At Home and Under Fire

Although the Blitz has come to symbolize the experience of civilians under aerial attack, Germany first launched air raids on Britain at the end of 1914 and continued them during the First World War. With the advent of war in the air, civilians far removed from traditional battle zones became a direct target of war rather than a group shielded from its impact. This study examines how British civilians experienced and came to terms with aerial warfare during the two world wars. Memories of the First World War’s air raids shaped British responses to the various real and imagined war threats of the 1920s and 1930s, including the bombing of civilians during the Spanish Civil War and, ultimately, the Blitz itself. The responses of the government and of many contemporary observers to the arrival of air power emphasized the significance of civilians – by which they meant the gendered category of women and children – to the waging of modern war.

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At Home and Under Fire

Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz

SUSAN R. GRAYZEL
University of Mississippi
In memory of my mother,

and above all, for Joe
Contents

Acknowledgments  ix

1. Introduction: Modern War and the Militarization of Domestic Life  1
3. Redefining the Battle Zone: Responding to Intensified Aerial Warfare, 1917–1918  64
4. Writing and Rewriting Modern Warfare: Memory, Representation, and the Legacy of the Air Raid in Interwar Britain  93
5. Inventing Civil Defense: Imagining and Planning for the War to Come  121
6. Trying to Prevent the War to Come: Efforts to Remove the Threat of Air Raids  149
7. Facing the Future of Air Power: Air Raids Abroad and Reactions at Home  177
8. Preparing the Public for the Next War: Air Raid Precautions on the Eve of War  200
9. Protecting the Innocent: Gas Masks for Babies and the Domestication of Air Raids Precautions  224
10. Responding to Air War’s Return: The Militarized Domestic Sphere from September ’38 to the Blitz  251
Contents

11. Representing the New Air War: Morale, the Air Raid, and Wartime Popular Culture 295
12. Conclusion: Air Raids and the Domestication of Modern War 315

Bibliography 323

Index 335
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To some extent, I have been working on this book since I first came across accounts of bombs dropping on the streets of London while researching women during the First World War. As I began this project in earnest at the end of the 1990s and certainly after the events of 9/11 and the responses to them, I became convinced that the air raid and the new understanding of the state, the civilian, and the home at war that it produced needed a history. Along the way, I was sidetracked by two enormous sets of challenges – the arrivals of my daughters and the serious illnesses faced by my parents. The commingling of the labor of teaching, researching, and writing while attending to growing children and a dying parent definitely shaped the book that has emerged. Given the long gestation of this project, I have numerous debts to old mentors and new colleagues, to archivists and librarians, and to a variety of audiences that listened to me deliver my work-in-progress. And I offer the usual but no less sincere apologies to anyone I may have inadvertently left out and for any errors, which remain mine alone.

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