

# Battling for the Skies: Key Facts

## The Beginning

As is the case during any war, many battles took place during the six years of the Second World War. Without a doubt, one of the most significant and momentous of these was the Battle of Britain. This was a fierce and strategic battle fought above the skies of England whereby the Royal Air Force (RAF)



heroically and skilfully held off the German air force (the Luftwaffe) who were attempting to defeat and then invade Great Britain. After first conquering most of Europe, Hitler (Germany's Chancellor and military leader) turned his attentions to attacking Great Britain. His plan, which was given the code name Operation Sea Lion, was to bombard the UK from the skies and then raid it from the sea. German fighter planes (Messerschmitts) had already begun bombing British ships in the English Channel as an attempt to infiltrate and attack. However, he greatly underestimated the bravery and the power of the British pilots, planes and people.

On paper, German invasion looked highly probable. In July 1940, when German planes began bombing British airfields, harbours, factories and radar stations, the Luftwaffe had 2000 more planes than the RAF. They therefore had greater fire power and numbers of pilots. However, by the end of the battle, 1800 of these were shot down by allied aircraft compared to

the British loss of around 1000. The bombing went on for many months. As the battle continued, Hitler grew increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress that the Luftwaffe were making and so in September, he commanded them to begin bombing British towns and cities instead. Although many cities across Britain were attacked, London was the most heavily afflicted in a period of history famously known as The Blitz. During this time, thousands of Londoners lost their homes and lives due to nightly German bombing assaults. Despite this, the British people never gave up and instead united together demonstrating what is referred to as the 'Blitz Spirit'.





### Did You Know...?

From 7th September 1940, London was bombed for 57 consecutive nights. In an attempt to stay alive, 180 000 people would regularly shelter in the London underground, emerging only once the siren signalled that it was safe to.

### The Final Days

Britain's eventual success in the Battle of Britain was a collaborative effort between the RAF pilots and the ground workers that supported them. Factory men and women worked tirelessly building new aircraft and weapons. Radar operatives scanned the skies and gave advance warning of incoming enemy planes.



Although the bombing went on for many more months in 1940, the 15th September is officially regarded as the end of the Battle of Britain and is referred to as the Battle of Britain Day. It was on this day that the Luftwaffe began an all-day attack on London. However, it soon became clear to German fighters that the RAF had gained control of the skies and that they could and would not be defeated. After this raid, Hitler stopped Operation Sea Lion and when the bombing finally ceased in May 1941, he ordered the Luftwaffe to attack Russia in the East instead.

### Interesting Fact

The Spitfire was mainly used in dog fights. This is a term used to describe the intense, close-range battle between small groups of planes in which pilots had to move and turn their plan quickly to avoid being shot down.

Due to their small numbers, the RAF pilots who flew in the Battle of Britain came to be known as, 'The Few'. This name came from Winston Churchill's speech to parliament on 20th August 1940:

**'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'**

### Plane Facts

British success during the Battle of Britain is partly due to the planes that the RAF flew. Two of the most popular British planes used were the Supermarine Spitfire Mark 1 (more commonly known as the Spitfire) and the Hawker Hurricane. The Spitfire was such a good fighter plane that it was used for several decades after the war ended. It was fast and agile and pilots could manoeuvre it easily when fighting in the sky. The Spitfires fought the German fighter planes while the Hawker Hurricanes targeted the German bombers.



# Questions

1. Fill in the missing words.

This was a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ battle fought above the skies of England whereby the Royal Air Force (RAF) \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ held off the German air force (the Luftwaffe) who were attempting to defeat and then invade Great Britain.

2. In the first paragraph, find and copy a word which means the same as 'permeate'.

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3. What were the German fighter planes called? Tick one.

- Hawker Hurricanes
- Luftwaffe
- Spitfires
- Messerschmitts

4. Why was Hitler confident that Operation Sea Lion would be successful? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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5. How and what did people do to keep up the Blitz Spirit?

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6. Along with the skilful flying of the RAF pilots, what other factors contributed to Britain's success in the Battle of Britain?

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7. After the Battle of Britain, who did German begin to bomb? Tick one.

- Russia
- France
- USA
- Belgium

8. When did the bombing of London finally stop?

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9. In your own words, explain what you think Churchill meant by,  
**'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'**

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10. In your own words, explain why the Spitfires were good planes to use in a dog fight. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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# Answers

1. Fill in the missing words.

This was a **fierce** and **strategic** battle fought above the skies of England whereby the Royal Air Force (RAF) **heroically** and **skilfully** held off the German air force (the Luftwaffe) who were attempting to defeat and then invade Great Britain.

2. In the first paragraph, find and copy a word which means the same as 'permeate'.  
Infiltrate

3. What were the German fighter planes called? Tick one.

- Hawker Hurricanes
- Luftwaffe
- Spitfires
- Messerschmitts

4. Why was Hitler confident that Operation Sea Lion would be successful? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

**Pupil's own response, such as: Hitler was confident that his plan would be successful because it says that he had already defeated much of Europe so he would have gained confidence from this. He may have known that Great Britain had less planes than Germany and so he would have thought that the Luftwaffe would easily beat the RAF.**

5. How and what did people do to keep up the Blitz Spirit?

**Pupil's own response, such as: People kept up the Blitz Spirit by never giving up, supporting each other and singing songs such as, 'White Cliffs of Dover' and 'There'll Always be an England' when they were sheltering from a bombing raid.**

6. Along with the skilful flying of the RAF pilots, what other factors contributed to Britain's success in the Battle of Britain?

**Pupil's own response, such as: Other factors that contributed to Britain's success was the Blitz spirit of Londoners. Men and women worked hard in factories to keep making aircraft and weapons and radar operatives kept watch and warned the pilots when German planes were approaching.**

7. After the Battle of Britain, who did German begin to bomb? Tick one.

- Russia**
- France
- USA
- Belgium

8. When did the bombing of London finally stop?

**May 1941**

9. In your own words, explain what you think Churchill meant by,

'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'

**Pupil's own response, such as: I think that Churchill meant that without the efforts of just a few RAF pilots, the country would have been invaded by Germany. Therefore, the country should be grateful to the small number of pilots of fought, and died, in the Battle of Britain.**

10. In your own words, explain why the Spitfires were good planes to use in a dog fight. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

**Pupil's own responses, such as: Spitfires were good planes to be used in a dog fight because in a dog fight, pilots had to move their planes quickly and easy so that they didn't get shot down and it says in the text that the Spitfire was fast and agile and could be manoeuvred easily.**