

# **‘The Strategic, Moral and Conceptual Significance of Victory in the Battle of Britain’**

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One of the few truly strategically significant battles in history, British victory in the Battle of Britain was pivotal to the course and outcome of the Second World War. German attainment of air superiority in 1940 would have led to the eventual defeat of Britain either by direct aerial attack, blockade, and/or by invasion. British capitulation would very likely have had fatal consequences for the Soviet Union facing an earlier and stronger German offensive, would have encouraged accelerated Japanese expansion in the Far East, and probably delayed US entry into the War. The principal strategic significance though, was the effect upon the *moral* component of British and German fighting power. Victory in the Battle spawned a moral cohesion that exerted a powerful grip on the British psyche in 1940, a grip that continues even today to permeate our national cultural, popular and political DNA. In this respect it was an event in British military history like no other.

## Introduction

*'The contest between the British and German air forces in the late summer of 1940 has become a defining moment in our history, as Trafalgar was for the Victorians'*

Richard Overy<sup>1</sup>

Churchill's memorable phrase, *'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few'*, encapsulates the standard perception of the strategic significance of the 'Spitfire Summer' of 1940. However, perhaps inevitably with the passage of time, this perception is often clouded by hyperbole and inaccuracy, leading revisionists to challenge the traditional story of the Battle of Britain, positing an imminent German invasion and a united Britain as a myth. Nevertheless, Overy's assertion hints at the iconic status that the Battle enjoys in the psyche of the British Nation. The achievements of the 'Few' had profound geo-political and moral implications at the time and still exert a powerful grip today, shaping key elements of our sense of British national identity - for good and bad. Why and how should this be so? The purpose of this article is neither to provide a historical narrative of the course of the Battle of Britain, nor to examine the reasons for British victory, both of which of have beaten a deservedly well-trodden analytical path. Instead, this article will focus holistically upon the *significance* of the victory in 3 areas.

Firstly, the article will examine the geo-political implications of the RAF's victory in the Battle of Britain to the course and outcome of the Second World War. Would the loss of air

superiority to the Germans have led to the *invasion* of Britain, and if so, could it have succeeded? Would the loss of air superiority to the Germans have led to the *defeat* of Britain? What could have been the consequences of British capitulation? Secondly, in a critical area that has received comparatively little attention in the plethora of research on the Battle; the article will examine the strategic significance of victory to the British and German moral components of fighting power. This section will also address its enduring effects today upon the RAF and the British people. Finally, the article will address the significance of the Battle to the conceptual component of fighting power: innovation, the ability to learn and adapt, and doctrine. Analysis will include the doctrinal primacy of air control: the assertion that 'no warfighting operation on land or at sea anywhere within the spectrum of conflict can be satisfactorily concluded without control of the air'<sup>2</sup> remains as axiomatic in 2009 Afghanistan as it did in 1940 Britain. Importantly however, this final section will also identify themes from the Battle for the broader (and topical) doctrinal context of cultural understanding.

## STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF VICTORY:

### THE COURSE AND OUTCOME OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*'Hitler knows he will have to break us in this island or lose the war'*

Winston Churchill, 18 Jun 1940

British sources cite the period of the Battle of Britain as the 10 July to 31 October 1940, comprising 4 phases: firstly (10 July to 7 August), attrition of

RAF fighters, using the bait of attacks on Channel shipping; secondly (8-23 August), attacks against Fighter Command infrastructure; thirdly (24 August to 6 September) the main focus of attacks switches to London; finally (7 September to 31 October), attacks further extended to a wider variety of economic targets. Temporally imprecise, the Battle petered-out rather than reaching a climactic conclusion, with the Luftwaffe failing to achieve its aim of air superiority over southern Britain. Any assessment of the strategic significance of this failure to the outcome of the War must be clear about German strategic objectives - difficult, given that Germany herself was unclear, not least her intentions regarding the invasion of Britain.

