

Determined to strike back Bomber Command launches raids against German industrial and strategic targets.
 With the threat of invasion attacks are directed against concentrations of invasion barges in the Channel ports.



During 1940 Bomber Command relies on Hamden, Wellington, Whiteley and Blenheim twin engine bombers, the heavy four engine bombers, like the Lancaster, still being in the process of development.



Initially targets are restricted to ships and naval bases, but following the Luftwaffe's bombing of Rotterdam on 15 May the War Cabinet lifts restrictions on civilian targets. The Croatia 1k+0.50k was issued perforate and imperforate.



Bombing raids are carefully planned, but poor navigational aids often result in the intended target not being found.



During May night raids on German industrial centres commence, Cologne and Kiel being bombed several times during September and October. In response to the 'accidental' bombing of London on 24 August Berlin is bombed for the first time the following night.



On 10 September a large bomber force makes a concentrated attack on Hamburg. The Nobel dynamite factory is in nearby Geesthacht.



Magdeburg-Neustadt, the main centre for the development of Junker engines, is bombed during the nights of 14/15 and 15/16 October.



Germany quickly establishes effective defences against British bombers. By the end of the war 47,120 operational Bomber Command personnel have been killed or are presumed dead.



The invasion barges being concentrated in the channel ports, including Antwerp, are attacked for the first time on 13/14 September. Such are the fires caused by the intensity of Bomber Command's assault that the continental coast is soon dubbed the 'Blackpool Front'.



The message contained in this 'Kriegsgefangenenpost' indicates the sender is a 'downed' bomber crewman. The 'Dulag Luft' censor cachet was used at two POW transit camps for airmen located in France during 1940.

5.4 the dual for air supremacy over Britain becomes a tenacious struggle

Mastery of the skies over Britain is the prerequisite for the success of Operation Seelowe, the German sea-borne invasion of southern England. The Luftwaffe's numerical superiority leads Reichsmarschall Göring to assure Hitler that the RAF will be destroyed in days. The ensuing aerial conflict, to become known as the 'Battle of Britain', reaffirms the British people's determination to fight on.



German pilots are already battle hardened from their experience in the Spanish Civil War and the invasion of Poland.



Hand stamp commemorating the Luftwaffe's participation in the Spanish Civil War.



Flying from their recently acquired French bases, including St Brieuc and Caen, British targets come well within the Luftwaffe's range.



At the beginning of the Battle of Britain the Luftwaffe has at its disposal 865 fighters, 248 dive bomber and 864 bombers significantly outnumbering the force rallied against it.

The Junkers 87 'Stuka' dive-bomber had been used to devastating effect in the 'Blitzkrieg' attacks in Poland and Western Europe.



RAF Fighter Command can at the beginning of July only muster 591 serviceable fighters. Organised into four regional groups, 10, 11, 12 and 13, and each commanded by an Air Vice Marshall, they prepare to meet the challenge.



The 'L 13652 / Luftgaupoststempel Frankfurt/Main' cachet identifies the sender of the Feldpost letter sheet as a member of 9th Company, Air Signals Regiment 3, Air Fleet 3. During August the unit is stationed in northern France participating in the air offensive against Britain.



Trafalgar Leigh-Mallory commands Fighter Command No 12 Group. He is to become critical of Dowding's and Park's strategy during Battle of Britain.



RAF Uxbridge is the headquarters of No. 11 Group RAF, which is responsible for the defence of London and the south-east of England during the Battle of Britain. A much redacted item that has passed through the RAF Depot at Uxbridge before being returned to sender. It is back stamped with a 'Returned Letter Branch / GPO Salisbury' cancel dated 3 July 40.



Keith Park, a New Zealander, commands No 11 Group.



At the outset of the Battle 19 squadrons are equipped with the fast manoeuvrable Mk1 Spitfire while 24 with the slower but more robust Hurricane. Six squadrons fly the fighter version of the Blenheim light bomber and two the fast becoming obsolete two-seater Defiant. Gladiators are only flown by No 247 Squadron.

The official opening day of the Battle of Britain, 10 July, sees the start of the Luftwaffe's month long campaign targeting Channel convoys, this first phase consequently becoming known as 'Kanalkampf' (Channel Battle).



