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 **Handout 37c: Exemplar text for** ‘**What were the different stages of the evacuation during the Second World War and what triggered each stage?’ (History)**

Many people think that the mass population evacuation in the Second World War was one big event but, in fact, there were four separate mass evacuations, often of the same people as, understandably, they kept returning home. These evacuations were triggered by different threats throughout the war.

The initial evacuation was carried out because of the fear of massive civilian casualties. Before the war started, 4 million civilian casualties were predicted in London alone. Thus at 11.07 am on Thursday 31 August 1939, the chilling words ‘Evacuate forthwith!’ were broadcast throughout Britain. And so began ‘Operation Pied Piper’, the four-day evacuation of nearly 3 million people, many of whom, as the name suggests, were children. So by the time Britain officially declared war on Germany on Sunday 3 September 1939, the evacuation was almost complete. However, just four short months later, by the beginning of 1940, almost 60% of evacuees had voted with their feet and returned home.

Unfortunately, by the middle of that year, the situation rapidly deteriorated because, in June 1940, Germany had occupied France. As a result, 1 million children in Britain were evacuated, some for the first time and others re-evacuated.

However, by the end of a further three months, the situation had deteriorated even further with the coming of the Blitz, when London and other major cities were repeatedly bombed night after night. This led to the third evacuation or re-evacuation of children. By the end of May 1941, 43,000 civilians had been killed across Britain and 1.4 million were homeless. These are chilling numbers but far short of the initial predictions. Encouragingly, by the end of that year city centres, especially London, became safer.

However, after two and a half years of relative calm in the cities, in June 1944 the Germans began the V1 rocket attacks on Britain with devastating casualties. This triggered the final phase of the evacuations. Only with the ending of the war a year later, in May 1945, did the rocket attacks cease.

If you visit the Imperial War Museum and listen to the memories of those who were evacuated, you get some insight into the trauma that this massive and repeated movement of people caused. It is, therefore, perhaps surprising that it wasn’t until nearly 65 years later, in 2009, when most of the evacuated were old or had died, that the first national memorial commemorating the evacuation was planned.