) was 681,000 men. Including reservists mobilised, a further 5,215,000 men were taken into the Services between 31st August 1939 and 30th June 1945, making a total of 5,896,000 men who served in the Armed Forces during the war. Of this total 923,000 men served in the Royal Navy; 3,788,000 in the Army, and 1,185,000 in the Royal Air Force.⁽²⁾ This intake was sufficient, not only to meet casualties and discharges on medical and other grounds, but also to raise the total serving strength of the Armed Forces from 681,000 men at the outbreak of the war to 2,223,000 by June 1940, and to a peak of 4,683,000 men in June 1945.

3. Most of these men were drawn from the younger age groups between 18 and 30. Three out of every five men born between 1905 and 1927 and seven out of every ten born between 1915 and 1927 served in the Armed Forces.

Women's Auxiliary Services

4. The strength of the Women's Auxiliary Services (Women's Royal Naval Service, Auxiliary Territorial Service, Women's Auxiliary Air Force and the Nursing Services) at the beginning of the war was 21,000.

Between 31st August 1939 and 30th June 1945, 619,000 women entered the Women's Auxiliary Services, so that a total of 640,000 women served during the war. From the beginning of the war to 30th June 1945, 86,000 women served in the Women's Royal Naval Service, 307,000 in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, 219,000 in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and 28,000 in the Nursing Services.⁽³⁾ This rate of intake made it possible to raise the total serving strength of the Women's Auxiliary Services from 21,000 at the beginning of the war to a maximum of 466,000 in 1944. Although the mobilization of women was directed mainly to the replacement of men in industry, one in every nine women born between 1915 and 1927 served in the Women's Auxiliary Services.

(1) The total strength of the British Commonwealth and Empire Armed Forces (excluding Women's Services) was 8,845,000 at the middle of 1945. If allowance is made for the number who became casualties and who were discharged on medical and other grounds the total number of men who served during the war was over 10 millions.

(2) To avoid duplication, men or women who transferred from one Service to another have been excluded from the intake figure of the Service to which they were later transferred.

(3) Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, Territorial Army Nursing Service, Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service and members of Voluntary Aid Detachments serving with the Armed Forces.

Other Services

5. In addition to the men and women serving in the Armed Forces and the Women's Auxiliary Services, a large number of men served in the Merchant Navy and many men and women were recruited for service, whole-time or part-time, in Civil Defence,⁽¹⁾ the Royal Observer Corps, and the Home Guard.

6. *Whole-time*.—At June 1944, when the strength of the Armed Forces was 4,544,000, there were 417,000 men serving whole-time in Civil Defence, the Merchant Navy and the Royal Observer Corps. In addition to the 466,000 women in the Women's Auxiliary Services at this date there were 61,000 women serving whole-time in Civil Defence and the Royal Observer Corps.

7. *Part-time*.—At June 1944, there were 3,002,000 men giving part-time service. Of this total 1,253,000 were in Civil Defence (excluding Fire Guards), 1,727,000 in the Home Guard and 22,000 in the Royal Observer Corps. In addition there were 391,000 women performing part-time duties in these three Services.

Peak of Mobilization

8. The peak of mobilization of the Armed Forces, Auxiliary and other Services taken together was reached in June 1944, when the liberation of Europe began. The numbers actually serving at that date were as follows:—

Men				Women			
<i>Armed Forces</i>				<i>Women's Auxiliary Services</i>			
			<i>Thousands</i>				<i>Thousands</i>
Royal Navy	...	...	790	W.R.N.S.	...	...	74
Army	...	...	2,742	A.T.S.	...	...	199
Royal Air Force	...	...	1,012	W.A.A.F.	...	...	174
				Nursing Services	...	...	19
Total	...	...	4,544	Total	...	...	466
<i>Other Services</i>				<i>Other Services</i>			
<i>Whole-time</i>				<i>Whole-time</i>			
Civil Defence	...	...	231	Civil Defence	...	...	58
Merchant Navy	...	...	180	Royal Observer Corps	...	...	3
Royal Observer Corps	...	...	6				
Total	...	...	417	Total	...	...	61
<i>Part-time</i>				<i>Part-time</i>			
Civil Defence	...	...	1,253	Civil Defence	...	...	358
Royal Observer Corps	...	...	22	Royal Observer Corps	...	...	2
Home Guard	...	...	1,727	Home Guard	...	...	31
Total	...	...	3,002	Total	...	...	391

SECTION II.—STRENGTH OF INDIVIDUAL SERVICES

Armed Forces

9. Table 1 shows the expansion of the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom from 1939 to 1945. The figures include men locally enlisted abroad in United Kingdom Forces (of whom there were 30,000 at June 1945) and men from overseas who enlisted in the United Kingdom to serve in the United Kingdom Forces.