Convoys passing through the English Channel come under constant attack from E-boat flotillas and Stuka dive-bombers. So intense is the battle in the Straits of Dover that it becomes known as 'Hellfire Corner'.



Royal Navy destroyers provide limited protection while fighters of No 11 Group are in constant action defending the convoys. Spitfire QJ-F of No 92 Squadron is one of many in the forefront of the air battles over the Channel.



The Stukas' vulnerability to fighter attack soon becomes apparent. On 18 July the Stuka Geschwader 77 loses 16 aircraft while attacking Ford and Thorney Island. They are withdrawn from front line operations 17 days later.

L31683 was allotted to III Stuka Geschwader 77 based in the Caen area during July.



The second phase of the Battle opens on the 12 August and lasts two weeks, with airfields and radar installations coming under heavy and sustained attack. On 13 August, Adler Tag (Eagle Day), the Luftwaffe dispatch 1,500 missions against Fighter Command airfields.



Pilots are on constant standby, frequently flying 3 or 4 missions a day. Ground crews work frantically to re-arm and re-fuel aircraft while at the same time ensuring airfields remain operational.



There is little time to rest....



before the next 'scramble'....

taking off.....

The special hand stamp depicts Hurricanes of No 501 Squadron taking off from Hawkinge, a Group 11 airfield.



to soar into the sky.....



Although not knowing their purpose the Germans never-the-less target the Chain Home RADAR installations along the south east coast.



to gain sufficient height.....



to get on the tail.....



Biggin Hill, a Group 11 sector station, comes under constant attack between 18 August and 5 September, but despite considerable damage remains operational.

..... and down the attacker.

By the middle of August Fighter Command is in dire straits. With airfields being continually bombed, new aircraft not keeping pace with losses and the declining number of trained pilots becoming critical, Fighter Command is in danger of losing the battle.



Aircraft are hastily repaired.



In these desperate days even trainers like the Magister and Tiger Moth are being armed in preparation for a fighter role.



The number of serviceable aircraft is dwindling. Repair is prioritised, existing aircraft adapted and a call goes out for subscriptions to meet the cost of building new planes.



The expense of new planes is often met through public subscriptions in both Britain and Allied nations. The source of funds is acknowledged on the fuselage of these 'presentation' aircraft.



With only eighteen rescue launches the RAF have to rely on RNLI lifeboats and Coastal Command air/sea rescue planes to retrieve downed pilots from the Channel. It is another year before a dedicated Air Sea Rescue Service is established.

Pilot welfare and morale is of growing concern. With the strain of battle the pilots' physical and mental well-being has to be maintained to ensure their battle readiness.



Medical advances are being made. Pilots suffering severe burns are treated in a pioneering unit set up by the plastic surgeon Archibald McIndoe.



The Times reports a greyhound meeting at Brighton raising £400 towards a 'Spitfire Fund'.

To enable the RAF to stay in the fight the development of improved performance aircraft becomes essential.



The improved Mk II Spitfire enters service with No 611 Squadron in August, but the two engine Whirlwind does not become operational until December.

New fighter Squadrons are formed with personnel drawn from Allied nations and volunteers.



Despite the language differences Polish and Czech squadrons become operational.



No 1 (Royal Canadian Air Force) Squadron arrives in Britain on 21 June and becomes operational flying Hurricanes at RAF Northolt by mid-August. FPO 465 was used at the Canadian Military HQ, London from August. The cover is back stamped with an oval 'ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE / ORDERLY ROOM' cachet dated NOV 26 1940.

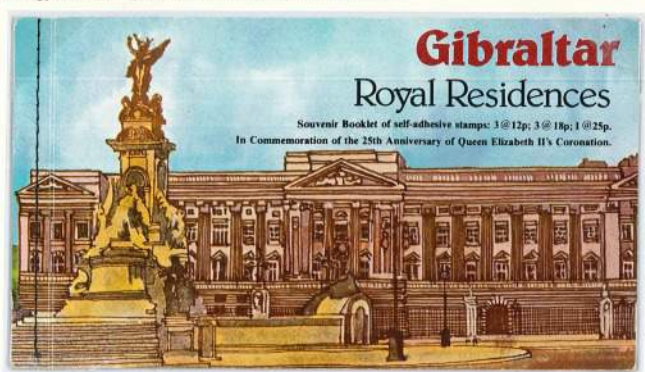


The local public house becomes a refuge from the trauma of battle, beer a welcome relief.