With Russia the focus of Hitler's national strategic aim, a diplomatically-negotiated peace with Britain was preferred in order to concentrate military resources upon 'tackling the Russian problem'. Churchillian defiance in May was seen as a bluff, and a crucial month passed, waiting for the British to recognise their 'militarily hopeless situation'. The Germans had identified (as the Allies did in 1944) the *political* risks of a failed landing, with the Armed Forces High Command reporting to Hitler on 11 August 'Under no circumstances must the landing operation fail. The political consequences of a fiasco might be far more far-reaching than the military'. With the Nazi regime divided on the matter, Hitler appealed for Britain to see sense in a speech to the Reichstag on 19 July, 'In this hour I feel it to be my duty before my conscience to appeal once more to reason and common sense in Great Britain ... I can see no reason why

this war must go on'. The appeal was dismissed peremptorily in a 22 July BBC broadcast.

German military opinion was similarly divided. The tipping point for a quick, decisive invasion had been missed. Liddell Hart's view is typical, 'If the Germans had landed in England any time in the month following the fall of France, there would have been little chance of resisting them.'<sup>13</sup> Kesselring (commanding Luftflotte 2) and Fricke (Head of Naval Plans) had urged in vain that the British be followed across the Channel after Dunkirk, before they could recover. Extraordinarily though, there appeared to be no plans in place, inducing the 'morass of uncertainty in which German strategy was labouring during this period.'<sup>14</sup> On 16 July, Hitler issued his 'Directive No16', 'I have decided to begin to prepare for, and *if necessary* to carry out, an invasion of England ... and *if necessary* the island will be occupied' - the caveats are revealing. The Germans considered 3 possible military courses of action to defeat Britain: air and naval blockade, direct air attack, and seaborne invasion - either as the main effort or a later *coup de grâce*. The unenthusiastic Army had no qualms about taking on its shattered British counterparts, but was deeply apprehensive about its vulnerability whilst embarked, lobbying for a wide front of 90 miles to stretch British defences. Conversely, Admiral Raeder, conscious of British naval superiority, argued for a narrow, mine-covered corridor, but in fact favoured a policy of blockade. Meanwhile, Goering assured Hitler that the Luftwaffe would check RN and RAF interference. The only thing

that they all agreed upon was the necessity for air superiority as an essential prerequisite to all military options. Ultimately, they were all to be disappointed, and when one considers his later complete unwillingness to accept 'excuses' from the military, Hitler's agreement on 12 October to postpone SEALION until Spring 1941 is indicative of his true strategic priority.

If the Luftwaffe *had* achieved air superiority in 1940, a vanguard of 3 to 4 German divisions could have overwhelmed British defences with relative ease. Dunkirk had decimated the British Army who, even supported by the 'brassard and shotgun' Local Defence Volunteers, would have been unable to contain, let alone repel Blitzkrieg. A far greater deterrent was the RN who, despite recent losses, dwarfed her German counterpart. The RN would have battled courageously, potentially causing serious damage, especially to German second and third echelons (for which, there was a dire lack of suitable landing craft). However, the Germans could have mitigated naval interdiction by securing airfields on the South Coast. Furthermore, the RN would have been mauled by the Luftwaffe in the narrow confines of the Channel.<sup>5</sup> In just one week of the Battle's first phase, the Luftwaffe sunk 3 destroyers and seriously damaged another 2 in the Channel, leading the RN to abandon Dover as a base on 29 July and withdraw northwards. Liddell Hart had no doubt that Luftwaffe air superiority would have led to Britain's defeat, whether by invasion or otherwise, 'Had Hitler concentrated on defeating Britain, her doom would have been almost certain ... although he had missed

