

## The Battle of Britain: A fight in the skies

In the summer and fall of 1940, German and British air forces clashed in the skies over the United Kingdom, locked in the largest sustained bombing



campaign to that date. A significant turning point of World War II, the Battle of Britain ended when Germany's Luftwaffe failed to gain air superiority over the Royal Air Force despite months of targeting Britain's air bases, military posts and, ultimately, its civilian population. Britain's key victory saved the country from a ground invasion and possible occupation

by German forces while proving that air power alone could be used to win a major battle.

1. When did the Battle of Britain take place?
2. What was the name of the German and British air forces?

## Britain alone

On June 17, 1940, the defeated French signed an armistice and quit **World War II**. Britain now stood alone against the power of Germany's military forces,



which had conquered most of Western Europe in less than two months. But Prime Minister Winston Churchill rallied his stubborn people and beat those politicians who wanted to negotiate with **Adolf Hitler**. But Britain's success in continuing the war would very much depend on the RAF Fighter Command's ability to ruin the Luftwaffe's efforts to gain air power. This then would be the first all-air battle in history.

3. Why were Britain now alone in WWII?
4. What did Britain's success rely on?

### Britain's strengths

In fact, Britain's situation was better than most of the world recognised at the time. Britain controlled an effective air defense system, first-rate fighter pilots, and a great military leader in Air Marshal Hugh Dowding. On the other hand, the Germans had major problems: they had no navy left after the costly conquest of Norway, their army was unprepared, and the Luftwaffe had suffered heavy losses in the west.



Even more serious, the Germans had poor intelligence and little idea of British vulnerabilities. They wasted most of July in waiting for a British surrender and attacked only in August. Although air strikes did substantial damage to radar sites, on August 13-15 the Luftwaffe soon abandoned that plan and turned to attacks on RAF air bases. A battle of attrition followed in which both sides suffered heavy losses.

5. Why was Britain in a good position?
6. What were Germany's major problems at the time of the battle?
7. Why did Germany waste most of July?

### Outcome: British victory



For a time the advantage seemed to swing slightly in favor of the Germans. The first attack on London on September 7 was quite successful; the second, on September 15, failed not only with heavy losses, but also with a collapse of morale among German bomber crews when British fighters appeared in large numbers and shot down many of the Germans. As a result, Hitler permanently postponed a landing on the British Isles and suspended the Battle of Britain.

8. Why did the Germans lose the Battle of Britain in September?