

The Blitz

In the summer of 1940, Hitler decided he wanted to invade Britain. His plan was to take control of the English Channel by destroying the Royal Air Force and then to send German troops into Britain to take control. Hitler called his plan "Operation Sea Lion." Elite German paratroopers and assault troops prepared for the attack.

In July 1940, Hitler put his plan into operation. The German Luftwaffe began making daily bombing raids on British ships, ports, radar stations, airfields and aircraft factories.



The Royal Air Force took to the skies and there were many battles between British and German planes over the English Channel and South Coast. British Spitfires and Hurricanes valiantly fought off the German air attacks. Although British losses were high, German losses were higher and at the beginning of September, Hitler decided to try a new tactic to conquer Britain.

Hitler believed that by targeting civilians, he could force the British to surrender. His hope was to break the will of the British people. The daily bombing campaign began against British cities and towns on September 7, 1940. London was the main target, but other major cities were also bombed. Casualties were high. On the first day of bombing, 430 people were killed and 1,600 were badly injured.



Within a few weeks the daily bombing raids had become nightly raids. Hitler decided to make the bombing raids at night to increase the 'fear factor'. He also hoped to weaken the British people by not allowing them to sleep properly. People in London took shelter and slept in underground air raid stations for protection.

There were public shelters in most towns, but many people built Anderson shelters in their backyards and gardens so that they had protection if they were unable to get to a public shelter. Anderson shelters were made from corrugated iron and were very strong. A hole was dug in the garden, then the shelter was placed in the hole, and finally it was covered with earth. Air-raid sirens warned people when a raid was about to begin so people could take shelter.



The government tried to confuse the German bombers by enforcing a 'blackout'. Street lamps were switched off, car headlights had to be covered and people had to hang black material in their windows at night so that house lights could not be seen. Going out at night could be dangerous during the blackout; cars crashed into each other and pedestrians, people walked into each other, fell off bridges or fell into ponds. British citizens lived in terror day and night.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill vowed that Britain would "never surrender" and the attacks failed to break the will of the British people. After May 1941, the bombing raids became less frequent as Hitler turned his attention to Russia. Nevertheless, the effects of the Blitz were devastating. 60,000 people lost their lives, 87,000 were seriously injured and 2 million homes were destroyed.