the best chance of conquering her by invasion, he could have developed such a stranglehold, by combined air and submarine pressure, as to ensure her gradual starvation and ultimate collapse'.<sup>6</sup> Joseph Kennedy, the US Ambassador in London, was similarly unequivocal on 2 August, 'if the Germans possessed the air power everybody supposed, they would put the RAF out of commission, after which British surrender would be inevitable'.<sup>17</sup> Britain's capitulation in 1940 would have been catastrophic, initially for Russia. Wavell would have been unable to launch his offensive on the Italians in Africa, with no consequent German reinforcement requirement. There would have been no British intervention in Greece in Spring 1941, and absence of British support would have deterred the March 1941 coup in Belgrade. Consequent German campaigns in Greece and the Balkans were successful, but diverted valuable combat power and induced several weeks delay in the launching of Barbarossa. A (stronger) Wehrmacht would otherwise have reached Moscow before the onset of winter. Hitler's failure to conquer Britain before attacking Russia resulted in him having to fight a war not on the 2 fronts often claimed, but on *several* fronts in 1941. These included: aerial bombardment and naval blockade of Britain; defensive garrisoning of Occupied Europe; an expeditionary force in North Africa; counterinsurgency campaigns in Greece, Yugoslavia and Crete against guerrillas sustained from Britain; and interdiction of British convoys to Russia. Meanwhile, what of Japanese aspirations? The collapse of France had accelerated Japanese invasion of

French Indo-China and thus British Far Eastern possessions, principally Hong Kong and the Malay Peninsula, would very likely have suffered the same accelerated fate in 1940 had London capitulated. Japan could then have focused upon Australia and India, arguably delaying the attack on Pearl Harbour.

Seeking another term in the forthcoming November 1940 US election, Roosevelt walked a tightrope of public opinion between vociferous opposition to entanglement in foreign wars, and concern over German and Japanese aggression, and German victory in the Battle would seriously have compounded Roosevelt's dilemma. Hallion describes the impact in the US of the RAF's victory thus, 'it ended forever the aura of Nazi invulnerability, greatly encouraged the pro-British interventionist lobby, and launched the US on the road to rearmament',<sup>8</sup> a bold assertion probably correct only in the longer term. US policy remained firmly isolationist in 1940 and 1941, with British lobbying instilling sympathy but not belligerence. But whilst British victory in the Battle did not bring the US into the War, it 'did create circumstances that allowed US political and military leaders to contemplate the prospect seriously.'<sup>9</sup>

#### THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF VICTORY:

##### THE MORAL COMPONENT<sup>10</sup>

*'These are the King's enemies. These are Huns attacking England, our small country, intent upon invasion and eventual occupation. We are on our own against this Teutonic monster, this arrogant bully, this invader of small countries ... Well, there's not many of us,*

*but we'll knock shit out of some of you, at least for as long as we can ... attack, get stuck in, and trust in the Lord'*

(Pilot Officer Geoffrey Wellum,<sup>11</sup>  
September 1940).

#### Leadership

The Battle had significant consequences for the leadership on both sides. Victory had fundamental, enduring benefits to Churchill's reputation, coming to personify the 'bulldog spirit' of Britain's (and his) 'finest hour'. Promoting public ambivalence, even dislike in many quarters in May 1940, Churchill was idolised by the end of the year, and even in 2002 was voted 'the greatest Briton of all time' in a BBC poll.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the machinations of senior RAF leadership during and after the Battle provided 'a backdrop of soap-opera proportions.'<sup>13</sup> Dowding, Fighter Command's victorious Commander-in-Chief became, according to Sir Arthur Harris, 'the only commander who won one of the few decisive battles in history and got sacked for his pains'. A whole host of personal issues and Service politics lay behind Dowding's dismissal, but the crux of the issue was his failure to grip his subordinates, most notably the increasingly acrimonious relationship between Park and Leigh Mallory. Fighter Command's poor night-time performance in the subsequent Blitz was the final blow, Churchill was compelled to intervene, and Dowding was dismissed on 14 November. Other casualties included Newall (Chief of the Air Staff) and Park, who was moved sideways into a training appointment.

