



FLIGHT-WATCH



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VISITING THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM IN LONDON

I.

A SUPERB FACILITY

The Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London is a remarkable facility that provides not only a remarkable historic record and displays dealing with warfare in the 20th Century, but it also captures the essence of war, any war, for the brutally horrific nature of that disease that has plagued man throughout recorded history. While the professional soldier, the historian and scholar will learn a great deal from the Museum, so too will the philosopher, the theologian and moralist.



II.

A STUDY IN THE CAUSES OF WAR

Perhaps few museums do an equivalent job to the IWM in explaining the cause of warfare. For example, students of history know that the Treaty of Versailles and the war reparations imposed on Germany laid the foundation for German resentment and hostility toward allied powers of the First World War. However, how many people are aware of the degree to which Adolph Hitler and his Nazi regime imposed total control over the will of the German people? To illustrate the point, how many readers know that every German citizen was required to complete an ancestry form going back six generations in order to prove the respondent was of pure, Aryan blood? How many people know that every household in Germany was required to have a copy of Hitler's treatise: *Mein Kampf*? As part of the Hitler initiative to bring Germany out of the great depression, able-bodied men joined a work corps to rebuild and expand the infrastructure of Germany. However, how many people know these workmen were, in effect, drafted into arms of the German military? The unity of work to rebuild and improve Germany evolved into a constrictive and totalitarian war machine in which the individual soldier, sailor or airman was expected to sacrifice his life for the sake of the German Fatherland.

The rise of Benito Mussolini in Italy also illustrated the rise of fascism in Europe with principles of domination and exploitation intended to emulate if not rival those of Hitler's Nazi Germany. However, how many people know there was a British member of parliament together with a sizeable following of British subjects who fashioned themselves as fascists, even to the point of wearing uniforms and armbands that resembled those of the Nazis? The British fascists were active in 1936-1937 and received support from the Nazis. The United States, as well, had an organized Nazi following and fellow travelers.

Totalitarian regimes were not unique to European cultures. The Samurai and industrialists in Japan manipulated the Meiji Dynasty and the divinity of the Emperor to ensure the Japanese people would support ambitions of conquest held by the military and political oligarchy that controlled Japan. Since the Japanese Emperor was a god according to the Shinto religion, to die for the Emperor was an honor. To kill in his name was not a sin. Japanese ambitions to eject western powers from Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific were driven by the zeal and self-sacrifice of a religion-driven culture, not unlike the Islamic extremists today who crash airplanes into buildings and engage in similar acts of terrorism and suicide bombing. The political, religious and psychological framework of a society, a nation or a supra-national or religious group has been, and will remain a cause for the blight of warfare and genocide inflicted on humanity.



III.

TREASURES ON DISPLAY AT THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

The Imperial War Museum houses an amazing number of artifacts. An oil painting of Adolph Hitler made in 1937 is on display along with a copy of *Mein Kampf* he gave to a German officer on the occasion of his wedding. The remains of the Messerschmitt ME-110 flown to England by Rudolf Hess are on display along with uniforms, guns and equipment of all the major combatants in World War Two. The uniform of British Field Marshall Mountbatten is on display along with the surrender ceremony brochure printed in connection with the surrender of the commanding general of Japanese forces to Mountbatten. The sword surrendered during the surrender ceremony is on display as well.

Hitler's order for the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, is housed at the Museum and a copy of the order is on display. The myriad of photographs, uniforms, guns, medals, and mechanical components on display is beyond description in this short treatment. The collection is attractively and systematically organized in conjunction with signs describing the theme or arrangement of the materials, exhibited together with video prompts that allow one to view film and hear a narrative which relates to or explains the materials on display. For example, the methods, techniques and command structure and functions of detecting and intercepting German bombers was clearly and visually explained in a short film available for viewing in conjunction with the Battle of Britain display.

The museum features a number of venues that are thematic in content, such as war at sea or children in war. These displays give an appreciation for unique operational aspects of war and provoke thought about the impact of war beyond combatants in the field. Another interesting display was on civilians captured and imprisoned by the Japanese during the Second World War. There were photographs and a printed discussion of this aspect of that conflict.



Although the exterior of the museum is a four-story building with a set of large cannons removed from a battleship, the interior features a glass roof that allows aircraft, rockets, tanks and submarines displayed on the ground floor and in the atrium. Some of the aircraft or aircraft components displayed were an Mk. I Supermarine Spitfire, a Focke Wulf FW-190A, a North American P-51D Mustang, portions of a Mitsubishi A6M5 Zero, an engine and a portion of the fuselage structure of the Messerschmidt ME-110 flown by Rudolf Hess, a Sopwith Camel, a Royal Aircraft Factory BE2C, a V-1 Buzz Bomb, and a V-2 Rocket. A German Panzer tank was an ominous machine and there was a one man German submarine approximately 30 feet long which featured a torpedo mounted on a fixed rail assembly of the vessel, the torpedo being nearly as long as the submarine. An Italian one-man (suicide) submarine was also on display.

In addition to the displays and exhibits, the IWM features an impressive library and catalog of primary source and research materials which are invaluable to historians and those engaged in research.

IV.

CONCLUSION

The causes of war and conflict were particularly relevant during my London visit, since two cars packed with explosives were discovered near Piccadilly Circus the day my family and I arrived in London. We discovered this as the restaurant where we planned to have dinner was closed by the police as part of the crime scene investigation. The next day, a car bomb exploded at Glaslow Airport in Scotland. Upon the writing of this material, eight men and women of the Muslim faith or culture have been arrested in connection with these crimes in the United Kingdom. The perversion and radicalization of a legitimate religion is today the cause of reckless violence and murder, not unlike the forces of evil that catapulted civilization in the Second World War. The Imperial War Museum remains relevant not only in the perpetuation of history, but it instructs those who attempt to promote peace and avoid war as to the causes of reckless and needless violence in the world.

The museum also stands as a testament to the greatest generation that conquered the forces of darkness and evil during World War Two. The men, women and machines involved in rescuing civilization from the monstrous forces of evil are memorialized for all to see.

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