

n the summer of 1940, the prospects for democracy in Europe appeared very bleak indeed. Adolf Hitler's apparently unstoppable military machine overrun most of Western Europe in less than two months and only the English Channel stood between Nazi Germany and the last remaining outpost of democracy in Europe. Britain's small army, as well as those of its allies, had been quickly defeated on the continent, and now the island nation stood alone against the enormous military might of the Nazi regime. Despite the apparent hopelessness of the situation, England refused to listen to Hitler's "reason" and vowed to fight on. Unable to achieve the negotiated peace

to be known as the Battle of Britain, was thus part of the preparatory effort meant to clear the way for Operation SEA LION—the invasion of Britain.

As Karl Klee has noted, "For the people of Britain the air battle over their heads was a decisive battle; in fact, it was *the* decisive battle of the Second World War [WWII] for them, and the continued existence of their island empire was at stake."

Prospects for a British victory appeared slim.

The task of defeating the largest air force in the

world

would

he sought, Hitler decided that only the invasion of

> fall primarily on the shoulders of the pilots and personnel of Fighter Command, led by Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding. Typical of British leadership at the time, Dowding pessimistically predicted that "our young men will have to shoot down their young men at a rate of five to one."2 Internationally, opinion was equally pessimistic. Joseph P. Kennedy, United States ambassador to the United Kingdom, dourly informed President Franklin Roosevelt that, "England will go down fighting. Unfortunately, I am one who does not believe that it is going to do the slightest bit of good."3 In the years since, historians have continued to portray it as a battle in

eliminate it from the war. In view of the relative weakness of the German navy, Nazi planners concluded that only once command of the air had been achieved could there be any hope of a successful cross-channel landing. The ensuing air battle, which pitted the might of the German Luftwaffe against the Royal Air Force (RAF), and later came

England

would

which the British were constantly on the ropes and struggling to survive. However, as Wing Commander M. P. Barley of the RAF points out, the truth is that "German failings before and during the battle conspired to ensure that they would not win."4 Contrary to the popular perception that the Battle of Britain was a close affair that was fought by the "few" in the face of overwhelming odds, the destruction of the RAF, as a prelude to a cross-channel invasion, was a task for which the Luftwaffe and its leadership were woefully ill-prepared.

Despite being in a favourable military position after a series of quick victories on the continent, failures in German doctrine, equipment, intelligence, and leadership conspired to ensure that the Luftwaffe would not be able to achieve success operating independently in pursuit of strategic goals. While this is in no way meant to belittle the efforts and achievements of the RAF, the reality is that German shortcomings played a greater role in the defeat of its air force than many choose to remember. The Luftwaffe was created as a tactical force, designed to be successful in a support role within offensive blitzkrieg warfare. As such, procurement, doctrine, and the role of intelligence were all geared for tactical success, and all contributed to the Luftwaffe's inability to carry out a successful strategic campaign against Britain. Shortcomings in these areas, when combined with the disastrous effects of poor leadership, ensured that the British would be able to make the most of the advantages they enjoyed and that the RAF would ultimately emerge victorious.

In his account of the Battle of Britain, Matthew Parker asserts that "in June 1940 the Luftwaffe was unquestionably the strongest air force in the world."5 Germany possessed more planes than Britain and was fresh off a series of successful campaigns through France and the Low Countries in which it had shot down over 3,000 enemy aircraft.6 With the decision to attack Britain, it appeared as if it was only a matter of time before the pilots of the RAF would be swept aside as well.

Hermann Göring, head of the German Air Force, confidently predicted that the elimination of fighter forces from southern England would take only four days and that the defeat of the entire RAF could be accomplished in four weeks.7 Field Marshal Willhelm Keitel, Chief Operations Officer of the German High Command, suggested that crossing the English Channel "should prove no more difficult than a river crossing. \*\* These predictions soon proved overly optimistic as it became apparent that the RAF was a much more formidable opponent than had been anticipated. Perhaps more important than British prowess, however, were the limitations of German capabilities which resulted from its short history and tactical role within the German military.