The consequences of defeat to the

Nazi leadership were not immediate, but a seed was sown. For Hitler, it represented 'His first great failure, of far greater ultimate consequence than all his victories.'<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Goering was damaged militarily as head of the Luftwaffe, and politically as Hitler's deputy. Following earlier stunning victories, 'defeat was a shock, especially to Goering and his Luftwaffe generals whose incompetence was revealed all too clearly by post-battle recriminations. All at once it was realised that the war was by no means won as Hitler continued to claim.'<sup>15</sup> Defeat also dealt a serious blow to the Luftwaffe's reputation as the World's strongest air force, 'the air offensive against England would reveal to the enemy the limitations and weaknesses of the Luftwaffe and thus rob Germany of the strongest military-political trump card she then held'.<sup>16</sup>

### Motivation

For the British, this was a 'Just War' not only of national survival, but with 10 nations already under Nazi occupation, Britons readily subscribed to Churchill's extrapolation 'Upon this battle depends the fate of Christian civilisation'. It was a view shared in US political circles, 'any concession on the part of the British Government would destroy forever the chance of eradicating the forces which are threatening our own civilisation, with England silenced, the force of democracy would be annihilated'.<sup>17</sup> Churchill also posited British victory as crucial to the morale of Occupied Europe, 'The fact that the British Empire stands invincible, and that Nazidom is still being resisted, will kindle again the spark of hope in the breasts of hundreds of millions

of downtrodden or despairing men and women throughout Europe'. This sense of moral integrity bolstered the RAF and public will to fight, summarised by Wellum thus: 'Bloody Nazis, somebody has got to stop them.'<sup>18</sup> This resolve was seriously underrated in Berlin, and if the air offensive and threat of invasion was an attack upon British morale, it backfired spectacularly. By the end of 1940, Germany faced a British public far more determined to fight than it had been at the beginning. On 21 June, the British Ministry of Information reported 'difficulty arose in satisfying people that the war could be won'. By November, the mood had changed with a recommendation that the ubiquitous slogan 'Britain can take it!' be changed to 'Britain can give it!' German faith in the decisive effect of aerial attack upon civilian morale had crystallised during the 1940 Blitzkrieg, particularly Rotterdam. This influenced Goering's decision (supported by Kesselring) on 7 September to switch the main effort from Fighter Command bases to London, a decision now regarded as the turning point of the Campaign. Meanwhile, Luftwaffe morale ebbed away as the battle progressed, as Adolf Galland, one of their most noted fighter aces later observed 'failure to achieve any noticeable success, constantly changing orders betraying lack of purpose and obvious misjudgement of the situation, and unjustified accusations had a most demoralising effect on us fighter pilots, who were already overtaxed by physical and mental strain.'<sup>19</sup>

### Moral Cohesion

For the military, moral cohesion comprises professional ethos, self-

esteem and tradition; yet RAF policy in the immediate aftermath of the Battle was not to glamorise Fighter Command and its individual aces. The reasons were partly institutional. Now in the House of Lords, Trenchard resisted the commemoration of only part of the Service and had difficulty coming to terms with 'merely' a defensive battle. Dowding's subsequent controversial dismissal was also problematic. Furthermore, for much of the population, the worst of the Blitz was yet to come. The focus was thus on deliverance from invasion rather than victory, and the Service as a whole. Bomber Command had taken the fight to the German heartland, invasion shipping and barges. Coastal Command conducted anti-invasion patrols, attacking shipping and German-controlled ports. The Roll of Honour in Westminster Abbey's Battle of Britain Memorial Chapel, lists 1495 aircrew killed - 449 from Fighter Command, 718 from Bomber Command, 280 from Coastal Command and 34 from the Fleet Air Arm. Not listed, is the still all-too-often overlooked sacrifice of the 185 RAF personnel killed on the ground by the Luftwaffe. Undoubtedly, the fighter pilots of 1940 saw themselves as a special breed, a view reinforced by Churchill's invocation of 'The Few' as the heroes of the Nation. The First World War had generated the notion of fighter pilots as the 'knights of the sky', where in contrast to trench carnage, aerial warfare provided 'detachment, chivalry and manliness, a new elite, lone warrior.'<sup>20</sup> However, stereotypes can be misleading. 'Sailor' Malan, commanding 74 Squadron in the Battle, espoused an altogether more aggressive approach. Asked how he

felt about shooting down German bombers, he replied that he preferred to send them home badly damaged: 'With a dead rear gunner, a dead navigator, and the pilot coughing up his lungs as he lands. It has a better effect on their morale'. In the contemporary RAF, the Battle still enjoys iconic status as its historical 'blue riband' event. Indeed, annual Battle of Britain parades, cocktail parties and the Memorial Flight provide the principal fora through which RAF units engage socially with the local community.

