

WESTERN APPROACHES HQ MUSEUM

Liverpool's Secret Second World War Bunker

Education Pack Key Stage 2



Western Approaches HQ Museum

Education Pack

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in Western Approaches HQ. This pack is designed to provide information about the bunker, its role during the Second World War and some of the opportunities we offer schools.

This pack has been created to meet the requirements of National Curriculum Key Stage 2 History, specifically:

- a study or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066.
- a local history study.

Planning Your Visit

- **Pre-Visits:** Teachers are welcome to visit the museum at any time to familiarise themselves with our layout and discuss any specific requirements. You can take advantage of our occasional free entry holiday offers for teachers and teaching assistants and one child or a complimentary entry if you have a confirmed booking.
- **Parking:** Unfortunately, we have no parking facilities on site and as a city centre site we have limited on street parking near by. We are within easy walking distance of Moorfields and James Street Merseyrail stations though.
- **Special Needs:** Western Approaches HQ is committed to helping all students access our museum. However, due to the nature of the bunker, physically disabled access is limited. Please contact us prior to visiting to discuss any specific requirements for your pupils.
- **Toilets:** Toilets are located on the ground floor. There are no toilet facilities inside the main bunker space.
- **Lunch:** A lunch room facility is available for school groups but this must be booked in advance as there is limited space. There is no eating or drinking allowed in the main bunker space.
- **Behaviour:** We want everyone to enjoy their visit to Western Approaches HQ and to ensure this please remind your pupils that there will be other visitors present in the museum and to act appropriately at all times. Discipline remains your responsibility and appropriate adult supervision is expected.



1. Background

With the approach of war in the late 1930's preparations were undertaken right across Britain including here in Liverpool. Derby House was already under construction for the Ministry of Defence when orders were given to build a reinforced concrete bunker beneath it.

The bunker was to become one of the most important sites in the whole of the Second World War as it became headquarters for the Battle of the Atlantic, organising and protecting the vital supply convoys needed to keep the war effort going and organising the war against the deadly German U Boats (Submarines).

2. What was the Battle of the Atlantic?

During the Second World War both the Allies and the Axis Powers fought for control of the Atlantic Ocean. The Allies wanted to use the Atlantic to resupply Great Britain and the Soviet Union in their fight against Germany and Italy. The Axis Powers wanted to stop them. This fight for control of the Atlantic Ocean is called the Battle of the Atlantic.

Where did it take place?

The Battle of the Atlantic took place throughout the northern region of the Atlantic Ocean. Once the United States entered the war the battle spread all the way to the coast the United States and the Caribbean Sea.

How long did it last?

The battle lasted over 5 years and 8 months from September 3, 1939 to May 8, 1945.

Early Battles

The early battles in the Atlantic heavily favoured the Germans. They used their submarines to sneak up on British ships and sink them with torpedoes. The Allies struggled to maintain the supply routes and lost a lot of ships over the first few years of the war.

U-Boats

German submarines were called U-boats. This was short for "Unterseeboot", which meant "undersea boat." The Germans quickly ramped up manufacture of their U-boats and had hundreds of submarines patrolling the Atlantic Ocean by 1943.

Allied Convoys

The Allies tried to counter the U-boat attacks by travelling in large groups called convoys. They had warships that would help to escort them and defend them from attacks. For a period of time in 1941 this method was fairly effective in helping get many ships through safely to Britain. However, as the Germans built more and more submarines the convoys became less successful.

Secret Codes and Innovations

In 1943 the battle reached its peak. The Germans had a large number of submarines in the Atlantic, but the Allies had broken the German



secret codes (Enigma) and had developed new technologies for fighting submarines. The Allies used radar to tell where the ships were and special new underwater bombs called Hedgehogs that helped to destroy the submarines.

The Battle Turns

By the middle of 1943, the battle had turned in favour of the Allies. From this point on in the war, the United States was able to more freely ship supplies to Great Britain including the large supply of soldiers and weapons needed for the D Day landings in France..

Results

The control of the Atlantic had a major impact on the outcome of the war. Keeping Britain supplied helped to keep the Germans from taking over all of Western Europe.

The losses in the battle were staggering. Over 30,000 sailors were killed on each side. The Allies lost around 3,500 supply ships and 175 warships. The Germans lost 783 submarines.

Interesting Facts about the Battle of the Atlantic

- Winston Churchill first called it the "Battle of the Atlantic" in 1941.
- It was estimated that at least 20 supply ships needed to arrive each day in Britain in order for them to continue to fight the war.
- The Allies lost 1,664 supply ships in 1942.
- The Germans sometimes used a "wolf pack" tactic where a number of submarines would surround and attack a supply convoy at once.
- Allied planes used a large spotlight called the Leigh Light to spot submarines that had surfaced at night.