The Luftwaffe had been forced to grow fast. Having been forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles from possessing an air force, German warplane manufacturers turned their efforts to commercial endeavours such as the airline Lufthansa, which by 1930 was larger than the French and British airlines combined. In this way, German industry maintained a great deal of technical sophistication with regard to aircraft design and production, and many of the aircraft which would eventually be employed during WWII evolved from the world-class civilian designs of the interwar years.9 But while a great deal of knowledge was retained about the design and manufacturing of aircraft, precious little existed about their employment in combat.

It was not until Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 that Germany began to overtly develop its air force. Hitler pursued a policy of rapid rearmament, and the Luftwaffe was quickly receiving new men and materiel. The development of air power concepts and doctrine was left to officers who had little practical experience in the employment and operation of aircraft and who came almost entirely from the army.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that German air power doctrine focused on support of ground troops and that the force would be structured and trained to

fulfill this tactical role. Experience in Spain, where aircraft had been successfully employed in ground support operations, virtually ensured that the Luftwaffe would evolve as a close-support force to the Wehrmacht.<sup>11</sup> While this model was extremely successful in blitzkrieg warfare on the continent, it resulted in the creation of an air force that was incapable of independent planning and action, and one which was poorly equipped and structured for a strategic campaign against Britain.

Hermann Göring, head of the German Air Force, confidently predicted that the elimination of fighter forces from southern England would take only four days and that the defeat of the entire RAF could be accomplished in four weeks.

Another challenge to the development of successful strategic air power doctrine was Germany's adherence to the concept of the supremacy of the offensive. German strategic doctrine evolved from their interpretation of Karl Von Clausewitz and their belief that the offensive must always be used to overpower the enemy.<sup>12</sup> The success of blitzkrieg warfare only served to strengthen this belief in the supremacy of the offence. Little thought was devoted to defence, and that which was remained predominately offensive in nature. Much of the Luftwaffe's air defence strategy, for example, rested with being able to destroy the enemy's air resources on the ground or in air-to-air combat over enemy territory. Hitler was confident of being able to achieve quick victories and had never seriously considered

the possibility of enemy attacks against Germany.<sup>13</sup> Defence against such attacks, therefore, received little attention from the Luftwaffe. The impact of this was that when faced with the sophisticated air defence system of the British, Germany was unable to appreciate the capability which had been created and was, as a result, unable to develop an effective means of dealing with it.<sup>14</sup> Britain's air defence system would continue to play a vital role throughout the Battle of Britain and would go largely untouched by the Germans because they simply could not understand the value of such a defensive apparatus.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the

development of successful air doctrine for the Germans was presented by Hitler himself. As R. J. Overy points out, Hitler "was by inclination and experience an 'army' man." 15 As such, the Luftwaffe was typically relegated to a position of lesser importance within the senior leadership of the German military, despite the position of prominence held by Hermann Göring himself. Very few Luftwaffe liaison officers were stationed at the Supreme Headquarters (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht [OKW]), and those who were employed there were usually of low rank and had little influence.16 Luftwaffe planning staff was routinely left ignorant of Hitler's intentions and was rarely given sufficient time to gear planning to future contingencies. With no clear understanding of Germany's grand strategy, it was virtually impossible to anticipate future requirements and develop air doctrine that could be successful under the expected conditions of combat. The difficulties faced by Luftwaffe planners are highlighted by the fact that even in the weeks leading up to the start of the Battle of Britain, Luftwaffe staff were still frantically working on plans to enable an invasion which they had not even known was as a possibility only a few weeks earlier. The result, as Karl Klee describes, was a staff which, even as the battle began, "still had no very clear idea as to how air warfare against Britain was to be effectively carried out."17

While this example highlights the difficulties associated with the planning of specific operations, it stands to reason that the development of doctrine without insight into grand strategy would have been equally difficult.