The strategic significance of the Battle upon the moral cohesion of the British nation was palpable. In early-1940, the British people were far from united, and there were enclaves of defeatism even within Government, including the Foreign Secretary, and a cabal of 30 MPs headed by Lloyd George. Other opposition included an unholy alliance of pacifists, fascists and communists. However, public opinion was overwhelmingly behind Churchill. Paradoxically, the fall of France had been met with widespread relief across the social spectrum, from the chirpy doorman who remarked to a Minister 'at least we've made it to the final sir, and we're playing at home!', to the King, who wrote to his mother on 27 June, 'Personally I feel happier now that we have no allies to be polite to.'<sup>21</sup> As the Battle continued, morale strengthened. People appreciated that they could contribute directly to the war effort (the Spitfire Fund for example) and were on the front line, under fire, watchful for invasion, spies and German paratroops. Churchill recognised a growing sense of a 'people's war' serving as an extraordinarily powerful rallying

effect, 'a white glow, overpowering, sublime, which ran through our Island from end to end.'<sup>22</sup> Of course, this was not an exclusively British affair. The Empire was well represented amongst the 'Few'. Amongst the top ten aces were 2 New Zealanders and an Australian. Poles accounted for 20% of 'kills', and the Czech pilot Joseph Franticek was the Battle's highest scoring ace with 17 victories.

Once the Battle was over, its full significance was not immediately apparent as the Blitz raged on. Then in March 1941, the Air Ministry published the pamphlet 'The Battle of Britain', and the seed of legend germinated. Public interest exploded. More than a million copies were sold in Britain alone, 300 000 on the first day and 15 million in all. From this seed, newsreels, movies, books, even children's comics blossomed in enduring thematic abundance. Today, whilst the impact of all events fades over time, the Battle still exerts on the British psyche, a powerful influence like no other military event in our history. It was a unique battle of national survival fought over a landscape that represented the 'crown jewels of English national identity',<sup>23</sup> like the white cliffs of Dover and St Paul's Cathedral, witnessed by large swathes of the public. The notion of Britain alone, defiantly championing freedom against European totalitarianism underpins what critics term a 'Little England' psyche that began in 1940. France had capitulated, allowing German (and from October, Italian) bombers free access to British skies. 'Never since the days of Nelson had the British been more conscious of living on an island, or happier with

the dispensation of Providence.'<sup>24</sup> Today, we see an enduring effect in popular culture: Spitfire Beer 'Bottle of Britain' advertisements; the chant 'Ten German Bombers' is a staple amongst England football supporters; the campaign to erect a statue of Keith Park in Trafalgar Square, to name but a few. Perhaps more sinister is the British National Party's use of the strap-line 'Battle for Britain' and Spitfire imagery in their 2009 European Election Campaign. In sum, 'The principal effect of post-war British history has been to convince many policy-makers that Britain's destiny must always remain separate from that of Europe. In particular, the development of a federal Europe, which appeared to threaten British independence, awoke disturbing memories of 1940.'<sup>25</sup>

## THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF VICTORY:

### THE CONCEPTUAL COMPONENT<sup>26</sup>

*'The real, the ultimate reason why Hitler failed to invade England was that he failed to understand her'*

(Peter Fleming)<sup>27</sup>

### Conceptual Innovation

British innovation proved a battle-winning trait, yet there seemed an inability to learn and adapt after victory had been won. The reverse was the case for the Luftwaffe, indicating that organisations learn more from defeats than victories. Baldwin's famous 1932 assertion 'the bomber will always get through' chimed with RAF predilection for the strategic bomber as a safeguard for independence against a predatory Navy and Army. It was not until 1936 that Air Defence was given