10. The figures relate only to men actually serving at the dates shown. They exclude men:—

- (a) on deferred service
- (b) on reserve

⁽¹⁾ Civil Defence General Services (including the Casualty Services and the Civil Defence Reserve), National Fire Service, Regular Police and Auxiliary Police. Members of the Fire Guard service, other than those engaged in supervisory duties, are excluded.

(c) temporarily released to industry or released on compassionate grounds

(d) reported prisoners of war or missing

(e) members of the Home Guard.

TABLE 1
STRENGTH OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
Thousands

End of month	Total Armed Forces	Royal Navy	Army	Royal Air Force
August, 1939	681	161	402	118
June, 1940	2,223	276	1,656	291
June, 1941	3,291	405	2,221	665
June, 1942	3,815	507	2,468	840
June, 1943	4,332	671	2,692	969
June, 1944	4,544	790	2,742	1,012
June, 1945	4,683	789	2,931	963

11. The total strength of the Armed Forces reached its peak of 4,683,000 in June 1945. Of this total strength 666,000 were engaged in the war against Japan in South-East Asia and the Far East and 4,017,000 were serving in other overseas theatres and at home. The numbers in each service were:

	Against Japan	Others
Royal Navy	224,000	565,000
Army	315,000	2,616,000
Royal Air Force	127,000	836,000

12. *Royal Navy*.—The strength of the Royal Navy rose from 161,000 at the beginning of the war to 789,000 in June 1945. The figures given include the Royal Marines, the Naval Air Arm and merchant seamen serving with the Royal Navy on special agreements (T.124 agreements and variants). In June 1945, the strength of the Naval Air Arm was 79,802, of whom 8,350 were trained aircrew and 4,283 aircrew in training. The strength of the Royal Marines was 78,000 and the number serving under T.124 agreements (and variants) was 13,000.

13. *Army*.—The strength of the Army was raised rapidly from 402,000 at 31st August 1939, to 1,656,000 in June 1940, and then increased each year to a peak of 2,931,000 in June 1945. This latter figure included some 108,000 men who were formerly prisoners of war in Germany. The figures for the Army exclude the British component of the Indian Army amounting to about 18,000 at 30th June 1945. At the end of the war over one and three quarter million men of the Army were serving abroad.

14. *Royal Air Force*.—The strength of the Royal Air Force was 118,000 at the beginning of the war. This was raised steadily to a peak of 1,012,000 by the middle of 1944 declining slightly to 963,000 in June 1945. The numbers shown exclude all Dominion Air Forces serving under their own Commands or placed at the disposal of the Royal Air Force and also exclude Allied Air Forces serving under their own or under British Commands. At the end of the war 316,000 men of the Royal Air Force were serving abroad.

Women's Auxilliary Services

15. The total strength of the Women's Auxiliary Services, including the Nursing Services, rose steadily from 21,000 at the beginning of the war to 466,000 at the middle of 1944. At this date there were 74,000 women serving in the Women's Royal Naval Service, 199,000 in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, 174,000 in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and 19,000 in the Nursing Services. About 37,000 members of the Women's Services were serving abroad at the end of the war.

**STRENGTH OF THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY SERVICES OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM**

TABLE 2

Thousands

End of month	Total	W.R.N.S.	A.T.S.	W.A.A.F.	Nursing Services
August, 1939 ...	21	—	18	2	1
June, 1940 ...	56	6	32	12	6
June, 1941 ...	105	15	43	37	10
June, 1942 ...	307	29	140	126	12
June, 1943 ...	461	53	210	182	16
June, 1944 ...	466	74	199	174	19
June, 1945 ...	437	72	191	153	21

Civil Defence

16. Grouped under this heading are the Civil Defence General Services (including the Casualty Services and the Civil Defence Reserve), National Fire Service, Regular Police and Auxiliary Police. These services exclude members of the Fire Guard Service other than those engaged in supervisory duties.