Development of aircraft within the German Air Force also focused primarily on its tactical role.18 Priority had always been given to the development of aircraft that were ideally suited for the close-support role, such as fighters and dive-bombers that were designed to support army operations on the ground.<sup>19</sup> Although the first Luftwaffe Chief of Staff, Major General Walther Wever, had in fact approached both Junkers and Dornier to manufacture a four-engined heavy bomber, the initiative died with him in a 1936 flying accident.20 Subsequent development and planning discarded the need for heavy bombers because it was felt that it would not be required during the anticipated operations against continental opponents. This proved to be a valid assumption until 1940, as the dive-bombers and medium bombers of the Luftwaffe performed brilliantly in Spain as well as in the campaigns through France and the Low Countries. During the strategic bombing campaign against Britain however, the destruction of industrial and economic targets, meant to cripple Britain's war effort, required much larger payloads than Germany's aircraft were capable of delivering.<sup>21</sup> As Samir Puri points out, the lack of a heavy bomber meant "that a relatively meager tonnage of bombs was actually being dropped," and "while industrial damage was considerable," it never approached a level that could have hoped to have been decisive.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to carrying insufficient loads to have a decisive effect, German bombers soon proved to be too slow and vulnerable to defend themselves against determined fighter opposition.<sup>23</sup> To have any chance of avoiding unsustainable losses over British territory, the Germans quickly realized that their bombers would require fighter escorts. But here, too, the development of a blitzkrieg air force

had detrimental effects on their efforts in the Battle of Britain. Germany had focused its fighter development on fast aircraft that would be capable of achieving air superiority over a localized area in order to facilitate the advance of the army below. The presence of long-range fighters was not a requirement in blitzkrieg because the aircraft were typically operating from airfields close to the front lines. While accompanying bombers on raids over England, however, the limited range of German fighters was quickly discovered to be a weakness. Even when operating from fields on the Channel coast, German fighters often had as little as 10 minutes' reserve fuel when escorting bombers to London.<sup>24</sup> This lack of fuel, combined with the need to guard the vulnerable bombers, allowed very little freedom of action for German fighter pilots.<sup>25</sup> Often, the Germans were so fuel critical that the RAF could secure a victory without necessarily having to destroy their opponents. Simply delaying the Germans for a few minutes would occasionally be enough to force the Germans to bail out on the return trip due to lack of fuel. Being tied to the bomber force as they were and with insufficient fuel to be truly effective against RAF Spitfires and Hurricanes, Luftwaffe fighter pilots typically entered dogfights at a true disadvantage.

Equally detrimental to the structure of the force was Hitler's incessant meddling in armament production. It was Hitler himself who was responsible for the general structure of German rearmament throughout the 1930s.26 As an army man, Hitler's focus was on the need to strengthen his ground forces for the inevitable show down with the Soviet Union. Neither the navy nor the Luftwaffe was ever given any priority in armaments, and the army routinely claimed the greater part of Germany's overtaxed armament production.<sup>27</sup> In addition to having to compete for resources, Hitler's insistence on rapid rearmament meant that Luftwaffe planners were often forced to sacrifice quality for quantity. His "production stop decree" in 1940, which forbade continuing work on any

project which could not be finished by the end of the year, essentially stalled military aircraft research and development and ceded the technological advantage to the Allies as the war went on. The result, as Overy points out, was that Germany forfeited "any chance the Luftwaffe had of keeping abreast of the aerial technology of the Allies." While the true effects of the decree would not be felt until later in the war, the decision to forego efforts to advance the technical quality of the Luftwaffe speaks volumes about how little Hitler understood aerial warfare and the role of technology within it.