Although their country remains neutral Americans volunteer to serve in the RAF. No 71 (Eagle) Squadron is activated on 9 November, but does not become operational at Church Fenton until 5 February 1941. The meter mark is advertising the US film 'Eagle Squadron' which was released in 1942. The film pays tribute to American pilots serving with the RAF during the Battle of Britain.

Having failed to destroy Fighter Command the Luftwaffe embarks on the third phase of the Battle, German bombers now targeting British cities in a bid to bomb the British people into submission. Becoming known as the 'Blitz', this change of strategy enables Fighter Command to regain the initiative.



German bomber formations sometimes number over 1,000 aircraft.



The faster more manoeuvrable Spitfires intercept the fighter escorts leaving the Hurricanes to engage the bombers.

Thousands of rounds are fired skyward by anti-aircraft guns, effectively making more noise than shooting down bombers.

The intensive bombing of London commences on 7 September and continues for sixty consecutive nights. All parts of the city, particularly the dockland area, suffer under a rain of high explosives and incendiaries.



Buckingham Palace is hit several times. After a raid on 13 September the Queen expresses her solidarity with fellow Londoners, remarking: "I am glad we have been bombed. It makes me feel I can look the East End in the face". Each night the Royal family retires to the safety of Windsor Castle.



Other British cities soon suffer the same fate as London, industrial centres and ports becoming regular targets for nightly raids by Luftwaffe bombers.



The King and Queen visit the bomb damaged port of Hull following an August daylight bombing raid.



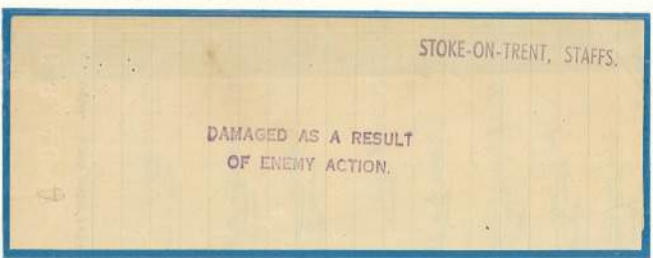
On 14 November 450 Luftwaffe bombers attack Coventry, devastating the city centre. 50,000 houses are damaged and 20,000 rendered uninhabitable. Three quarters of the city's industry is affected.



The dock area of Leith in Edinburgh is bombed on a number of nights during July. Use of this temporary cancellation was possibly the result of damage to a post office in the area.



St Mary le Port Church, Bristol painted by John Piper following the bombing of the city on 24 November. As Piper saw it, without the head and valve. Missing gold (left) with normal.



Proof of cachet prepared in Stoke on Trent in readiness to endorse bomb damaged mail. It is printed on the back of a 1938 Post Office account ledger.

In the air Fighter Command intercept the attackers, while on the ground the medical and emergency services strive to rescue the injured and douse the fires. The cities' inhabitants endeavour to carry on as usual despite the bombing they are enduring.

Advertisement for 'THE HALF-PENNY LETTER POST COMPANY, LIMITED' featuring 'BRAMSTON'S FIRE! FIRE ESCAPE', 'HINDLE'S HAIR CURLING PINS', and 'DE JONG'S ICED COCOA OR CHOCOLATE'.

Fire escapes are an essential addition to homes and commercial premises. Headache pills may come in handy as well. 1d pink embossed postal stationery envelope produced by 'The Half-penny Letter Post Company' c1880.



Emergency and rescue services work tirelessly.



While some rescue the trapped from the debris of their homes the Citizens Advice Bureau attempts to find the homeless alternative accommodation.



Undeliverable mail is returned to the Post Office to await collection. When not retrieved it is returned to the sender. Being posted at the printed paper rate a 1d underpaid fee was raised for its return.



The milkman continues to do his rounds. The 'Moorgate Post Office has re-opened' handstamp provides evidence of the effect of bombing on the Post Office and its determination to maintain a service.



At night the blackout is strictly imposed. During the day in London lunchtime concerts are held in the National Gallery.



Advertisement for 'Messrs JOHN BIRCH & Co. Ltd' with a stamp from Egypt 40c and a handstamp that reads 'Moorgate Post Office has Re-opened at 33, Moorgate St. E.C.2. LONDON (E.G. 2) (ENGLAND)'.