3. Liverpool in the Second World War

Liverpool had a important role to play for Britain and its Empire even before the war as one of the largest and busiest ports, but this made it a high priority target for the German air force (the Luftwaffe) once war broke out.

The docks and the ship building facilities were vital for the war effort and were the main targets for the Luftwaffe from August 1940 through to January 1942.

Liverpool suffered heavily during these air raids and was the second most bombed city in the country outside London. Over 4,000 people lost their lives and over 10,000 homes were lost. The most intense bombing came during the Christmas Blitz of December 1940 and the May Blitz in 1941. The May Blitz saw a continuous period of 8 nights of bombing and over 1,500 people killed.



The people of Liverpool also had to contend with having their sons, husbands, brothers, and daughters being called up for the various armed forces, the blackout, shortages of clothing, petrol and other luxury goods and of course, food rationing. Throughout the war though the spirit of the Liverpool people was never diminished and a real sense of community and camaraderie developed.

Explore the impact of the war on Liverpool and rationing with our specifically designed workshops.

4. Combined Headquarters, Western Approaches, Derby House, Liverpool:

Derby House was under construction in 1938 as part of the redevelopment of Exchange Buildings, just behind the Town Hall. As war approached orders were given for a secret HQ bunker to be built beneath the building and Exchange Flags Square. To ensure maximum security, the builders were told they were building a "restaurant", though how many of them believed this story is anyone's guess!

At the outbreak of war, the building, located in Rumford Street, and still incomplete consisted of two floors of offices and accommodation for the senior officers above ground and two floors of the most sensitive parts of the headquarters underground in a bomb and gas proof reinforced bunker. Affectionately known as 'the citadel' or 'the fortress', it was also referred to by those who worked there as 'the pit'.

In February 1941, Western Approaches Combined Headquarters was moved from Mount Wise, just outside Plymouth to Derby House under the command of Admiral Sir Percy Noble. Liverpool was chosen for its proximity to the convoys, as the northern and western ports were now the most important, being furthest from German occupied Europe and the closest to North America. Plymouth was also deemed too vulnerable to German air raids though in August 1940, Liverpool itself became the target for the Luftwaffe (German air force).

From 1941 to the end of the war in August 1945, Combined HQ Western Approaches master-minded the Battle of the Atlantic, planning and protecting the convoys and fighting a ruthless war against the U-boats. Radio signals from ships and aircraft, communications from the Admiralty in London and importantly, de-coded Enigma messages from Bletchley Park were all received and processed within bunker. Over 30,000,000 message forms (written copies of radio signals, etc) were handled by staff during the four years and the bunker was linked via cable to large radio transmitters in Birkenhead and to the most vital Government offices, including a direct link to the USA via undersea cable.



At the end of the war in August 1945, the headquarters was opened to the public for one week so they could see what exactly had been going on beneath their feet. Following that the bunker was sealed and very little is known about its usage over the next 50 years. It is believed to have been kept as a training establishment for the Royal Navy, but almost everything had been stripped out by the 1970's. Two floors of living and mess (canteen) facilities were lost in the 1950's when the underground car park was built under Exchange Flags Square, and for much of the 1980's a stationary shop occupied the ground floor parts of the bunker. In 1993, to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic, Western Approaches Museum was opened, the brain-child of local businessman Fred O'Brien. Sadly, the museum became neglected until 2017 when Big Heritage, a not-for-profit, community interest company took it over and is in the process of developing the museum.

5. 'The Fortress' today

Of the original 50,000 square feet, only around 33,000 square feet remains, though not all areas are yet open to the public. The main highlights are:

a) **The Operations Room:**

Arguably, the room where the Second World War was won, as this is the very heart of the operations of Western Approaches HQ during the war. All information arriving at the bunker was processed and eventually made its way onto the large, two storey map wall, providing an up to date visual representation of the situation in the Atlantic.

WRENs and WAAF's acted as 'plotters' in this room, climbing the moveable ladders to plot convoys, submarines, aircraft and even the weather and sea conditions on the map wall.

Here pupils will hear about the course of the Battle of the Atlantic, the role of the WRENs and WAAF's and the operation of the room.

The 'Ops' room contains many interactive activities for pupils to enjoy, including original telephones and typewriters.