Although Hitler appeared to have a detailed knowledge of aeronautics, as evidenced by his ability to recite descriptive details about the aircraft in his arsenal, he never really grasped what types of aircraft, and in what quantities, would be required for a given task. Hitler seemed to believe that victory could be achieved through weight of numbers alone. Eventually, his early insistence on quantity gave way to a desire for quality, but the resultant confusion ensured that German industry was never capable of living up to his desires. Although Germany possessed the potential to deliver massive, technically advanced aircraft production, Hitler's constant

meddling ensured that German industry delivered neither the quantity nor the quality of which it was capable.<sup>29</sup> The result was that the Luftwaffe pursued an aircraft program which initially concentrated on aircraft that could be delivered quickly, rather than focusing on those which might deliver the required capabilities should an attack on Britain become necessary.<sup>30</sup> Medium bombers, such as the Dornier 17, and dive-bombers, such as the Stuka, were the results of Hitler's influence on German aircraft development.31 While these machines were ideally suited to blitzkrieg warfare, they were simply inappropriate for the distances and payloads required in the Battle of Britain. That the Luftwaffe was dependent on aircraft so poorly suited for its campaign against England was, to a large degree, the result of Hitler's meddling in an area he simply did not understand.32

Although German aircraft procurement ensured that the Luftwaffe would be poorly equipped to fight the Battle of Britain, failures in German intelligence were even more damaging. The Luftwaffe intelligence department, led by Colonel Josef Schmid, was underfunded, understaffed, and far too small to meet the requirements of the world's largest air force.<sup>33</sup> During the planning and



conduct of the battle, German intelligence failures included a lack of information on appropriate bombing targets, little useful information about British radar or the British air defence system, and a persistent tendency to underestimate the strength of the RAF. The inadequacy of German intelligence caused leaders to be overly optimistic before and during the battle and was a serious impediment to effective decision making throughout.

As previously discussed, Germany's embracement of blitzkrieg warfare was based on their belief in the supremacy of the offensive. As Samir Puri notes in his description of German intelligence failures during the battle, blitzkrieg was "a concept that did not profess to require a major intelligence input."34 In the campaigns which preceded the Battle of Britain, sheer weight of force was used to overcome an enemy whose forces were easily located. The lack of an operational need resulted in an intelligence apparatus that was underfunded, lacked specialist training, and was typically left out of the decision-making process. Worse still, the political climate of the Nazi regime led to intelligence authors tailoring their reports to suit the wishes of their readers, rather than attempting to describe the conditions as they actually were. Even Göring himself was so afraid of Hitler that he would often falsify his reports so as not to appear critical or pessimistic.35 In the absence of reliable information, decisions were made based on overly optimistic assessments that ignored military realities and resulted in unnecessary difficulties.

The Luftwaffe intelligence unit's major contribution to the planning process for the invasion of Britain was the "Study Blue." The major sources for this report were officially published maps and handbooks, British newspaper articles, and a book on British industry that had been ordered directly from a London bookshop. That these were the primary sources of intelligence for a report that would help to set the priorities and objectives for the world's first ever strategic air campaign

speaks volumes about the unsophisticated and amateur nature of the Luftwaffe intelligence department.

If the sources used in compiling the "Study Blue" hinted at the deficiencies of German air intelligence, its conclusions confirmed them. Schmid reported that British air defence was weak and still in the developing stage.38 It included no information on radar and failed to recognize the significance of the air defence system that had been installed by Dowding. Despite having pioneered the technology, Germany simply failed to grasp its implications in aerial warfare.<sup>39</sup> This was a costly mistake for the Germans because radar, when properly integrated into the air defence system, allowed the British to husband their precious fighter resources. Early detection of incoming German aircraft meant that fighter squadrons were given the greatest possible warning and that they were able to stay on the ground until the last moment. This allowed pilots to engage the enemy with the greatest possible amount of fuel and avoided the need to mount tiresome and wasteful patrols.40

The Germans were aware that the coastal towers were meant for the radio detection of aircraft but simply could not understand how the system worked, so they chose to attribute RAF success in locating German aircraft to luck. As Fred Strebeigh points out, In the first five weeks of the Battle of Britain, the lucky' RAF outshot the *Luftwaffe* [sic] day after day, losing 128 planes but destroying 255 by August 12. Against the importance of the radar sites contributed to Göring's conclusion that the sites were inconsequential and allowed the British to make use of this valuable tool throughout the battle.