There are acts of heroism. Robert Davies and George Wylie, members of a bomb disposal detail, are the first recipients of the newly instituted George Cross for their retrieval of an exploded bomb in the vicinity of St Paul's Cathedral, London.



Stamp designer Leonard Rosoman, while a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service, witnesses two of his colleagues die when a wall collapses while fighting a fire in London.

Italy's declaration of war on 10 June opens a second theatre of war in the Mediterranean and North Africa. The presence of a strong modern Italian navy, the Regia Marina, in the Mediterranean leads to the immediate disruption of British sea routes to the Far East and a threat to the security of the Suez Canal. Britain is compelled to reappraise her naval strategy.



For Italians living in Britain Mussolini's declaration of war had immediate repercussions. This cover is dated 10 June 1940, the day Mussolini declared war on Britain.



Mussolini meets Hitler at the Brenner Pass on 18 March and agrees to declare war, but at a time of his choosing.



Britain's reaction is swift; Whitleys bombing Genoa and Turin two days after Italy's declaration of war.



The Italian fleet, including the heavy cruiser Trento, is quickly involved in naval operations in the Mediterranean.



The heavy cruiser Pola, commissioned on 21 December 1932, participates in the Battle of Calabria on 9 July, the first naval engagement of the Mediterranean war. Each ship of the Regia Marina has its own identifying date stamp.

The decision to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet at the expense of the naval presence in the Far East is taken despite an awareness of Japan's expansionist ambitions.



China Station, with its headquarters in Singapore sees its complement of vessels depleted. FPO S.P. 501 was used in Singapore from 30 September 1939 until the Japanese invasion.



Britannia 'ruling the waves' is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.



The aircraft carrier HMS Eagle is among a number of capital ships transferred to the Mediterranean.



On 27 September Japan signs the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, the terms of which grant Japan lordship over 'Greater East Asia'. The battle cruiser Hiyoi is part of an expanding Japanese fleet.



Japan's expansionist ambitions in the region became manifest in 1937 when they invaded China.

Postal stationery envelope sent from a Japanese soldier fighting in China. These are rarer than postal stationery cards as special permission had to be obtained to send them due to censorship regulations.

This item is censored by the Transportation Master Sergeant of the Kusama Company, Yamamori Battalion.

Ships of the Royal Navy's Force 'H' are stationed at Gibraltar. Already a major naval base for ships patrolling the Atlantic it now becomes pivotal in the Royal Navy's operations against the Regia Marina in the Mediterranean.



Warships of Force 'H' constantly sail into the Mediterranean to engage the Regia Marina or to escort convoys to and from Malta and Egypt.



The omission of 'TRAVEL' from the lower slogan cancellation emphasises Gibraltar's acknowledged strategic importance. The 'PASSED CENSOR 16' cachet was used by 4th Battalion Black Watch from 17 July.



Rosia Bay, Gibraltar's port area, comes under aerial bombardment by both Vichy French and Italian aircraft, but such is its Anti-Aircraft defences that little significant damage is inflicted.

The Mediterranean Fleet, based at Alexandria, is tasked with the defence of the eastern Mediterranean ensuring the Suez Canal remains open to convoys bringing essential supplies and reinforcements to the garrison in Egypt.



Naval censored cover posted in Alexandria, probably from a seaman serving with the Mediterranean Fleet. It was necessary for British Force personnel to use Egyptian 'Army Post' adhesives to obtain the concessional postal rates. This remained in force until 30 April 1941.



Ships of the Mediterranean fleet, including the cruiser HMS Liverpool and the battleship HMS Malaya constantly harry Italian convoys bound for North African and bombard Italian installations along the Libyan coast.



Operation 'Judgement' effectively neutralises the Regia Marina. On the night of 11/12 November twenty-one Swordfish flying off HMS Illustrious mount a devastating torpedo attack on the Italian fleet in Taranto Harbour, surviving ships retreating to Genoa, Naples and La Spezia.



During Operation Judgement HMAS Sydney together with other ships mount diversionary raids while skuas fight off Regia Aeronautica fighters.



It proved 'once and for all that in the Fleet Air Arm the Navy has its most devastating weapon.' - Admiral Andrew Boscawen, British Naval Commander. 'By this single stroke the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean was decisively altered.' - Winston S. Churchill.