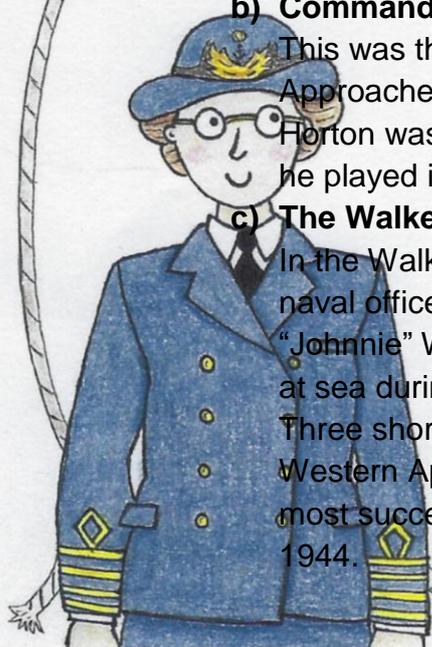
b) **Commander-in-Chief's Office and sleeping quarters**

This was the office and sleeping quarters for the most senior officer in Western Approaches HQ, the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C). From 1942, Admiral Sir Max Horton was C-in-C and pupils will learn about his career, character and the role he played in winning the Battle of the Atlantic.

c) **The Walker Room**

In the Walker Room, pupils will learn about one of the most successful Allied naval officers of the Second World War, Captain F.J. Walker, also known as "Johnnie" Walker. They will also get an insight into what the conditions were like at sea during the Battle of the Atlantic.

Three short videos show the conditions at sea, the main Operations Room of Western Approaches in action, the return of Captain Walker to Liverpool after his most successful cruise and Captain Walker's funeral at Liverpool Cathedral in 1944.



Captain Walker is commemorated with a statue near the Museum of Liverpool on the waterfront alongside several memorials connected to the Battle of the Atlantic (further details on these can be provided upon request)

d) The Radio Room

This was the Royal Navy Signals Office and received coded signals from the ships at sea and the Admiralty in London. Messages arrived via morse code and were written down and handed through to the Royal Navy Signals Officers in the room next door who then passed them to the relevant parts of the HQ.

This room now has some interactive activities for pupils including practising their morse code and deciphering messages.

e) The Wartime Street

The final part of the museum looks at Liverpool during the Blitz and focuses on the lives of the ordinary citizens of Liverpool. Our 'wartime' street scene takes pupils back to the 1940's with its sweet shop, grocers and even an unexploded bomb!

All of these are visited as part of the guided tours available to schools and are described in an interactive, educational and entertaining way, with plenty of opportunity for 'hands-on' experiences for your pupils.

6. What we offer

a. Interactive Guided Tour

An interactive guided tour of the HQ bunker focusing on the story behind Western approaches HQ and why it was in Liverpool, the operation of the bunker, the lives of those who worked here and the impact of the war on Liverpool as a city. Pupils will have the chance to explore the main areas of the bunker experience life underground in the 1940's. (Approx. 1 ¼ Hours)

Tours can be tailored to meet your syllabus requirements. Please contact our Education team to discuss.

b. Workshops

We currently have three one hour workshops available, *Coding & Cyphers*, *Rationing* and *Liverpool at War*, where pupils will add to their knowledge and understanding of the Second World War through small group activities. More workshops are planned.

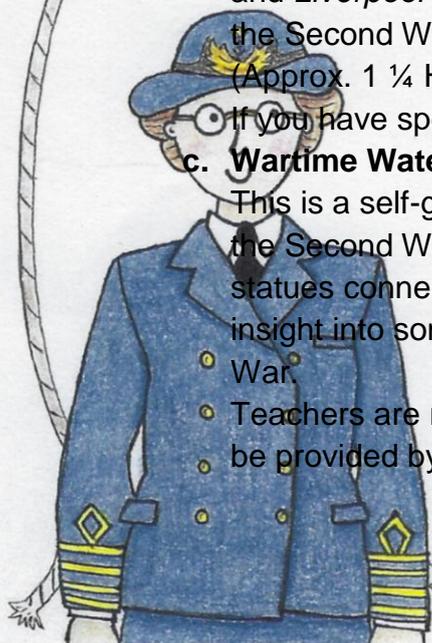
(Approx. 1 ¼ Hours)

If you have specific requirements please contact our Education Team to discuss.

c. Wartime Waterfront Walking Tour

This is a self-guided walking tour of the Liverpool Waterfront area and the impact of the Second World War on this area. Includes details of the various memorials and statues connected with the war and the Battle of the Atlantic and also gives an insight into some the lesser known facts about Liverpool during the Second World War.

- Teachers are responsible for leading these tours but all information and maps etc will be provided by our Education Team. (Between 45 mins and 1 ¼ hours long)



A Typical Visit:

a) Up to 35 pupils:

- 10.00 – Arrival at the museum. Coats and bags stored in cloakroom
- 10.15 – **Group 1:** Interactive Guided Tour **Group 2:** Workshop
- 11.00 – **Group 1** Workshop **Group 2:** Interactive Guided Tour
- 12.15 – Lunch (if booked) or Depart
- 1.00 - Depart

b) Over 35 pupils and up to 70:

- 10.00 – Arrival at the museum. Coats and bags stored in cloakroom
- 10.15 – Interactive Guided Tour
- 11.00 – Workshop
- 12.15 – Lunch (if booked) or Depart
- 1.00 - Depart