Another major flaw in Schmid's study was underestimation of RAF strength and British industrial capability. Schmid reported that the RAF had only 200 frontline fighters and that Bomber Command had in the vicinity of 500 bombers at its disposal.

While his estimate of bomber strength was remarkably accurate—there were actually 536—he failed to accurately predict the all important strength of Fighter Command, which had over 600 frontline aircraft. Underestimating British fighter numbers by a factor of three undoubtedly contributed to German optimism before the battle. That such miscalculations continued throughout the battle was even more damaging to German efforts.

Intelligence failures were by no means limited to underestimating British numbers. Fighter bases were routinely tagged as bomber bases and parked aircraft were often misidentified.44 The most serious mistakes, however, were the gross errors made in estimating British strength during the course of the battle. By early September, with Göring insisting that the British were down to their last 150 fighters, Hitler decided to switch the focus of the campaign to daylight bombing against London.45 This decision must have been influenced by the belief that the RAF was finished as an effective force. The result was costly for the Germans as the break gave Fighter Command time to repair and restock. Equally inaccurate was the prediction that the British aircraft industry had no hope of catching up to the expansion of the Luftwaffe in the following two years. In fact, not only were the British able to close the gap, they would surpass German production as early as 1940, when Britain produced 15,049 aircraft compared to just 10,247 in Germany.<sup>46</sup> The steady flow of replacement aircraft was an important factor in the RAF's ability to continue to fight. In fact, RAF Fighter Command grew steadily stronger as the battle progressed, whereas attrition took a heavy toll on German strength.47

Faulty German intelligence also played a role in the failure of the Luftwaffe bombing campaign. Although the objectives of the German Air Force varied from the destruction of shipping to terror bombing of British citizens, the target that needed to

be destroyed, if the Germans were to have any hope of defeating Fighter Command, was the British aircraft industry. Only if the steady supply of new airplanes could be halted could the Germans hope to win the battle of attrition that ensued throughout the summer of 1940. However, German intelligence was simply incapable of developing sophisticated target lists and determining which targets ought to be struck, and with what intensity, in order to cripple the aircraft industry. Also, by relying exclusively on post-flight reports, German intelligence was never able to accurately monitor the effects of their efforts.<sup>48</sup> Without accurate information, and with no means of determining the success of their efforts, German commanders had little hope of waging a successful bombing campaign. The lack of a heavy bomber, and the effect of constantly changing objectives, only served to further hamper their efforts.

While weaknesses in doctrine, equipment, and intelligence contributed mightily to failure during the Battle of Britain, the factor which ultimately ensured defeat was the poor quality of German leadership. From the outset, Hitler lacked the determination and political will that had marked his earlier campaigns. He appears to have been convinced that the threat of invasion alone would be sufficient to bring Britain to terms.49 Addressing the Reichstag in July 1940, Hitler said that "a great empire will be destroyed, an empire which it was never my intention to destroy or even to harm."50 Hitler made this speech as an appeal to reason. He assumed that the British would recognize the peril of their situation and that a negotiated peace could be concluded, thereby allowing him to focus his attention on the real prize—the Soviet Union. Hitler was not alone in his assessment. Given the weakness of the British military situation, leaders all over the world assumed they would sue for peace.<sup>51</sup> General Maxime Weygand, Commander in Chief of French military forces until France's surrender, predicted that in three weeks, "England will have her neck wrung like a chicken."52 With such gloomy

prospects, it appeared as if England had no choice but to negotiate. Regardless of the justification for Hitler's opinion, the impact of his ambivalence was confusion for Luftwaffe planners as to the political and military goals they were to pursue.<sup>53</sup> With no clear aim, the Luftwaffe set out on a campaign against Britain which simply meandered from one objective to the next, and it was never able to determine a military means to bring about the defeat of the British.

