

SALUTE TO THE FEW



"SCRAMBLE!" A young pilot from 64 Squadron sprints over the airfield turf towards his Spitfire on August 15, 1940.

On that day the mighty German Luftwaffe lost 75 aircraft — well over twice the casualty rate of the defenders — as Fighter Command intercepted wave after wave of invaders.

The clear blue skies of that scorching summer were criss-crossed with vapour trails, and excited schoolchildren craned

their necks to watch the spectacle, unaware that the very future of democracy was being decided overhead.

Despite appalling losses, the Germans were still convinced that their "Attack of the Eagles" would pulverise Britain's air defences and leave the country naked to the kind of crushing onslaught unleashed on those other nations that had dared to defy Hitler's legions.

Within a month, the veteran Luftwaffe fliers



This anniversary eight page special supplement on the Battle of Britain has been researched and written by
STEVE BRUMWELL

knew a hard truth that their masters were more reluctant to admit.

Sunday, September 15, which cost the Luftwaffe 185 aircraft, has become

known as "Battle of Britain Day".

According to the Air Ministry account published the following year, the first enemy patrols

arrived off the South East coast and Thames Estuary soon after 9.00 am.

At around 11.30 am Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering sent over the first wave of more than 100 aircraft, with another 150 hot on their heels. They were Dornier bomber 17's and 215's destined for London, with Messerschmitt 109 fighters riding shotgun.

The opening round of the combat was fought over east Kent and London and the German

pilots could soon be heard calling the familiar warning "Achtung, Schpitfeuer!" over their wireless 'phones as the RAF Spitfire and Hurricane squadrons closed the range.

By sheer weight of numbers, some of the German fliers pierced through to the outskirts of London, and two unexploded bombs even lodged in Buckingham Palace. But the bombing was scattered and the raiders had no leisure to

linger as they were scourged by the cannons of the RAF.

Shortly after noon the fight lulled for about an hour and a half before the Luftwaffe attacked once again in equal strength to the morning's onslaught.

Twenty-one RAF squadrons were scrambled to tackle the invaders and the skies over Kent were soon a swirling mass of dog-fights that drew a veil of vapour over the blue.

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