The total strength of the Civil Defence Services was raised rapidly by the middle of 1940 to 1,742,000, of whom 349,000 were serving whole-time. The number of men serving whole-time increased to 330,000 in 1941 and then declined to 231,000 by the middle of 1944. The number of both men and women serving part-time, however, rose between 1940 and 1944 so that the total strength of the Civil Defence Services reached its peak of 1,900,000 at the middle of 1944.

**STRENGTH OF THE CIVIL DEFENCE SERVICES OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM**

TABLE 3

Thousands

End of month	Total			Whole-time			Part-time		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
June, 1939 ...	83	83	—	83	83	—	— ⁽¹⁾	—	—
June, 1940 ...	1,742	1,401	341	349	296	53	1,393	1,105	288
June, 1941 ...	1,834	1,487	347	390	330	60	1,444	1,156	288
June, 1942 ...	1,728	1,399	329	391	311	80	1,337	1,088	249
June, 1943 ...	1,881	1,472	409	331	260	71	1,550	1,212	338
June, 1944 ...	1,900	1,484	416	289	231	58	1,611	1,253	358
June, 1945 ⁽²⁾	411	369	42	131	116	15	280	253	27

⁽¹⁾ Considerable numbers were enrolled for part-time duty, but only limited numbers were required to perform regular duties in June 1939.

⁽²⁾ Only the National Fire Service, Regular Police and Auxiliary Police were still performing active duties at the end of June 1945.

Home Guard and Royal Observer Corps

17. The appeal for men to enrol in the Local Defence Volunteers, which was re-named the Home Guard, was made in May 1940. By the end of June 1940, the strength of the Home Guard was 1,456,000. This strength was raised to 1,784,000 by the middle of 1943 and maintained at about one and three quarter million until the end of 1944. In 1943 women were enrolled in the Home Guard for non-combatant duties and 31,000 were serving at the middle of 1944.

The Royal Observer Corps was created to ensure the rapid detection of enemy aircraft attacking the United Kingdom and to provide navigational help to the Royal Air Force operating from the United Kingdom. By June 1940, there were 28,000 men and women serving in the Royal Observer Corps, of whom 2,000 were serving whole-time and 26,000 part-time. The strength was increased to 33,000 in 1941 and maintained at about this level throughout the war.

STRENGTH OF THE HOME GUARD AND ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS

TABLE 4

Thousands

End of month	Home Guard		Royal Observer Corps				
	Men	Women	Total	Whole-time		Part-time	
				Men	Women	Men	Women
June, 1940	1,456	—	28	2	—	26	—
June, 1941	1,603	—	33	4	—	29	—
June, 1942	1,565	—	34	5	—	28	1
June, 1943	1,784	7	33	6	1	25	1
June, 1944	1,727	31	33	6	3	22	2

SECTION III.—CASUALTIES

18. The figures given in this section relate to the casualties suffered during the war by the Armed Forces and auxiliary services enumerated in Section II and to casualties suffered by the civilian population of the United Kingdom. In the case of the Armed Forces, casualty figures are subject to continuous revision and a final statement cannot be issued until the fate of all men still reported missing is determined. Four categories of casualties to the Armed Forces and the Women's Auxiliary Services are distinguished—killed, missing, wounded and prisoners of war.

(a) *Killed.* The numbers recorded as killed include those who have died of wounds or injuries, those missing presumed dead and those who have died in captivity. The Royal Navy include deaths from disease attributable to war service and the Royal Air Force include suicides. All other deaths from natural causes are excluded.⁽¹⁾

(b) *Missing.* Men reported missing and then subsequently reported killed, wounded or prisoners of war have been transferred from "missing" to the other category. The figures for missing shown in the tables include men reported missing who subsequently rejoined their units as well as those who were still missing on 28th February 1946.

(c) *Wounded.* The number of wounded recorded by the Army is limited to injuries classified as battle casualties, which are defined as comprising injuries caused by enemy action, accidental injuries occurring in action or in proximity to the enemy and injuries caused by fixed apparatus laid as defences against the enemy. The figures relate to wounds requiring treatment at a hospital or field dressing station. The other two Services use the term in a wider sense which embraces all injuries sustained on war

⁽¹⁾ In addition to the casualty figures given in Table 5, the following numbers of men died from natural causes during the war while serving in the Armed Forces: Royal Navy 6,950, Army 19,935, Royal Air Force 4,386, Total 31,271.

service. The Royal Air Force also include accidents occurring during training. The figures for all Services exclude absence from duty due to sickness.