While Hitler's ambivalence detrimental to the German effort, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's dogged determination was vital to his nation's efforts during the battle. Despite the many predictions of Britain's impending doom, and the defeatist attitudes of many within his own party, Churchill vowed to fight on and to "never surrender." When asked how his country would react when the might of the Wehrmacht inevitably fell upon it, Churchill's response was that the British would "drown as many as possible on the way over, and then frapper sur la tête anyone who managed to crawl ashore."54 In a May 27 cabinet meeting, he made it clear that "under no circumstances would [he] contemplate any course except fighting to the finish."55 Churchill made the British aim clear from the outset, and the result was a focused national effort. Whereas Hitler's leadership was detrimental during the course of the battle, Churchill's determination was invaluable as a source of inspiration for ordinary Britons and for the men of Fighter Command who would be charged with mounting the defence.

Although Hitler's lack of focus was serious, its effects were made worse by his Luftwaffe chief. As John Correll states, "Göring was prone to impulsive and erratic decisions." Throughout the battle he constantly changed targets, leading to confusion amongst his staff and the inefficient use of his resources. According to Peter McGrath, "One week it would be radar stations: the next, airfields. Nothing was ever

finished off."57 Such direction as he did issue on the selection of targets tended to be vague and all encompassing. On 30 June, Göring called for "attacking the enemy air force, its ground installations, its own industry," and goes on to order attacks on enemy "harbors and their installations, importing transports and warships," as well as "destructive attacks against industry."58 There was no prioritization as to where Luftwaffe efforts should be focused. Such vague direction accomplished little more than to direct that any and all British targets should be attacked. The resultant dispersal of force and lack of focus prevented the Luftwaffe from achieving decisive results in any area of their campaign. As the battle wore on, Göring changed targets with increasing frequency, and Luftwaffe efforts to achieve air supremacy continued to be frustrated.

The lack of focus which marked German efforts was in stark contrast to the steadfast determination on the British side. Having recognized early on that the intent of repeated German fighter sweeps was to draw out British fighter strength and engage it in decisive battle, Dowding refused to play into Göring's hand. At Dowding's insistence, Fighter Command was not to accept battle unless an opportunity to attack enemy bombers presented itself. Dowding's strategy systematically avoided against engagements German fighter formations and deprived the Germans of the opportunity to gain the all-important air superiority it required.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the strategy allowed the RAF to avoid wasting its limited strength in engagements that would not likely be conducive to Britain's goal of preventing an invasion. It would appear that Dowding understood from the start that a successful channel crossing would require air superiority, and that such superiority could only be achieved by destroying Fighter Command. By refusing to engage in decisive fighter battles, Dowding was able to continue the struggle and force the Germans to accept what would eventually become unacceptable bomber losses. Having identified the correct

course of action for Fighter Command, Dowding refused to alter course and eventually prevailed.

Of course. the disastrous most contribution of German leadership was the decision of September 7, 1940, to shift the focus of German bombing away from RAF airfields and to focus on London.<sup>60</sup> This decision may have been motivated by a desire to retaliate for Allied raids on Berlin, or possibly as the result of Göring's insistence that Fighter Command was down to its last few planes. Whatever the rationale, the decision afforded the RAF time to regroup and was a turning point in the battle. Having observed the damage wrought by one of the first German attacks on London, Air Vice Marshal Keith R. Park was quick to grasp the significance of the change in German strategy; "Thank God for that," he said of the carnage created by the German bombs.<sup>61</sup> Park realized that the German change in strategy had come at an important time for the RAF. The Germans had let up just as they were beginning to achieve significant results. While the failure to establish clear goals and objectives was significant in contributing to German defeat, the decision to make such a fundamental change to German strategy, without having secured a definitive victory against the RAF, was the single most costly leadership failure of the campaign.



