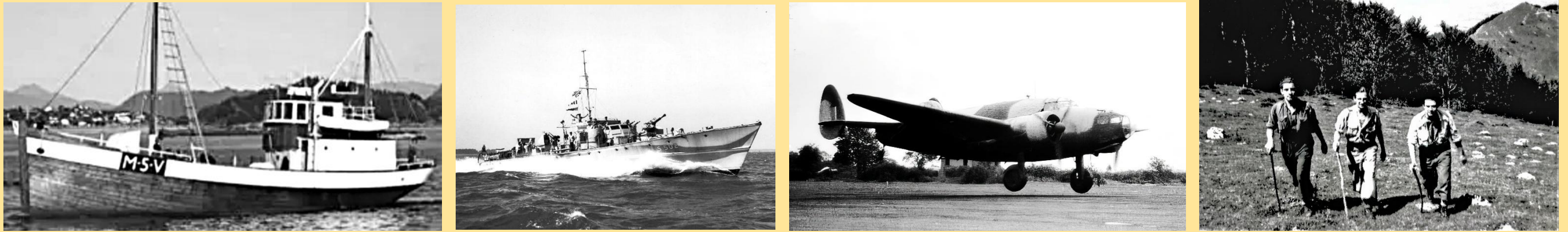


MI5's LONDON RECEPTION CENTRE

wartime interrogations at the Royal Victoria Patriotic School 1941-1945.

During the Second World War, the rapid invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Norway and Denmark by Nazi Germany in the spring and early summer of 1940, after the earlier occupation of Poland and Czechoslovakia, resulted in a stream of allied refugees, termed 'aliens', reaching the UK. They arrived by a wide range of methods, including by fishing boat, Royal Navy motor gun boat, Royal Air Force aircraft operating to and from clandestine airstrips in France and via escape lines into neutral countries such as Spain.



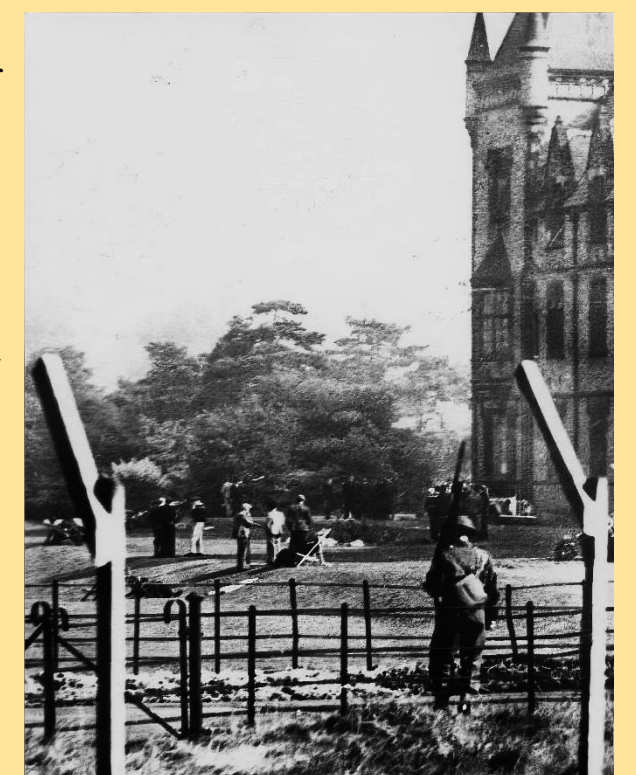
Above, left to right: the MK Heland carried 23 refugees from Vigra, Norway to Shetland in February 1942; MGB 502 operated from Kingswear, Devon to bring escapees from Brittany in France; the Lockheed Hudson aircraft of 161 (Special Duties) Sqn., RAF could fly up to ten people from French clandestine airstrips; these three Belgian refugees were pictured crossing the Pyrenees mountains from France into Spain in 1941 and arrived at the LRC in January 1942.

Among these refugees the enemy stood the best chance of infiltrating spies into Britain. The UK's Security Service (MI5) addressed this immediate challenge by establishing a new section of 'examiners' – interrogators who were largely former employees of British consulates in the occupied countries and therefore having expert knowledge of those countries and their inhabitants.

Establishment of a central reception and vetting centre for the refugees was urgently essential if the interrogators were to carry out any sort of effective security check. The centre would need to house the arrivals securely until their stories could be heard and checked and from 8th January 1941 it was established by the Internment Camps Division of the Home Office as the London Reception Centre (LRC), housed in the buildings of the vacated Royal Patriotic School (RVPS), now the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building. In addition to the RVPS, another, much smaller, former school building was appropriated in Nightingale Lane, Balham. Just over a mile away, this hosted the female refugees and their children, far fewer in number, who reached Britain. A commemorative blue plaque on the site, now a purpose-built care home, records its wartime use.

Arrivals came to the LRC under escort from their point of entry to Britain, accompanied by Immigration Officers of the Home Office and Security Control Officers of MI5, assisted by personnel of the Field Security Sections of the British Army's Intelligence Corps. Within the LRC, the interrogators had four main purposes:

- the detection of 'goats' (enemy agents) from the 'sheep' (genuine refugees) entering Britain;
- the weeding out of 'undesirables' – those deemed to be telling a lying story or being a renegade or a collaborator with the enemy to some degree;
- the gathering of intelligence for the Allied military forces e.g. regarding e.g. ports, enemy bases and defence positions;
- the identification of potential agent recruits for Britain's secret services, including the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS – also known under its cover name of MI6) and the Special Operations Executive (SOE).



Refugees under guard in the grounds of the RVPS during WW2.

The general process involved MI5 undertaking initial interrogations in order to identify enemy agents. Those cleared could then be questioned by two other sections at the LRC – MI6 (the Secret Intelligence Service) and MI19. MI6 officers were chiefly concerned with obtaining information for use in their offensive operations. MI19 personnel represented almost all other governmental and military agencies, including Military Intelligence, Naval Intelligence and Air Intelligence and were joined by visiting representatives of those organisations as required.

Almost 33,000 refugees were released by the LRC: Norwegian (8,813), French (6,875), Polish (5,699), Belgian (3,569), Dutch (3,200), Danish (757), Sundry - all other nationalities (4,022). Only three enemy agents with missions in Britain were known to have passed through the LRC undetected and at least 50 were identified. Those who were not 'turned' to work for the Allies were imprisoned or executed. Three of the enemy agents identified at the LRC were, after trial, hanged at nearby Wandsworth Prison. The LRC closed on 31st May 1945.



This information board was a 2025 initiative of **SECRET WW2** – The Secret WW2 Learning Network, a UK-registered educational charity, no. 1156796.

www.secret-ww2.net

www.facebook.com/secretww2net

Le Gothique