new impetus, exploiting new radar and aircraft technology, and reorganising into the functional commands that proved ideal for the air defence of the UK. During the Battle itself, Newall intervened quickly to correct Churchill's potentially suicidal assertion that it was better to shoot the Luftwaffe down over France than Britain, and the RAF adapted its tactics quickly against the more battle-hardened Luftwaffe. Yet these lessons proved curiously non-adhesive after the Battle. For example, the first action of Dowding's replacement was to order RAF fighter sweeps over occupied France, thereby effectively reversing the force gradient disadvantages that the Luftwaffe had suffered, unsurprisingly resulting in more RAF pilots killed than the Battle of Britain (including Tedder's eldest son, Dick). Furthermore, the failure to recognise the deduction of its own Intelligence Reports on the ineffectiveness of aerial attack upon civilian morale obviously escaped Bomber Command's attention as it pursued its implacable assault on German cities throughout the War.

Conversely, the Luftwaffe was slower to innovate but learned quickly. Fatally and unlike the German Navy, they had discounted radar's potential, 'an extraordinary advantage which we could never overcome throughout the entire war.'<sup>28</sup> They had even captured a mobile set at Dunkirk, but considered it ineffective. Luftwaffe analysts concluded that the RAF's Integrated Air Defence System limited flexibility and would be swamped by mass attacks. Goering's micromanagement during the Battle was unhelpful and inconsistent, with fighters left free initially early to attrit

their RAF counterparts, and then tied to the bombers in order to ensure bombing objectives were met. On 15 August, he even removed British radar from the Luftwaffe target list. Nevertheless, the fact that the Luftwaffe's next target, the Soviet Air Force, was destroyed in 2-3 days, suggests they had learned from their mistakes.

### Doctrine - Air Control

Arguing for the doctrinal primacy of air control is pushing on a long-open door; indeed, it was the only thing that all German commanders agreed upon in considering Op SEALION. Churchill's views were also clear - 'The only real security upon which sound military principles will apply is that you should be master of your own air'. Virtually all air theorists accept the premise of the first of Meilinger's seminal Ten Propositions of Air Power, 'Whoever controls the air generally controls the surface.'<sup>29</sup> The 6-day Israeli victory of 1967 and the 1991 Gulf War are but 2 examples. Of course, Meilinger was talking about conventional war and not 'wars amongst the people'. The US and Soviet Union lost the Vietnam and Afghan Wars respectively despite air superiority, but this reinforces the point that, as with Germany in the Battle of Britain and the Coalition in 2010 Afghanistan, the achievement of air control is almost never an end in itself. Nor, in modern operations is complete air supremacy achievable, even against 'primitive' opposition. The tipping point for the Soviets in Afghanistan was Mujahideen acquisition of Stinger MANPADS; eventually, the Soviets were to lose 451 aircraft (including 333 helicopters) in the campaign. Today,

Coalition fast jets in Afghanistan are largely immune once airborne, but insurgents do contest the lower airspace with SAA and MANPADs. The airbases from which they operate are also regular targets for insurgent ground attack, and aircraft are particularly vulnerable as they take off and land.

British doctrine has recently been reviewed to better reflect air power in contemporary operations. For example, the 7 air power roles identified in the previous edition of AP 3000 (British Air Power Doctrine) have been reduced to 4, a change anticipated in both JDN 2/08 (Integrated Air-Land Operations) and the new Future Air and Space Operational Concept. Crucially though, 'Control of the Air' retains its primacy as the foremost of the roles.<sup>30</sup> In addition to opening with Montgomery's 1942 axiom 'If we lose the war in the air; we lose the war, and we lose it very quickly', JDN 2/08 evokes the powerful image of the Gulf War of 2003 when 'coalition soldiers did not look up at the sky in dread in the way that those they fought did.'<sup>31</sup> If anything, the importance of air control in modern operations has increased commensurate with rising demand for air-provided intelligence and 'soft' psychological effects such as shows of presence and force that provide battle-winning effects against asymmetric adversaries, as well as reassuring friendly forces. As Richard Holmes observed about 1 PWRR in Maysan Province 'The AC130 effect on morale was palpable.'<sup>32</sup> It remains the case though that air superiority alone is meaningless without the political will to exploit it, with hard power if required - as events in Bosnia and Somalia proved.

