

The Battle of Britain (1940) P 2

Date: _____

On the afternoon of 7 September, controllers at Bentley Priory, headquarters of Air Vice Marshal Keith Park and his No 11 Group Squadron, reported a surge of approaching formations. All 21 fighter squadrons around London were primed. They encountered a formation of *Luftwaffe* aircraft an astounding 1 ½ miles high, covering 800 sq mi of sky. The approach was clearly towards London and no area of the capital escaped the devastation, which spread right along the Thames, from the working class East End to the wealthy areas of the West End.

The following morning, another 300 bombers attacked in waves, torching the entire 9 miles of River Thames waterfront, and 488 Londoners were killed. In its efforts to counter these daylight formation, 31 fighters were lost in combat. Six Hurricanes alone were lost from 249 Squadron in one action without destroying a single German aircraft. By end of 8 September, Germans had lost 39 aircraft.

Further heavy night raids confirmed the change in strategy – the *Luftwaffe* were targeting British cities, rather than trying to reduce the RAF's capability to defend the island. A particularly heavy daylight raid on London on 12 September claimed 412 victims, including 50 people in a single block of flats. During the night, the German assault continued. In the business area of the City of London, a further 370 civilians were killed. Three days later, Kesselring mustered all his resources to make two attacks on London, while assaults were also made by another powerful air fleet, *Luftflotte 3* (Air Fleet 3) under *Generalfeldmarschall* Hugo Sperrle, which attacked Portland Eastleigh near Southampton on the coast. Forces marshalled against Kesselring included those of Park with his Group Squadron and, commanded by Bader, a 'big wing' of five squadrons from Leigh-Mallory.

The fighting raged so intensely along the coast, that Park sent up six more squadrons But Kesselring gave no quarter.

When his attack resumed in the afternoon, he sent in fighters ahead of the Heinkel and Dornier bombers with the aim of destroying the RAF interceptors. In the meantime, the German bombers were hitting the East End of London. A plea was made to Leigh-Mallory for the use of three squadrons of No 12 Group, bolstered by about 60 Hurricanes and Spitfires from Bader's 'big wing' to try to fight them off.

Göring received reports from his pilots that they were encountering weakening opposition. On Sunday 15 September, the *Luftwaffe* tried to press home their likely advantage, summoning two waves of fighters and bombers over the Pas de Calais. But these were soon detected by British radar and harassed all the way to their targets by Park, aided by a wing of No 12 Group. In the face such strong defense, the Germans scattered their bomb loads, mainly over south and east London, and were forced to withdraw. Gradually, figures began to look better for the British: by 30 September, Fighter Command's loss was 242 aircraft against the *Luftwaffe*'s 433. In addition, output of aircraft from the factories, previously a source of anxiety to Dowding, had speeded up considerably.

Despite his weakening position, Göring persisted in his belief that the *Luftwaffe* could still crush Fighter Command in preparation for an invasion. But Hitler had become increasingly reluctant to endure further losses, which included RAF counterraid raids on his assembled invasion barges. On 17 September, Grand Admiral Erich Raeder of the *Kriegsmarine* recorded: "The enemy airforce is by no means defeated. On the contrary, it shows increasing activity. The Führer therefore decides to postpone Operation] Sea Lion indefinitely.' In effect, the invasion was abandoned. Increasingly, Hitler was focusing on long cherished plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Main Idea:

<p>Still raging, however, was the bombing of London and other British cities. A notable victim was Coventry, a manufacturing centre for armaments and engine parts. On the night of 14 November 1940, it came under a heavy <i>Luftwaffe</i> attack, codenamed <i>Mondlichtsonate</i> (Moonlight Sonata). Along with its cathedral, which was devastated and whose destruction became a symbol of German brutality, there were 568 civilian deaths and 1256 injuries. Over 4000 homes were destroyed and three-quarters of its factories damaged.</p>	<p>Both Nazi Germany and Britain failed to gain air superiority and both were destined to endure ongoing bombing raids for the next four years. The threat of sea invasion receded from late September 1940, but with the end of the air war came the recognition that there would be no quick end to the conflict. The British triumph in the Battle of Britain was won at a heavy cost. Total British civilian losses from July to December 1940 were 23,002 dead and 32,138 wounded.</p>
<p>Main Idea:</p>	