

Battle of Britain and aerial bombardment

Enquiry: When was the turning point of the Second World War?

Ms Dawson



By June 1940, Hitler and the Nazis had defeated Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Poland, the Netherlands, and France. Germany now turned their attention to Britain; they were determined to get the British to surrender. Adolf Hitler wanted to achieve this by executing a full-scale invasion of Britain and he ordered his generals to draw up a plan. The plan was known as Operation Sealion, and the Nazis planned to land 160,000 soldiers along the British Coast in September of 1940. However, Hitler's generals feared that the British Royal Air Force could defeat the German army before they would be able to land on British soil. They needed to eliminate this threat before Operation Sealion could be carried out. Hitler agreed to delay the proposed invasion until the **RAF** could be destroyed. From July of 1940, the Battle of Britain began. The **Luftwaffe** outnumbered the RAF by 4-1. At first, the Luftwaffe concentrated their attacks on British airfields, ships and ports. This would destroy food supplies and weaken the British. They also met and fought RAF fighter planes directly in the sky. However, this wasn't enough to force a surrender, so in September the Germans were ordered to attack London. This began the period known as **the Blitz**.



On the 7th September 1940, around 300 German bombers were sent to attack London. What followed was a campaign of continuous bombing designed to target **civilians** and destroy Britain's **morale**. The raids were terrifying and relentless: London was targeted for 76 consecutive nights. As well as London there were attacks on a number of other major cities including Liverpool, Hull, Bristol, Glasgow, Manchester, Sheffield, Belfast, and Cardiff. In one particularly intense 10-hour air raid, 500 German bombers almost destroyed the city of Coventry. The conditions necessary for surviving the Blitz were incredibly difficult. **Rationing** was introduced to combat the dwindling food supplies as a result of attacks on food ships. Children were evacuated to the countryside in order to escape the risk of having their homes bombed in the cities. There were mass **blackouts** at night-time, lights were switched off and thick blackout curtains put on windows. It was hoped that this would make the cities harder to spot and save lives. The British also got used to the sound of continuous **air-raid sirens**. Upon hearing these, they would be directed safely to the nearest shelter. Some built shelters out of iron in their back gardens and dug them into the ground for extra protection. Many people who weren't able to build a shelter at home spent nights asleep in London underground stations.



During the eight months of bombing, around 40,000 civilians were killed. Despite this, the Nazis were not able to defeat the RAF or force a British surrender. There were many reasons why the Nazis were not able to overcome the British during the Battle of Britain. The first of these was the use of **RADAR** technology. Although the RAF were outnumbered, this system gave them early warning of the approach of German planes. This meant that they could be adequately prepared and concentrate their resources wisely. In addition to this, the British were fighting over home soil. This meant that they could land easily for fuel and re-loading, and if a British plane was shot down the pilot could parachute out and return to fight another day. In contrast, a German who was shot down became a prisoner of war. Alongside intense **propaganda** in order to boost morale, these factors all helped the British to avoid surrender.



The Battle of Britain ended on 28th September 1940. The RAF had lost 800 pilots, compared with the Luftwaffe who had lost 1,400. Churchill famously said of the Battle: 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.' The Battle of Britain was the first major defeat on Nazi forces in the war. It was a huge morale boost after the evacuation at Dunkirk, and a huge blow to the Nazis. After postponing Operation Sealion several times, Hitler eventually cancelled it in October 1940. In May 1941 the last of the heavy air raids on Britain took place; the Blitz was over. Hitler became frustrated at the lack of success, and so decided to turn his attention to the East instead; he was going to attack the USSR.



Glossary

RAF: Royal Air Force - the British air force.

Luftwaffe: The German air force.

The Blitz: Short for Blitzkrieg, the term 'the Blitz' refers to German bombing of civilian targets in Britain.

Civilians: Ordinary people, not soldiers.

Morale: The confidence of a group of people.

Rationing: Limiting of food.

Blackouts: When all lights must be turned out or covered to prevent them being seen by the enemy during an air raid.

Air-raid sirens: Loud warning alarms to let people know that German bombers approached.

RADAR: A system to detect approaching aircrafts.

Propaganda: Use of the media to promote a political cause or view.



Comprehension questions:

1. What was Hitler's invasion plan called?
2. What did the Nazis need to do before they could carry out their invasion plan?
3. Why did the Germans begin to bomb London?
4. How did people protect themselves during the Blitz?
5. Why were the Luftwaffe unable to defeat the RAF?
6. What did Hitler do in October 1940?

Challenge: Why was the Battle of Britain such a boost for British morale?

Sentence starter: The Battle of Britain was a huge boost for British morale because..

Evidence to support this is...

This meant that...



Turning point table

Date	In your opinion, who looks likely to win the war at this point?	Evidence to justify your view
June 1940	Nazi Germany	They had defeated Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. They had forced the British and French to evacuate.
May 1941		



Extension Question

What was the impact of the Battle of Britain on Germany?
Use the sentence starters and key words below to help you

Sentence starters:	Key words
The impact of the Battle of Britain on Germany was... Evidence to support this is... This meant that...	Morale Defeat USSR Postponed Cancelled