## Doctrine - Cultural Awareness

The recently-issued JDN 1/09 (Cultural Awareness) opens with the quote 'To operate without cultural understanding is to operate blind and deaf.'<sup>33</sup> This was certainly true of German strategy in 1940. The failure to have planned for the need to defeat Britain militarily after the fall of France was 'a failure in foresight, an error in psychology rather than in pure strategy.'<sup>34</sup> After the British rejection of Hitler's compromise peace in 1940, Goebbels told his staff on 22 July 'With their totally different, un-European mentality, the British are unable to believe that the offer made in the Führer's speech was not just a bluff but meant seriously'. Subsequent German propaganda was a cultural red flag to a bull, it was 'sheer folly to try to browbeat the British with the threat that their country was about to be occupied, it instilled in even the sceptic, the slacker and the dullard a sense of the immediacy of the danger.'<sup>35</sup> On 1 August, when the Luftwaffe dropped leaflets of Hitler's 'Last Appeal to Reason' speech, the British press delighted in photographing people cutting them up, threading string through them and fastening them to the toilet door. Rather than inducing mass panic, social upheaval, and blame for Churchill for prolonging the war, 40000 civilian deaths in the Battle and the subsequent Blitz merely served to intensify hatred of the Germans, bolster national unity and stiffen resolve - a lesson seemingly missed by Bomber Command. Whilst focusing almost exclusively on cultural understanding of the adversary, JDN 1/09 does acknowledge the need for self-awareness to avoid ethnocentrism,

an innate belief in one's own cultural superiority, a trap that the Nazis continually fell into, and one the Coalition should keep in mind whilst dealing with contemporary Islamist insurgencies.

### Conclusion

*'By their valiant deeds our fighters had saved Britain and saved civilisation. After myself seeing the camp at Auschwitz, I know the fate which would have been in store for us apart from that deliverance. Their deed saved the world from the most terrible attack ever made on the fellowship of men.'*<sup>136</sup>

Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Westminster Abbey,  
19 September 1945

The strategic significance of victory in the Battle of Britain was decisive and its effects enduring, as John Keegan asserts, it 'inflicted on Nazi Germany its first defeat. The legacy of that defeat would be long delayed in its effects; but the survival of an independent Britain which it assured was the event that most certainly determined the downfall of Hitler's Germany.'<sup>137</sup> In 'straightforward' geo-political terms, the course and outcome of the Second World War would have been fundamentally different. German attainment of air superiority in 1940 would have led to the eventual defeat of Britain either by direct aerial attack (unlikely on its own), blockade (in conjunction with the U-Boat fleet), or by invasion (whether it be an early opposed landing or, more likely, as a final *coup de grâce* in conjunction with the first 2, a foretaste of Coalition strategy in the 1991 Gulf War). British capitulation would very likely have had fatal consequences for the Soviet Union facing an earlier and stronger German

offensive, would have encouraged accelerated Japanese expansion in the Far East, and probably delayed the entry of the US into the War. The principal effect though, both at the time and, importantly to this day, was the strategic effect upon the *moral* component of British fighting power, Overy again, 'The Battle of Britain mattered above all to the British people, who were saved the fate that overtook the rest of Europe. The result was one of the key moral moments of the war, when the uncertainties and divisions of the summer gave way to a greater sense of purpose and a more united people.'<sup>138</sup> To this day, victory in the Battle, and the British spirit engendered thereafter continue to exert a powerful grip, for good and occasionally bad, on the British psyche. In this respect it is an event in British military history like no other.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Overy, Richard, *The Battle of Britain: The Myth and Reality* (London: Norton, 2000), pIX.

<sup>2</sup> Johns, Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard, 'Sir Frederick Tymms Memorial Lecture', *RAF Air Power Review*, Vol 3, No 1, Spring 2000, p3.

<sup>3</sup> Liddell Hart, B. H., *History of the Second World War* (London: Pan, 1973), p741.

<sup>4</sup> Warlimont, General Walter, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, (London:

Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1952) p109.