(d) *Prisoners of War.* The figures include men interned in neutral countries. They also include prisoners of war who have been repatriated or who have escaped, but they exclude prisoners who have died in captivity. Reported deaths in captivity are transferred from "prisoners of war" to "killed". For prisoners in Europe the figures are based partly on official notifications received from Germany and Italy. For prisoners in Japanese hands the figures are based partly on official notifications and partly on information received from prisoners themselves.

19. The figures relate to the gross number of casualties and not to the number of men who became casualties. A man who was reported missing, wounded or prisoner of war more than once has been counted as a casualty on each occasion so reported. Men reported missing or prisoners of war are deducted from the figures of strength when so reported and are included again in the figures of strength if and when they rejoin their units.

20. The total casualties suffered during the war by the Armed Forces, the Auxiliary Services and the civilian population of the United Kingdom were 950,794. Of these 357,116 were killed, 369,267 were wounded, 178,332 were prisoners of war or internees and 46,079 were missing.

CASUALTIES SUFFERED DURING THE WAR BY THE ARMED FORCES, THE AUXILIARY SERVICES AND THE CIVILIAN POPULATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM FROM 3RD SEPTEMBER 1939 TO 14TH AUGUST 1945, AS REPORTED TO 28TH FEBRUARY 1946

TABLE 5 Number

	Total	Armed Forces	Women's Auxiliary Services	Home Guard	Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet	Civilians
Killed	357,116	264,443	624	1,206	30,248	60,595
Missing	46,079 ⁽¹⁾	41,327	98	—	4,654	—
Wounded	369,267	277,077	744	557	4,707	86,182
Prisoner of war and internees	178,332	172,592	20	—	5,720	(²)
Total	950,794	755,439	1,486	1,763	45,329	146,777

(¹) Including 6,244 still missing at 28th February 1946 and 39,835 who rejoined their units.

(²) The number of United Kingdom civilians interned in enemy occupied countries is not known.

Armed Forces

21. Table 6 shows the casualties to each of the three Services of the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom⁽¹⁾ during the war. The Royal Navy suffered 73,642 casualties including 50,758 killed and 14,663 wounded. The 569,501 casualties to the Army included 144,079 killed and 239,575 wounded. In the Royal Air Force total casualties amounted to 112,296, including 69,606 killed and 22,839 wounded.

(¹) The figures include casualties to men from overseas serving in the United Kingdom Forces, in particular from Newfoundland and Southern Rhodesia. They exclude casualties to the Armed Forces of the Dominions, India and the Colonies. Casualties to all ranks of the Armed Forces of the Dominions, India and the Colonies reported up to the end of the war were 490,768, of whom 108,929 were killed, 37,805 missing, 197,980 wounded and 146,054 prisoners of war.

**CASUALTIES TO ALL RANKS OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
DURING THE WAR AS REPORTED TO 28TH FEBRUARY 1946**

TABLE 6

Number

	Total	Royal Navy	Army	Royal Air Force
Killed	264,443	50,758	144,079	69,606
Missing ⁽¹⁾	41,327	820	33,771	6,736
Wounded	277,077	14,663	239,575	22,839
Prisoners of war	172,592	7,401	152,076	13,115
Total	755,439	73,642	569,501	112,296

⁽¹⁾ Including the following who were still missing on 28th February 1946: Royal Navy 340, Army 2,267, Royal Air Force 3,089, Total 5,696.

22. In Tables 7 and 8, the casualties in the war against Japan are distinguished from casualties in the war against Germany and Italy. They show that the Armed Forces suffered 90,332 casualties in the war against Japan—about 12 per cent. of the total casualties of 755,439.

**CASUALTIES TO ALL RANKS OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
IN THE WAR AGAINST GERMANY, AS REPORTED TO 28TH FEBRUARY 1946**

TABLE 7

Number

	Total	Royal Navy	Army	Royal Air Force
Killed	234,475	46,911	121,484	66,080
Missing ⁽¹⁾	35,075	416	29,255	5,404
Wounded	260,548	14,360	224,427	21,761
Prisoners of war	135,009	5,518	119,764	9,727
Total	665,107	67,205	494,930	102,972

⁽¹⁾ Including the following still missing on 28th February 1946: Royal Navy nil, Army 671, Royal Air Force 2,109, Total 2,780.