The Battle of Britain was Germany's first serious failure in WWII.62 In the days leading up to the battle, however, such a defeat seemed highly unlikely. Fresh off its easy victories through France and the Low Countries, it appeared certain that it was only a matter of time before the Luftwaffe would brush aside the RAF, just as it had its opponents in earlier campaigns. Britain's tiny army had already been routed on the continent and their air force had suffered serious losses as well.63 However, despite the apparent inevitability of yet another German victory, the destruction of British air power and securing the conditions necessary for a successful invasion were tasks which the Luftwaffe was never capable of completing. German failures before and during the battle would conspire to ensure that they would never be able to bring about a British defeat.

Much of the Luftwaffe's early success was the result of its development as a tactical air force. Operating primarily in support of ground forces, the Luftwaffe had little need of the planning capability or the type of doctrine that would be required in a strategic campaign. Similarly, the lack of a heavy bomber and long-range fighters was not detrimental to its efforts during earlier campaigns. In the Battle of Britain, however, the German Air Force would be called upon to do something very different from its earlier roles. For the first time in history, an attempt was made to use air power to cripple an enemy to such an extent that it would be incapable of offering any further resistance.<sup>64</sup> This was a task for which the Luftwaffe was simply inadequate.65 Its development as a close-support force to the army had resulted in little thought being given as to how to employ air power strategically, or over great distances. As successful as the air force had been within blitzkrieg warfare, it simply was not organized or equipped to carry out a strategic campaign. Furthermore, German adherence to offensive strategy blinded them to technical possibilities within the realm of air defence.66 By devoting so little thought to their own air defence system,

they were simply incapable of recognizing the potential of the British system and, therefore, failed to identify it as an important target that needed to be destroyed as quickly as possible.

German intelligence, before during the battle, was abysmal. Lacking the resources to serve such a large air force, the department made critical errors in assessing the strength of the RAF, particularly that of Fighter Command. It was equally ineffective in determining the capabilities of the British aircraft industry and identifying significant targets for the bombing campaign. In the words of Michael Handel, writing on the role of intelligence services within military operations, "good intelligence will act as a force multiplier by facilitating a more focused and economical use of force."67 It is equally true, however, that poor intelligence is highly detrimental to one's efforts. Without reliable intelligence, German leadership was never able to accurately identify those targets which were of the greatest strategic value or what the effects of their efforts had been. As such, they were at a serious disadvantage when trying to determine appropriate courses of action.

Of all the German failures in the Battle of Britain, none was more significant than the failure of its leadership. Hitler's ambivalence with regard to an eventual attack against Britain left planners at a disadvantage, as they were never really aware of the political aim they were meant to achieve. This shortcoming, along with Göring's incessant meddling and changes of targets, combined to ensure that Luftwaffe efforts were never focused and that it was never able to complete any of its objectives before moving on in a rational manner. The fateful decision to switch to daylight raids against London, and the reprieve it afforded the embattled British fighter forces, was simply the most significant in a long line of German leadership failures.

Despite the challenges posed by its doctrine, equipment, and faulty intelligence, the Luftwaffe was still able to push the RAF

to the very brink of defeat. By late August, the Germans were destroying British fighters faster than they could be replaced, and they seemed to have Fighter Command on the ropes.<sup>68</sup> Having apparently compensated for all of its other deficiencies, it was ultimately the failure of German leadership that ensured the Luftwaffe's defeat. Had they been better led, as the British most certainly were, the results may have been very different. Hitler and Göring, however, were very much part of the package, and it was a package that was simply inadequate for the task it was being asked to perform. Ultimately, and contrary to the German belief that superiority in numbers could be used to overwhelm the enemy, such abundance was simply not sufficient to overcome the damage caused by inept leadership.

