

Sermon for Battle of Britain Sunday

2015 – 75th Anniversary

- Intro:**
1. Why was this Battle, lasting some 3½ months, so successful? – some thoughts
 2. Why was it necessary? What were the pilots fighting for?
 3. What can we learn and do to lessen the likelihood of war in the future?

The Story:

30 June 1940

The order is given by Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe, to draw the RAF into battle. Attacks are to be focused on coastal convoys, radar stations along the south coast, aircraft factories and RAF airfields. A tactic that succeeded in drawing in the RAF but which failed in its outcome.

10 July: (Phase One)

The German air force began running fights over convoys in the Channel, occasionally dive-bombing cargo ships. And on **13 July**: The Luftwaffe began laying mines around Britain. This would continue until early September.

12 August: (Phase Two)

Germany began their main raids across Britain, codenamed *Adlerangriff* ('Eagle Attack'). This was a systematic assault on radar stations and forward fighter airfields. *Adlertag*,

15 August: otherwise known as 'Black Thursday' for the Luftwaffe. The RAF flew a total of 974 sorties and the Luftwaffe 1,786. Germany lost 75 planes to the RAF's 30 – heavy casualties meant that this was to be the last outing of strength for *Luftflotte* 5 division.

18 August: Both sides saw their greatest losses of the Battle of Britain: for that, this day became known as 'The Hardest Day'. The losses of the Germans' Junkers 87 'Stuka' – the main Luftwaffe precision-bombing weapon – were so severe that Göring withdrew them from the battle. Between August 8 and the 18 the RAF had lost 175 aircraft, and the Luftwaffe 332.

19 August: Attacks began in earnest on aircraft factories.

20 August: [Churchill made his famous speech](#) to Parliament: 'never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few.'

23 August: Attacks began on RAF airfields, the heaviest damage happening on 31st August

23/24 August: (Phase Three) Bombs were dropped over residential areas of London – Heavy night-time bombing raids continued until 15 September and to a lesser extent for several years.

31 August: Fighter Command suffered its heaviest losses to date: Debden airfield was hit by 100 bombs. Six out of the seven main bases in South-East England had been heavily damaged, in some cases badly enough to severely restrict efficiency.

7 September: (Phase Four) The assault was switched to massed attacks on London, major cities, aircraft factories and other strategic targets. Nearly 400 bombers and more than 600 fighters targeted the docks in the East End of London, day and night. The Luftwaffe switched to night bombing to avoid the large numbers of fighters countering day raids.

15 September: A massive attack on London saw inaccurate bombing due to the determined defence put up by RAF fighters – every single aircraft of 11 Group was used. The Germans suffered their

highest losses since 18 August, forcing a reconsideration of tactics; this day was subsequently chosen as Battle of Britain Day. From this point the Luftwaffe were forced to gradually scale down their attacks.

17 September:

The German land invasion was called off until further notice, never to take place.

Bombing raids continued until **31 October:** but petered out as the weather worsened. Although bombing of London continued for several years, this day is generally regarded as the final day of the Battle of Britain, and October the month in which regular bombing of Britain ceased.

All this took just a little over 3½ months.

2. Why was the RAF so successful?

It could be argued that, at its root, is a mindset of liberty which had become deeply ingrained in the British psyche. An island mentality has evolved over centuries of threat and attack by other European nations. And this mentality was carried to the New World in the minds of the Pilgrim Fathers and the later establishment of the Constitution of the USA. Also, the mindset of independence and self determination became apparent when Henry VIII broke away from the control of Rome and the Church of England was formed. And this resistance to state control combined with a spirit of freedom is embedded in the way much is done in this country. For instance, in our pilot training initiative is strongly encouraged and rules in flight are seen as for guidance rather than for letter-of-law obedience. Cf. Using initiative, 'Taking the bull by the horns' and Air-to-air combat experience during advanced jet training (Gnat). Thinking creatively and outside of the box has been a key to air superiority in the RAF. Freedom and self determination is fundamental to British thinking.

As a result, a respect for the right of independence and self-determination was evident in acts like the Treaty of Paris, and a willingness to allow nations such Malawi, Ghana, Kenya and, of course, the Commonwealth countries to determine their own futures having been under British Empire control for a season.

It could also be argued that this thinking has been reinforced by the Christian message of freedom; liberty being at the heart of Jesus' teaching – "If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed." But freedom from what? Freedom to do what one likes only leads to an enslaving to one's passions and desires – an internal tyranny. What aspect of freedom was this nation resisting?

3. Why was the Battle of Britain necessary?

This is, perhaps, the same question as why this country went to war in the first place. In short, the battle was necessary in order to preserve liberty.

Something appears to have gone wrong in the German psyche. Through the extreme years of social deprivation following WWI anxiety seems to have taken hold of the nation. And when people, groups or nations become anxious they revert to dysfunctional behaviour; one form of which is sometimes referred to as Fight –Flight. It manifests itself in the demonising of those who are different, not of you, perceiving them as a threat to one's future, Jews and Gays and all non-Arian people in Germany's case. In such a mindset one becomes obsessed with one's perceived enemy and there is a fleeing from considered behaviour – a flight into a sort of fantasy. *(One could argue that the formation and activity of ISIS is just such a behaviour pattern – a thought for another day).*

It is reasonable to conclude that wars begin because of a perceived threat which has led to national Fight-Flight behaviour. If this is an accurate hypothesis then the remedy is to lower anxiety. All peace-making is rooted in this. And so, at conflict memorial gatherings such as this we commit ourselves to prayers for peace and to active peace-making.

4. So, what can we learn and do to lessen the likelihood of war in the future?

Being Peacemakers:

Jesus called all his followers to be peace-makers and said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.'

- a. Peacemakers in the World** – That's about politics, about how not to be a threat and how to feel secure enough so as not to respond to threat dysfunctionally. One could argue that some of the driver for the first Iraq war was a dysfunctional response to 9/11 as Iraq wasn't implicated in those attacks.
- b. Peacemakers in our Relationships** – That's about doing the same thing on a personal level – not being a threat to others by loving them as oneself. It's also about feeling secure enough not to respond dysfunctionally when we are, or feel, threatened. As Jesus taught, 'Love your enemy; do good to those who harm you, blessing those who curse you.' Great wisdom! This is not so much about mercy but about grace. 'Like someone smashing your car window and responding by giving them a cake'.
- c. Peacemakers in ourselves** – It all starts here. The biggest struggle is within ourselves - our default response to threat – Fight-Flight. We have to learn to deal with anxiety arising from perceived threat. As Jesus taught, 'Have no anxiety about anything, but with all prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses understanding will keep your hearts and minds in the love of God.'

But there is another aspect to this struggle – a corporate psychological and spiritual one. As St Paul stated and implied, 'It is not against flesh and blood that we contend, but against the spiritual and cosmic powers in heavenly places that take hold of human institutions and governments if they are not alert to the possibility, and resilient in the face of the temptation to demonise those who are different, at times of national stress or external threat.

5. Conclusion:

So, today, as we thank God for the courage and will to resist the attack on the liberty so embedded in this nation which happened 75 years ago, we are challenged to commit ourselves to the ways of peace: peace in the world through wise and resilient politics; peace in our relationships through loving our neighbours as ourselves; and peace within by dealing with anxiety caused by stress and threat through prayer and supplication.

In doing this we will know inner peace, be blessed as peacemakers and have the right to be called children of God.

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