British Army In Wwii Essay, Research Paper

The British Army in World War 2

During the First World War, the British Army was transformed from a voluntary, professional force backed up by a voluntary reserve into a ‘national’ army recruited by conscription. It was able to make this transition without a material decline in its’ effectiveness, and this is a considerable credit to the regimental system and the calibre of its personnel. At the start of the war, there was probably no or very little anti-German feeling amongst the ranks of the army, but instead probably a preparedness to take on anyone.

Once war was declared and mobilization ordered, the recruiting offices were swamped with volunteers, rising to 33,000 per day in September 1914, who could hardly be accommodated in barracks or equipped. After the rush slowed, in July 1915 the National Registration Act provided for the listing of all men aged 18-41, and in October 1915 the ‘Derby Scheme’ provided for the enlistment of recruits for one day’s service, then passing to the reserve for call-up when required, this brought in some two million men by the end of the year. Conscription was introduced by the Military Service Act of January 1916, which rendered liable all single men aged 18-41, extended to married men in May 1916; Exemptions were permitted from reserved occupation to conscientious objection. The creation of the Ministry of National Service in November 1917 transferred recruiting to civil control, and in April 1918 another Military Service Act extended the age limit to 51, and the government was compelled to abandon its undertaking not to send aboard troops under the age of 19. Conscription was never applied to Ireland. Upto February 1916 more than 2,631,000 men volunteered, from then to the armistice another 2,339,000 were conscripted. A major consequence of this saw women employed in previously male occupations.

The End of the First World War, saw the RAF replace the Army as police of the empire, as the RAF was both further ranging and cheaper to maintain than an army in the field. The Interwar years, saw the run down of the Army back into the hard-core of professionals from the massive post-first world war numbers. When the Army entered World War 2, it was outgunned and outmaneuvred by the German Blitzkreig, despite the British theorists having originated the Blitzkrieg. The British and French had more tanks, and some which were better at the beginning of the battle fo France, but the lack of knowledge of how to use and deploy them doomed the British Expeditionary Force and the Army did not receive a credible replacement Cruiser tank until the Sherman appeared. No Allied tanks was able to withstand the infamous German 88mm Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank gun. The British Army did not receive a credible British Tank, the Crusader until after VE-day.

It is almost impossible to list all the British Armies actions of this period, but the main theatres of war for the British Army were in Chronological order:

The Battle of France

The African Campaigns (Including the Battle of El Alamein)

The Retreat from Burma

The Sicilian and Italian Landings

The Battle of Kohima

The D-Day landings and Normandy

The Fall of the Reich