

WHY WAS WINNING THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN IN 1940 SO IMPORTANT?

Overview and Map

What was the Battle of Britain?

The Battle of Britain was an important aerial battle in World War II, which started on July 10th, 1940.

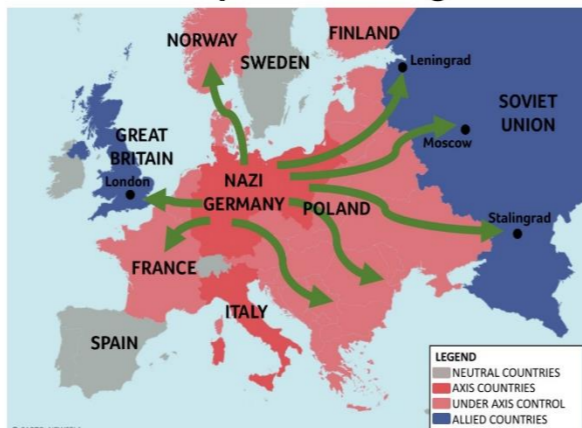
After Hitler's Nazi Germany had conquered most of Europe, including France, the only major country left for them to fight was Great Britain.

In order to attack Britain, the Germans knew that they would need to defeat Britain's air force.







The Battle of Britain pitted Germany's Luftwaffe against Britain's Royal Air force.

Although the Luftwaffe had more planes and pilots, the RAF was a formidable opponent. Britain won the battle.

How did Europe look during the War?



Important Events and Information

Important Events and Information		Fun Facts
Rejection of Negotiated Peace		On several occasions before the battle, the Germans tried to negotiate peace with Britain. However, Winston Churchill (with popular support) refused. He made several speeches rousing the British public to defend with all their might against the attacking Germans.
'Eagle Attack'		'Eagle Attack' was the name given to the first attacks on the RAF. They attempted to destroy Britain's Radio Detection and Ranging (Radar) capacity. Radar meant that the RAF knew that German bombers were coming. The Luftwaffe failed to wipe them out.
The Hardest Day		This day took place on the 18 th August 1940, on which both sides suffered huge losses. The Germans had attempted to launch a huge attack. Whilst twice as many Luftwaffe were shot down as RAF, many RAF bases were badly attacked.
Battle of Britain Day	 	Battle of Britain Day is the name given to the large aerial battle that took place on the 15 th September 1940. The Germans, feeling that they were closing in on victory, launched a huge attack on London. The RAF took to the sky and scattered the German bombers, shooting down a number of German planes. It became clear to the Germans that the RAF was not defeated. The German leadership realised that they would need to change their approach in order to attack Britain.
The Blitz		The Blitz was a major bombing campaign that the Germans pursued after they were unable to destroy the RAF. In order to avoid the RAF, the Germans instead began to bomb British cities and towns at night. The term 'Blitz' was first used by the British press, and is the German word for lightning. More than 40,000 British civilians were killed by this type of bombing in the war – more than half of them in London.

1. The name 'Battle of Britain' was given by Winston Churchill in a speech to parliament on 18th June 1940.
2. The Battle of Britain was the first ever battle fought only by air forces – planes hadn't been around too long!
3. London was bombed by the Luftwaffe on 71 different occasions through the battle.
4. 15th September is considered the most decisive day. Germany launched a huge attack, but failed.
5. Around 15% of the RAF pilots were not British, hailing from Britain's allies.

Important People and Forces

Adolf Hitler

(1889-1945) was a German politician who was the leader of the Nazi party, Chancellor of Germany from 1933-1945, and the Fuhrer of Germany from 1934-1945. Hitler's Germany invaded Poland in Sep 1939 to start the war. In 1940, at the start of the Battle of Britain, Hitler's Nazis and the Axis powers, were winning the war, having just conquered France. After attempting to structure a peace deal with Britain (and failing) Hitler decided to invade Britain. However, he knew that Britain's powerful air force would sink the boats carrying his men across the channel. Therefore, he hoped to defeat the Royal Air Force by bombing their bases and shooting them down. However, the RAF proved to be a formidable opponent, and Hitler was left disappointed.



Sir Winston Churchill



(1874-1965) was a British politician who served as the Prime Minister between 1940 and 1945 and again from 1951 to 1955. He took over after a disastrous start to the war in which Nazi Germany conquered much of Europe. He did his best to rally the nation in defiance of Adolf Hitler, possessed excellent military knowledge and forged crucial alliances with both the USA and Russia. Churchill is often characterised for his extraordinary leadership throughout World War II – he was bold, brave, and tireless in his resolve to take on the might of Nazi Germany, refusing to surrender or make peace. As the battle loomed, he made one of his most famous speeches ('Finest Hour') and emboldened them once more with his 'The Few' speech in August 1940.

Royal Air Force

The Royal Air Force, (shortened to the RAF) is the air force of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In the Battle of Britain the RAF was the main opponent of the Luftwaffe. The RAF fighter pilots in the Battle of Britain became known as 'The Few', taken from Winston Churchill's phrase 'Never...was so much owed by so many to so few.' It is thought that British RAF crew numbered 2,353 of the total 3,000 men who fought in the battle on the side of the allies. In total, 407 lost their lives.



Luftwaffe

The Luftwaffe was the German aerial warfare branch in World War II. The Luftwaffe was widely feared, and had been vital as the Germans had invaded and defeated Poland and western mainland Europe. In the Battle of Britain, despite causing severe damage to Britain's RAF (and to towns and cities across the country), the Luftwaffe was unable to destroy the British aerial forces. The Luftwaffe was later defeated by Allied forces, and was disbanded after the war was lost.



Vocabulary

- Invasion**- the act of entering a country to occupy it
- Occupy**- to be situated in another country
- Fuhrer**- name of the leader of Germany
- Evacuation**- the act of removing
- R.A.F**- the air force of England
- Luftwaffe**- the air force of Germany
- Dog-fighting**- the act of planes fighting each other in the air
- Detection**- action of identifying something that is hidden
- Artillery**- large caliber guns used in warfare on land
- Propaganda**- information used to promote a cause
- Armistice**- an agreement to stop a war at a certain time
- Alliance**- a group on the same side of a conflict



Battle of Britain Timeline

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| 10 th July, 1940 – The Germans begin dive bombing cargo ships in the Channel. The battle begins. | 16 th July – Hitler declared 'Operation Sea Lion.' He wanted the RAF to be so destroyed that they couldn't stop invading troops. | 13 th August – Bombing of Royal Air Force bases begins. | 18 th August – Called 'The Hardest Day.' The Royal Air Force suffered lots of losses. | 19 th August – The Germans launched an intensive period of bombing of British towns and cities. | 15 th September – Known as 'Battle of Britain' day. Luftwaffe lost many planes attempting to attack London. | 31 st October – The Germans suffered heavy losses and ended their attempts – |
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