# Peter Hitchens questions Britain’s true victory in World War II



# Rethinking Victory: Peter Hitchens Challenges the Narrative of World War II

In a provocative episode of the Mail's "Alas Vine & Hitchens" podcast, best-selling author Peter Hitchens posed a contentious question: was Britain truly victorious in the Second World War? He argued that the public's entrenched belief in a simple, unabated triumph constitutes what he termed a “pseudo-religion.” This belief, he asserts, masks the harsh realities that followed the defeat of Nazi Germany, leaving Britain in a state that he describes as "a dump."

Drawing on personal reflections about his late father, who served in the Royal Navy during the war, Hitchens painted a sobering picture of the post-war landscape. He recalled how his father, despite serving valiantly, became increasingly disillusioned with the perceived victory as his life and the lives of many veterans failed to improve in the years that followed. "Did we really win the war?" Hitchens recounted, as he reflected upon his father’s seemingly rhetorical question that seemed laden with a profound sense of loss.

The situation in 1945 starkly contrasts with Britain’s emergence from the First World War, where, despite the heavy toll, the country maintained a facade of power and territorial expansion. Following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Britain expanded its Empire, seemingly solidifying its status on the global stage. Yet, as Hitchens aptly highlighted, the end of the Second World War presented a vastly different scenario. With a battered economy and rising independence movements across its colonies—often bolstered by American support—Britain’s global influence waned significantly.

Hitchens remarked on the severity of post-war life, noting that rationing persisted well beyond the conflict. The experience of his father mirrors that of many others from that generation, who found the honours of war were scarce compared to the weight of hardship. There were instances where veterans’ pensions, once a symbol of gratitude from the state, turned into meagre sums that offered little security. Hitchens declared, “After the Second World War, this place was a dump,” calling attention to the struggles that overshadowed national pride.

However, co-host Sarah Vine offered a counterpoint, advocating for the significance of VE Day as a celebration of the triumphs and sacrifices made for freedom. She argued that the essence of VE Day lies not merely in a celebration of victory, but in honouring the veterans and recognising the heavy toll that the conflict took on individual lives. Vine poignantly cited her grandfather, who returned from service psychologically scarred and struggle-filled, stating, “I think he would have celebrated his men.” Her perspective underscored the complexities of remembrance—balancing the honour of those who fought with an earnest reflection on the costs of war.

This debate echoes themes from Hitchens’s book, "The Phoney Victory: The World War II Illusion," wherein he meticulously examines the traditional narratives surrounding the war. He critiques the justification for Britain’s entry into the war and questions the retrospective claims regarding the motives for fighting. Hitchens posits that the war's escalation unwittingly aided Germany's capacity for unspeakable atrocities, complicating the notion of a “Good War.” His insights prompt readers to reconsider not just Britain’s role but the very underpinnings of historical narratives that have shaped collective identity.

This ongoing discussion reflects a broader reckoning with how the Second World War is commemorated and understood in contemporary Britain. Hitchens calls for a more honest reflection on the complexities of the past, arguing that the glorification of war often oversimplifies the narratives of loss and suffering that veterans endured. In doing so, he challenges society to confront uncomfortable truths while honouring the experiences of those who lived through one of history’s most tumultuous periods.

As the 80th anniversary of VE Day approaches, the question remains: how should Britain reconcile its historical triumphs with the stark realities faced by its citizens in the aftermath of war? What emerges from this dialogue is a call for a nuanced understanding of history—one that acknowledges both the victories and the tribulations faced by a nation seemingly marked by triumph yet burdened by the cost of conflict.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/phoney-victory-9781350156333/> - Peter Hitchens' book, 'The Phoney Victory: The World War II Illusion', published by I.B. Tauris, critically examines the narrative of World War II as a 'Good War'. Hitchens questions the timing of Britain's entry into the war and the justification for defending Poland's independence. He argues that Britain and France were unprepared for a major European conflict in 1939, leading to unforeseen consequences. The book also challenges the retroactive claim that Britain went to war to save the Jewish population of Europe, suggesting that the war's escalation made it easier for Germany to implement mass murder in secret and close escape routes. Hitchens aims to deconstruct myths surrounding Britain's role in the war, offering a provocative and deeply researched perspective. ([bloomsbury.com](https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/phoney-victory-9781350156333/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/phoney-victory-9781350156333/> - In 'The Phoney Victory: The World War II Illusion', Peter Hitchens challenges the prevailing narrative of World War II as a 'Good War'. Published by I.B. Tauris, the book questions the appropriateness of Britain's entry into the war in 1939 and the defense of Poland's independence. Hitchens highlights the unpreparedness of Britain and France for a major European conflict, leading to unforeseen consequences. He also disputes the claim that Britain went to war to save the Jewish population of Europe, suggesting that the war's escalation facilitated Germany's secret mass murder and closure of escape routes. The book aims to deconstruct myths about Britain's role in the war, offering a provocative and well-researched perspective. ([bloomsbury.com](https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/phoney-victory-9781350156333/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.amazon.com/Phoney-Victory-World-War-Illusion/dp/1350156337> - Peter Hitchens' 'The Phoney Victory: The World War II Illusion', available on Amazon, critically examines the narrative of World War II as a 'Good War'. Hitchens questions the timing of Britain's entry into the war and the justification for defending Poland's independence. He argues that Britain and France were unprepared for a major European conflict in 1939, leading to unforeseen consequences. The book also challenges the retroactive claim that Britain went to war to save the Jewish population of Europe, suggesting that the war's escalation made it easier for Germany to implement mass murder in secret and close escape routes. Hitchens aims to deconstruct myths surrounding Britain's role in the war, offering a provocative and deeply researched perspective. ([amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/Phoney-Victory-World-War-Illusion/dp/1350156337?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.newenglishreview.org/articles/revisionist-history/> - An article from the New English Review titled 'Revisionist History' discusses Peter Hitchens' book, 'The Phoney Victory: The World War II Illusion'. The piece highlights Hitchens' argument that the invasion threat from Germany was more of a useful threat than a likely triumph, suggesting that the myth of the 'Good War' has been used to support unwise wars of choice. The article reflects on Hitchens' critique of the prevailing narrative of World War II and its implications for understanding historical events. ([newenglishreview.org](https://www.newenglishreview.org/articles/revisionist-history/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.thecritic.co.uk/issues/november-2019/remember-them-more-honestly/> - In an article titled 'Remember them more honestly', Peter Hitchens discusses the need for a more honest remembrance of World War II. He critiques the current ceremonies and rituals associated with Remembrance Day, arguing that they perpetuate myths about the war that are no longer necessary or beneficial. Hitchens calls for a revision of these rituals to better reflect the complexities and realities of the conflict, moving beyond the glorified narratives that have been traditionally upheld. ([thecritic.co.uk](https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/november-2019/remember-them-more-honestly/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.thecritic.co.uk/issues/july-2023/dont-mention-the-war-2/> - In an article titled 'Don't mention the war', Peter Hitchens reflects on the British national identity and the role of World War II in shaping it. He discusses how the collective effort and shared experiences during the war have become central to British identity, leading to a form of national religion centered around the conflict. Hitchens explores the complexities of this identity and the challenges of reconciling it with contemporary values and perspectives. ([thecritic.co.uk](https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/july-2023/dont-mention-the-war-2/?utm_source=openai))