

Battle of Britain

The Battle of Britain was one of the most significant battles of the Second World War. For several months, the Royal Air Force (RAF) heroically and skilfully held off the German air force (the Luftwaffe) over British skies.



The Beginning

On 10th July 1940, German fighter planes began bombing British convoy ships and ports in the English Channel. Germany's Chancellor and military leader at that time, Adolf Hitler, ordered his German armed forces to bomb the United Kingdom and then invade it from the sea. Throughout July and early August, bombing raids began to include airfields along the south and east coasts as well as RAF facilities that were further inland, such as the West Midlands.



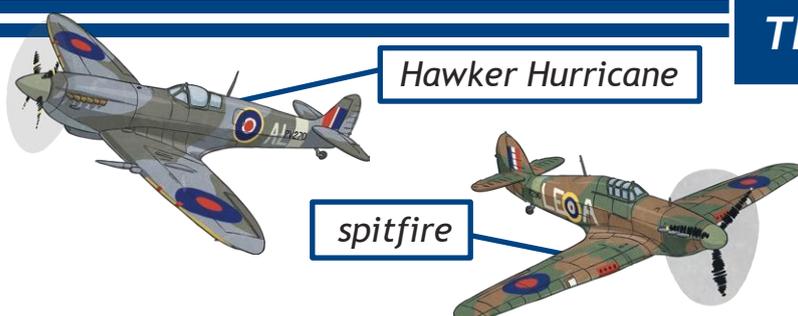
Defending Great Britain

During the battle, the RAF had organised its Fighter Command (the branch of the RAF that specialised in fighter planes) into four groups based in different locations within Great Britain. Chain Home, another part of Britain's defence, was a series of radar stations along the south and east coasts that sent early warnings about approaching raids to Fighter Command.

Along with the Observer Corps (a group of people who spotted and tracked approaching German army

aircraft), Chain Home was the first step in Britain's highly organised warning and defence system called the Dowding System. It controlled the flow of communications about Luftwaffe bombing raids nationwide.

Once warnings were received, messages were sent to the British Fighter Command location closest to the approaching raiding party. Planes from that location would then take off and engage the incoming Luftwaffe aeroplanes.



British Aeroplanes

When the battle started, the Luftwaffe had more aeroplanes than the RAF. As time passed, Great Britain began building more planes with better technology than the German army's aeroplanes.

Two of the most well-known British aeroplanes used during the Battle of Britain were the Supermarine Spitfire Mark 1 and the Hawker Hurricane. The Spitfires fought German fighter planes, while the Hawker Hurricanes targeted German bombers. The Spitfire was such a good fighter plane that it was used after the war ended: it was fast, and pilots could manoeuvre it easily when fighting in the sky.

The Battle Continues

During the second half of August 1940, the German air force concentrated its raids on radar stations and airfields but many volunteers and people within the British armed forces repaired these facilities within hours. Some of the heaviest fighting took place in late August but British pilots and pilots from over 15 allied countries refused to back down from the incoming Luftwaffe raids.

The Blitz

During one raid, a German bomber formation accidentally dropped several bombs on London. In retaliation, the RAF sent their Bomber Command to attack Berlin. These acts partially contributed to the start of the Blitz.

The Blitz (taken from the German word blitzkrieg or lightning war) was a period of time when many Luftwaffe raids dropped bombs over several major British cities, including London, Bristol and Coventry. It started on 7th September 1940 and ended around 11th May 1941 and destroyed thousands of homes and buildings.



The Final Days

Although the bombing continued for some time afterwards, 15th September 1940 is regarded by many as the end of the Battle of Britain and is commonly referred to as Battle of Britain Day. Hitler eventually postponed his invasion and ordered the Luftwaffe to attack Russia instead.

Due to their small numbers, the RAF and allied pilots who flew in the Battle of Britain became known as 'The Few'. This name came from Winston Churchill's speech to Parliament on 20th August 1940, in which he declared, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."



Questions

1. What was the Observer Corps? Tick one.

- the branch of the RAF that specialised in fighter planes
 a group of people who spotted and tracked German army aircraft
 a series of radar stations
 the British pilots who flew in the Battle of Britain

2. Number the events from 1–4 to show the order in which they happened.

- A German bomber formation accidentally bombs London.
 The German air force begins attacking convoy ships and ports.
 The German air force focuses on radar stations and airfields.
 The German air force begins a series of bombing raids on major British cities.

3. Fill in the missing words.

Once warnings were _____, messages were sent to the British Fighter Command location closest to the _____ raiding party.

4. What was the name of Britain's highly organised warning and defence system?

5. Look at the first paragraph.

Find and copy one word that means the same as 'important'.

6. Which part of the text surprised you the most? Explain your answer.

7. Why do you think the RAF was able to hold off the German air force successfully? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. *Were the volunteers and people within the British armed forces who helped repair damaged buildings and stations important? Explain your answer.*

9. *Look at the section called **The Beginning**.
Summarise the main point of this section in 25 words or fewer.*

Answers

1. What was the Observer Corps? Tick one.

- the branch of the RAF that specialised in fighter planes
- a group of people who spotted and tracked German army aircraft
- a series of radar stations
- the British pilots who flew in the Battle of Britain

2. Number the events from 1–4 to show the order in which they happened.

- 3** A German bomber formation accidentally bombs London.
- 1** The German air force begins attacking convoy ships and ports.
- 2** The German air force focuses on radar stations and airfields.
- 4** The German air force begins a series of bombing raids on major British cities.

3. Fill in the missing words.

Once warnings were **received**, messages were sent to the British Fighter Command location closest to the **approaching** raiding party.

4. What was the name of Britain's highly organised warning and defence system?

Britain's highly organised warning and defence system was called the Dowding System.

5. Look at the first paragraph.

Find and copy one word that means the same as 'important'.

significant

6. Which part of the text surprised you the most? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I didn't realise that Great Britain had organised such a widespread and effective warning system with radar and spotters. It was amazing to learn about.

7. Why do you think the RAF was able to hold off the German air force successfully? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think they were able to hold off the German air force because they were able to make a large number of technologically advanced planes, they had a highly-organised defence and warning system and they had pilots from over 15 allied countries helping them.

8. *Were the volunteers and people within the British armed forces who helped repair damaged buildings and stations important? Explain your answer.*

Pupils' own responses, such as: Yes, I think the people who helped repair the damaged buildings and stations were important because they kept the defence system and aeroplanes working.

9. *Look at the section called **The Beginning**.*

Summarise the main point of this section in 25 words or fewer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Adolf Hitler ordered the German air force to begin bombing British ship convoys and ports in order to invade Great Britain at a later date.

