

The Battle of Britain [edited text]

Background

In the beginning of May 1940 Germany attacked France. From the beginning it did not look promising for the French. After France surrendered to German forces on June the 22nd 1940, it was only a matter of time before Hitler turned to Britain. Hitler attacked France only really to cover his back; his main aims were to expand his empire in the east. Germany's previous advance on Paris 25 years earlier had meant huge losses for Germany, and a 4-year long battle. The fact that it only took 6 weeks for France to surrender surprised everyone, including the Germans. France was more militarily powerful and technologically advanced than the Germans, so this caused great fear for Britain. Great Britain was (as Hitler saw it) Germany's only real threat, so peace with Britain was essential for Germany. Hitler admired Britain and its empire and knew that any conflict with Britain would be a disaster for Germany. Hitler believed that Germany and Britain could literally 'takeover the world.' Together, basically split the world, and hopefully on German terms. Britain however did not agree with Hitler or Germany.

In June 1940 Germany took aerial photographs of the military airbases and munitions of Britain. These photos gave Germany an idea of how many fighter planes they had. Unfortunately for Germany this was one of the Luftwaffe's (the German air force) key errors. The Luftwaffe thought that they seriously outnumbered Germany in terms of fighter planes, they did not take into consideration however the amount of planes that were being made each month.

Operation Sea Lion

Though Hitler had many doubts on July the 2nd Hitler ordered the commands of the three German services to prepare to invade Britain, this operation was known as 'Operation Sea Lion'. The invasion itself was scheduled to take place on September 11th 1940. The plan entirely depended on the destruction of the British airpower and on assembling the shipping that was required to convey a German landing force of around 100,000 men. If the RAF collapsed rapidly as Hermann Goering had predicted, the landing might have been risked; if not German forces would have turned east (as they were always planning too) and disposed of the Soviet Union. If Operation Sea Lion had succeeded this would have been disastrous for New Zealand. New Zealand relied greatly on Britain - economically and physically, had it gone ahead New Zealand knew they would be in trouble.

The Battle - Phase one (July 10th- August 7th)

The Battle of Britain is said to be split into 4 different phases. phase one (July 10th- August 7th), phase two (August 8th- September 6th), phase 3 (September 7th- September 30th) and phase 4 (October 11th-October 31st). The Luftwaffe's main objective was to take down the strength of the British RAF Fighter command. The Luftwaffe began a series of operations that were designed to draw the RAF into battle but on German terms. The main focus was the convoy of ships travelling through the English Channel to and from the east coast ports. By sinking these ships Germany would deny the British people their basic commodities needed for everyday use - thus breaking the British spirit. German forces also hoped that this would draw British Fighters out from their bases, this was the Luftwaffe could assess and analyse the strength of the RAF. During this the British mainly tried to avoid battle with

German fighters and instead attack German bombers. Bombing raids continued throughout the first phase on places such as Portsmouth, Newcastle, Merseyside, Falmouth and Swansea. Unlike the raids on the Channel these were spasmodic and not consistent. This phase was seen as a 'softening up phase' in which Germany prepared to really take control. On the 1st of August 1940 Adolf Hitler issued a directive for 'the conduct of air and sea warfare against England'. To bring the conditions ideal for the 'final conquest' the Luftwaffe was to bring the RAF to their knees by an assault 'primarily against flying units, their ground installations, and their supply organisations, but also on the aircraft industry, including the manufacturing of anti-aircraft equipment'. It wasn't till August the 5th however that the real intense campaigns really began.

The Battle - Phase 2 (August 8th- September 6th)

Although the attacks on the shipping containers continued, the failure to draw and destroy the Fighter Command in the air meant that Germany had to change their tactics. German tactics were now a more direct attack on Fighter Command. By August the 11th the RAF had shot down 172 German aircraft and had badly damaged the Luftwaffe had shot down 115 RAF fighters and damaged 772. The Germans had 153 crew killed and 45 seriously injured whilst the British lost 69 crew and had 25 seriously injured. Already the Luftwaffe casualties were significantly higher than the British. On August the 11th Goering (the commander and chief of the Luftwaffe) ordered a change of tactics, stop targeting shipping and instead start attacking the RAF fighters in the and/or on the ground. This change of tactics was a huge gamble for the Luftwaffe. On August the 14th the battle has been going on for 3 weeks and Goering's 4 week deadline is looming, Hitler was beginning to get impatient. On August the 15th Hitler tells army generals that he wants the invasion 'operation sea Lion' to begin on September the 15th. As a last warning to Britain to sign a peace treaty, on August 15th the Luftwaffe dropped pamphlets to appeal to the British public, Britain rejects the offer. Decisions to invade Britain were based on the fact that Germany believed Britain to be down to its last 450 fighter planes, the Luftwaffe was basing this on the reconnaissance photos. Unfortunately for the Germans, lots of fighters were hidden in camouflaged bases, and instead of having 450 fighters ready for action, Britain had 750. Also unaware to the Luftwaffe, Britain was making roughly around 400 new aircrafts per month. Goering believed this information however and so told Hitler that the RAF would be destroyed in 4 days. "Within a short period of time you will wipe the British air force from the sky. Hail Hitler". On August the 13th an operation was launched to destroy the RAF. This day became known as Eagle Day. At 6:30 am the Luftwaffe attacked radar stations in 6 different raids. This did little damage however and the Luftwaffe hardly ever attacked them again. At 2pm the Germans attacked. 1 squadron intercepted the Luftwaffe and many aircrafts were shot down, however some bombers got through and headed for Eastchurch RAF base. By 7pm the area was considered a 'killzone' with over 100 high explosive bombs dropped. 16 personnel were killed and 48 were seriously injured. 5 RAF aircrafts were destroyed but fortunately for Britain they were old bombers not Spitfires. Overall the RAF lost 84 aircraft on Eagle Day whilst the Luftwaffe lost 47. This day led Goering to believe that the Germans were sure to win the battle. By August the 16th the Luftwaffe had stepped up the attacks to gain control of the sky. August 18th is widely recognised as the hardest day with the Luftwaffe sending 1000 bombers and 745 fighters compared to Britain's 630 fighters. At 12pm radar detected massive build up over Kent, squadrons were launched immediately and fierce battle began. The Luftwaffe lost 69 aircraft and had 31 damaged ...

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