Battling for the Skies: Key Facts

The Beginning

The Battle of Britain is one of the most important and celebrated events of the Second World War. It was a 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 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. However, he greatly underestimated the bravery and the power of the British pilots, planes and people.

In July 1940, when German planes began bombing British airfields, harbours and factories, the Luftwaffe had 2000 more planes than the RAF. 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'.

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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

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.
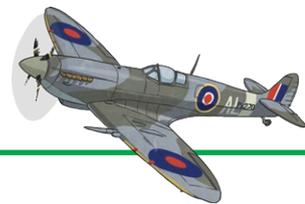
Plane Facts

One of the reasons the RAF were so successful in fighting off the Germans was because of the planes that they flew. Two of the most popular British planes used during the Battle of Britain 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.

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.

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Questions

1. Who was Hitler? Tick one.

   ○ A German pilot
   ○ A German officer
   ○ Germany's Chancellor
   ○ Germany's Prime Minster

2. Why do you think Hitler's code name for his planned invasion of Great Britain was Operation Sea Lion? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. In the second paragraph, find and copy a word which means 'ordered'.

   _____

4. What is the 'Blitz Spirit'? Explain it in your own words using evidence from the text to support your answer.

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. For how many nights in a row was London bombed for from 7th September 1940?

   _____

6. What day is Battle of Britain day? Tick one.

   ○ 7th September
   ○ 15th September
   ○ 20th August
   ○ 15th July

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7. Fill in the missing words.

    Two of the most popular British planes used during the Battle of Britain were the

    Supermarine _____ Mark 1 (more commonly known as the Spitfire)

    and the _____.

8. Why was the Spitfire an ideal plane to use in a dog fight? Use evidence from the text to
    support your answer.

    _____

    _____

    _____

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Answers

1. Who was Hitler? Tick one.

   ○ A German pilot

   ○ A German officer

   ✓ **Germany's Chancellor**

   ○ Germany's Prime Minster

2. Why do you think Hitler's code name for his planned invasion of Great Britain was Operation Sea Lion? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
   Pupils own response, such as: I think the code name was Operation Sea Lion because it says in the text that he wanted to raid Great Britain from the sea and a lion is a fierce and dangerous animal which shows that he wanted to attack Great Britain.

3. In the second paragraph, find and copy a word which means 'ordered'.
   commanded

4. What is the 'Blitz Spirit'? Explain it in your own words using evidence from the text to support your answer.
   Pupil's own response, such as: I think that the Blitz Spirit means never giving up, even if you are really suffering because Londoners were being bombed every night and were being killed but they united together and kept going anyway.

5. For how many nights in a row was London bombed for from 7th September 1940?
   57

6. What day is Battle of Britain day? Tick one.

   ○ 7th September

   ✓ **15th September**

   ○ 20th August

   ○ 15th July

7. Fill in the missing words.

   Two of the most popular British planes used during the Battle of Britain were the Supermarine **Spitfire** Mark 1 (more commonly known as the Spitfire) and the **Hawker Hurricane**.

8. Why was the Spitfire an ideal plane 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.

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