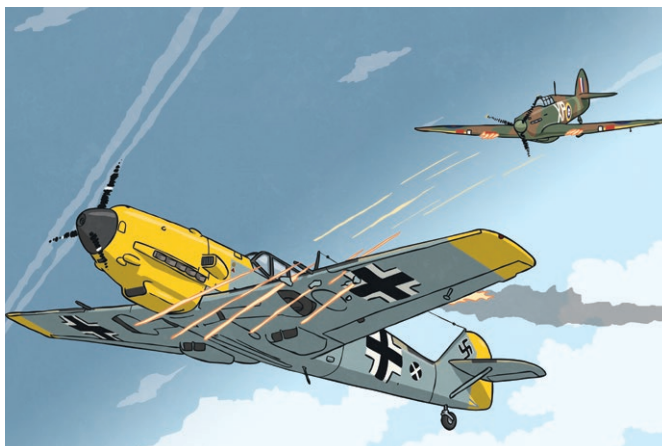


Battling for the Skies: Key Facts

The Beginning

Many battles took place during the six years of the Second World War. However, one of the most significant and momentous of these was the Battle of Britain. This 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, factories and radar stations, 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.



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.

Despite this, the British people never gave up and instead united together demonstrating what is referred to as the 'Blitz Spirit'.

The Final Days

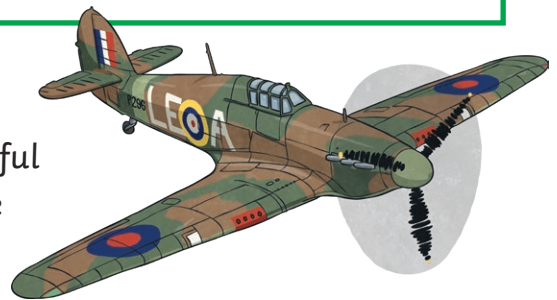
Although the bombing went on for many more months in 1940, the 15th September is officially regarded as the end of the Battle of Britain and is referred to as the Battle of Britain Day. It was on this day that the Luftwaffe began an all-day attack on London. However, it soon became clear to German fighters 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.

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

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. The Spitfires fought the German fighter planes while the Hawker Hurricanes targeted the German bombers.

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.

Questions

1. What was the name of the German Airforce?

2. Fill in the missing words.

Many battles took place during the six years of the Second World War. However, one of the most _____ and _____ of these was the Battle of Britain.

3. What was Hitler's code name for his planned invasion of Great Britain? Tick one.

- ☐ Operation Seagull
- ☐ Operation Sea Monster
- ☐ Operation Sea Tiger
- ☐ Operation Sea Lion

4. How many people sheltered in undergrounds during bombing air raids? Tick one.

- ☐ 2000
- ☐ 1800
- ☐ 180 000
- ☐ 1000

5. In the second paragraph, find and copy a word which means 'exasperated'.

6. Explain in your own words why were the RAF pilots referred to as 'The Few'?

7. If you were an RAF pilot in the Second World War, which plane would you like to fly and why? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. If you were an RAF pilot in the Second World War, which plane would you like to fly and why? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Answers

1. What was the name of the German Airforce?

The Luftwaffe

2. Fill in the missing words.

Many battles took place during the six years of the Second World War. However, one of the most **significant** and **momentous** of these was the Battle of Britain.

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- ☐ 1000

5. In the second paragraph, find and copy a word which means 'exasperated'.

frustrated

6. Explain in your own words why were the RAF pilots referred to as 'The Few'?

Pupil's own response, such as: RAF pilots were referred to as the few because there were not very many of them, especially compared to the Luftwaffe who had 2000 more planes than them.

7. If you were an RAF pilot in the Second World War, which plane would you like to fly and why? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Pupil's own response, such as: If I were an RAF pilot, I would want to fly the Spitfire because it was a good fighter plane which was used long after the war ended and it says in the text that it was good in a dog fight because it was agile and easy to manoeuvre.

8. If you were an RAF pilot in the Second World War, which plane would you like to fly and why? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Pupil's own response, such as: I think that Hitler's invasion was not successful because he underestimated how skilful and brave the RAF were. He also underestimated the Londoner's Blitz Spirit which meant that they never gave up.