**CASUALTIES TO ALL RANKS OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
IN THE WAR AGAINST JAPAN, AS REPORTED TO 28TH FEBRUARY 1946**

TABLE 8

Number

	Total	Royal Navy	Army	Royal Air Force
Killed	29,968	3,847	22,595	3,526
Missing ⁽¹⁾	6,252	404	4,516	1,332
Wounded	16,529	303	15,148	1,078
Prisoners of war	37,583	1,883	32,312	3,388
Total	90,332	6,437	74,571	9,324

⁽¹⁾ Including the following still missing on 28th February 1946: Royal Navy 340, Army 1,596, Royal Air Force 980, Total 2,916.

23. Table 9 shows the total number of prisoners of war in each of the Services reported captured in the war against Germany and against Japan and the

numbers reported killed or died in captivity. The total number of prisoner captured by Germany and Italy was 142,319, of whom 7,310 died in captivity but of a total of 50,016 prisoners captured by Japan, 12,433 died in captivity

TOTAL NUMBER OF PRISONERS OF WAR OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM CAPTURED BY THE ENEMY AS REPORTED TO 28TH FEBRUARY 1946

TABLE 9

Number

	Total	Royal Navy	Army	Royal Air Force
<i>Captured by Germany and Italy</i>				
Total reported captured ...	142,319	5,629	126,811	9,879
Killed or died in captivity ...	7,310	111	7,047	152
<i>Captured by Japan</i>				
Total reported captured ...	50,016	2,304	42,610	5,102
Killed or died in captivity ...	12,433	421	10,298	1,714

The difference between the total number of prisoners captured and the number who died in captivity is identical with the numbers shown as prisoners of war in Tables 7 and 8, in which those who died in captivity are included in the numbers killed.

Women's Auxiliary Services

24. The Women's Auxiliary Services suffered 1,486 casualties. Of these 624 women were killed and 744 wounded.

CASUALTIES TO THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY SERVICES DURING THE WAR AS REPORTED TO 28TH FEBRUARY 1946

TABLE 10

Number

	Total	Women's Royal Naval Service	Auxiliary Territorial Service and Army Nursing Services	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
Killed	624	102	335	187
Missing	98	—	94 ⁽¹⁾	4
Wounded	744	22	302	420
Prisoners of war	20	—	20	—
Total	1,486	124	751	611

⁽¹⁾ Including 18 women who were still missing at 28th February 1946.

Civil Defence and Civilian Casualties

25. There were 146,777 civilian casualties in the United Kingdom due to enemy action. Of these 60,595 were killed or missing believed killed and 86,182 were injured and detained in hospital. These figures include 6,838 casualties suffered by Civil Defence workers while on duty of whom 6,220 were men and 618 women.

**CASUALTIES TO UNITED KINGDOM CIVILIANS DUE TO ENEMY ACTION AS REPORTED
TO 31ST JULY 1945**

TABLE II

Number

	Total Civilian Casualties					Casualties to Civil Defence workers ⁽¹⁾ on duty, (included in civilian casualties)		
	Total	Men	Women	Children under 16	Unidentified	Total	Men	Women
Killed and missing believed killed	60,595	26,923	25,399	7,736	537	2,379	2,148	231
Injured and detained in hospital	86,182	40,738	37,822	7,622	—	4,459	4,072	387
Total ...	146,777	67,661	63,221	15,358	537	6,838	6,220	618

⁽¹⁾ Civil Defence General Services, National Fire Service, Regular and Auxiliary Police.

Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet

26. The Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet sustained 45,329 casualties during the war. Of these 30,248 were fatal (including deaths presumed in missing ships and deaths while interned), and 4,707 were wounded. There were 4,654 men reported missing of whom 530 had not been accounted for on 28th February 1946; in addition 5,720 men were reported as internees. The figures for deaths, missing and internees include all British subjects and nationals of allied countries who served in British registered ships and fishing boats as well as British subjects who served in foreign ships chartered by the United Kingdom during the war.

Home Guard

27. Members of the Home Guard suffered 1,763 casualties attributable to service. Of these 1,206 died of wounds, injury or illness attributed to service and 557 were wounded (excluding accidental injuries or illness).

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