<sup>5</sup> The potential for which was demonstrated during the May 1941 evacuation from Crete, when the RN lost 9 warships (3 cruisers and 6 destroyers) plus another 7 seriously damaged (including 2 battleships) - all to Luftwaffe air attack. During the 1940 Dunkirk evacuation, 200 sea craft had been lost, nearly all by air attack, including 9 destroyers sunk and a further 19 damaged.

<sup>6</sup> Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, p741.

<sup>7</sup> Langer, William and Gleason, S Everett, *The Challenge to Isolation 1937 - 1940* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1952), p744.

<sup>8</sup> Hallion, "The American Perspective", in *The Burning Blue: A New History of the Battle of Britain*, eds. Addison, Paul and Crang, Jeremy A (London: Pimlico, 2000), p82.

<sup>9</sup> Overy, Richard, "How Significant was the Battle?", in *The Burning Blue: A New History of the Battle of Britain*, eds. Addison, Paul and Crang, Jeremy A (London: Pimlico, 2000), p270.

<sup>10</sup> The moral component of fighting power is about getting people to fight, and comprises leadership, motivation and moral cohesion - Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01, *British Defence Doctrine*, Shrivenham, DCDC, 2008, p4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Wellum, Geoffrey, *First Light* (London: Penguin, 2003), p147.

<sup>12</sup> BBC. 'WW2 People's War'. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/w2peopleswar/stories/10/a4081510.shtml> (accessed 10 March 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Gray, Group Captain Peter W, 'The Battle of Britain: so we already know the story?', *RAF Air Power Review*, Vol 3, No 3, Autumn 2000, p21.

<sup>14</sup> Wilmot, Chester, *The Struggle for Europe* (London: The Reprint

Society, 1952).

<sup>15</sup> Macksey, Kenneth, *Why the Germans Lose at War: The Myth of German Military Superiority* (London: Greenhill Books, 1996), p117.

<sup>16</sup> Galland, Adolf, *The First and the Last: The German Fighter Force in World War II* (London: Methuen), 1955, p61.

<sup>17</sup> Kirk, Alexander, Letter to President Roosevelt from US Embassy in Berlin, 29 Jul 1940.

<sup>18</sup> Wellum, *First Light*, p130.

<sup>19</sup> Galland, *The First and the Last*, p73-74.

<sup>20</sup> Mosse, George, "The Knights of the Sky and the Myth of the War Experience", in *War: A Cruel Necessity*, eds. Hinde and Watson, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Terraine, John, *The Right of the Line: The Royal Air Force in the European War 1939-45*, (Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), p169.

<sup>22</sup> Parker, Matthew, *The Battle of Britain: July – October 1940*, (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2000), p319.

<sup>23</sup> Addison, Paul and Crang, Jeremy A, *The Burning Blue*, p250.

<sup>24</sup> Bell, P, *Britain and France 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement* (London: Longman, 1996), p253.

<sup>25</sup> Addison and Crang, *The Burning Blue*, p260.

<sup>26</sup> The conceptual component of fighting power comprises conceptual innovation (how military thinking changes over time in response to new contexts, challenges and technologies) and doctrine.

<sup>27</sup> Fleming, Peter, *Operation Sealion* (London: Pan, 2003), p300.

<sup>28</sup> Galland, *The First and the Last*, p69.

<sup>29</sup> Meilinger, Colonel P S, *Ten Propositions Regarding Air Power, Monograph* (Maxwell Air Force Base, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> The 4 roles are Control of the Air,

Mobility and Lift, Intelligence and Situational Awareness, and Attack.

<sup>31</sup> Joint Doctrine Note 2/08, *Integrated Air-Land Operations in Contemporary Warfare* (Shrivenham: DCDC, 2008), p2-2.

<sup>32</sup> JDN 2/08, p2-10.

<sup>33</sup> Joint Doctrine Note 1/09, *The Significance of Culture to the Military* (Shrivenham: DCDC, 2009), p1-1.

<sup>34</sup> Fleming, *Operation Sealion*, p299.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p206.

<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, reporting on the Battle of Britain Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey, 19 Sep 45.

<sup>37</sup> Keegan, John, *The Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p81.

<sup>38</sup> Overy *The Battle of Britain: The Myth and Reality*, p132.

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