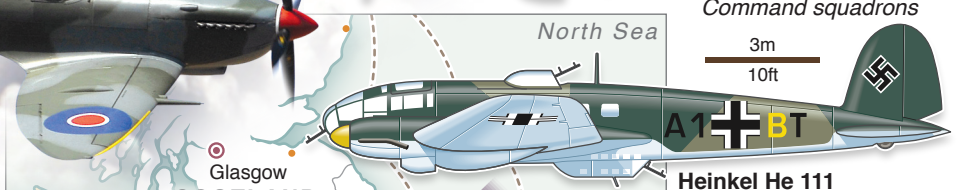
Battle of Britain – Triumph of "The Few"

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, one of the most decisive clashes of World War II, when a handful of Royal Air Force pilots fought in the skies over southern England to defeat Germany's mighty Luftwaffe squadrons and foil Adolf Hitler's invasion plans

Supermarine Spitfire
Speed: 585km/h

Spitfire remembered as key to battle, although in reality, Hurricane shot down more aircraft

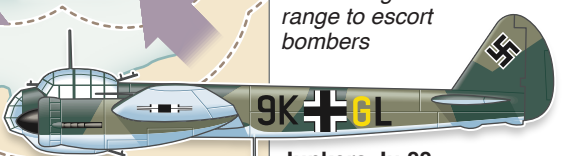
Hawker Hurricane
Speed: 530km/h
Mainstay of RAF Fighter Command squadrons



Heinkel He 111
Speed: 350km/h
Main German bomber used in battle

Junkers Ju 87 Stuka
Speed 375km/h
Dive bomber suffered high losses

Messerschmitt Bf 109
Speed 575km/h
German fighter lacked range to escort bombers



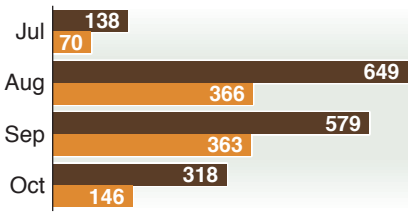
Junkers Ju 88
Speed 460km/h
Best German bomber

KEY DATES

- **Jul 10, 1940:** Battle begins with Luftwaffe attacking south coast ports and shipping
- **Jul 16:** ***Hitler*** orders detailed plans for invasion of Britain, codenamed ***Operation Sealion***. Germans begin assembling hundreds of invasion barges in Channel ports
- **Aug 13:** ***Adlertag*** (Eagle Day) – Germany launches campaign to destroy RAF, targeting airfields, aircraft factories and radar sites
- **Aug 15:** Luftwaffe mounts largest number of sorties – over 2,000 – destroying 34 RAF aircraft for loss of 75
- **Aug 18:** "Hardest Day" – intense air-to-air combat results in greatest number of casualties on both sides
- **Aug 20:** Britain's Prime Minister ***Winston Churchill*** makes speech to parliament, *"Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few"*
- **Aug 24:** German aircraft accidentally bomb residential areas of London. In retaliation, RAF raids Berlin on following day
- **Aug 30-31:** RAF close to defeat, suffering heavy losses in aircraft and pilots
- **Sep 5:** After more RAF raids on Berlin, Hitler orders attacks on British cities – fatal error that takes pressure off RAF airfields
- **Sep 7:** ***The Blitz*** begins with massive air raids on London
- **Sep 15: Battle reaches climax – 60 German aircraft shot down for loss of 26 RAF planes**
- **Sep 17:** Hitler cancels invasion plans. Battle fizzles out by end of October but Blitz on London continues until May 1941

STRENGTHS AT START OF BATTLE

AIRCRAFT LOSSES



Chain Home Low *radar could detect aircraft flying at 152m at range of up to 177km*

British physicist ***Robert Watson-Watt****, "Father" of RADAR*

RADAR: Gave Britain advance warning of attack. RAF could deduce altitude, direction and size of enemy formations and send aircraft to intercept

Sources: Royal Air Force, Imperial War Museum, Brooks Aviation Art, Encyclopedia of Air Warfare Pictures: AP, Imperial War Museum © GRAPHIC NEWS