The Battle of Britain was meant to pave the way for a German invasion. To have any chance of success, such an invasion would require both sea control and air superiority in order to avoid having German ships blown out of the water.<sup>69</sup> The first step in achieving both was the destruction of Fighter Command. For the people of Britain, the battle was perceived as a struggle for national survival in which the RAF provided the last line of defence.<sup>70</sup> Despite the fact that many in Britain, and indeed throughout the international community, assumed it to be only a matter of time before the British would be forced to capitulate, the "inevitable" German victory never came. Exceptional leadership and the tireless efforts of RAF personnel were essential to the eventual British victory. More important, however, were the German failures before and during the battle that ultimately ensured defeat. Contrary to the popular belief that the Battle of Britain was one in which the "few" achieved victory against overwhelming odds, the lack of appropriate doctrine and equipment, combined with failures in intelligence and leadership, ensured that the defeat of the RAF was a task which the Luftwaffe could never achieve. 9

Captain Jim Pinhorn is a pilot with 103 Search and Rescue (SAR) Squadron in Gander, NL. He has previously completed tours in Goose Bay, NL and Cold Lake, AB. Capt Pinhorn is currently working toward degree completion through the Initial Baccalaureate Degree Program (IBDP).

## **Abbreviations**

RAF Royal Air Force

WWII Second World War

## **Notes**

- 1. Karl Klee, "The Battle of Britain," in *Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View*, eds. H. A. Jacobsen and J. Rohwer (London: Deutsch, 1965), 93.
- 2. John T. Correll, "How the Luftwaffe Lost the Battle of Britain," *Air Force Magazine. com* 91, no. 8 (August 2008): 63, http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2008/August%202008/0808battle.aspx (accessed May 10, 2012).
  - 3. Ibid., 65.
- 4. M. P. Barley, "Contributing to its Own Defeat: The Luftwaffe and the Battle of Britain," *Defence Studies* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 407.
- 5. Matthew Parker, *The Battle of Britain: July-October 1940* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2000), 104.
  - 6. Ibid.
- 7. Samir Puri, "The Role of Intelligence in Deciding the Battle of Britain," *Intelligence and National Security* 21, no. 3 (June 2006): 424.
- 8. Williamson Murray, "Germany's Fatal Blunders," *Military History* 26, no. 5 (January 2010): 34.
  - 9. Parker, 104–5.
  - 10. Barley, 392.

- 11. Puri, 419.
- 12. Ibid., 420.
- 13. Barley, 398.
- 14. Ibid.
- 15. R. J. Overy, "Hitler and Air Strategy," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 3 (July 1980): 406.
  - 16. Ibid., 408.
  - 17. Klee, 74.
- 18. R. J. Overy, "From 'uralbomber' to 'amerikabomber': The Luftwaffe and Strategic Bombing," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 1, no. 2 (1978): 155.
  - 19. Parker, 106.
  - 20. Puri, 419.
  - 21. Overy, "amerikabomber," 160.
  - 22. Puri, 426.
- 23. R. J. Overy, *The Air War 1939–1945* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981), 34.
  - 24. Correll, 64.
  - 25. Overy, The Air War, 34.
  - 26. Overy, "Hitler and Air Strategy," 415.
  - 27. Klee, 91.
  - 28. Overy, "Hitler and Air Strategy," 415.
  - 29. Ibid., 406 and 416.
  - 30. Barley, 390.
  - 31. Parker, 108.
  - 32. Overy, "amerikabomber," 158.
  - 33. Puri, 420.
  - 34. Ibid.
  - 35. Overy, "Hitler and Air Strategy," 407.
- 36. Barley, 404.
- 37. Ibid.

- 38. Puri, 422.
- 39. P. McGrath et al, "Their Finest Hour," Newsweek 116, no. 8 (20 August 1990): 52.
- 40. Charles J. Thompson, "Art of Flight," *Aviation History* 15, no. 4 (March 2005): 62.
- 41. Fred Strebeigh, "How England hung the 'curtain' that held Hitler at bay," *Smithsonian* 21, no. 4 (July 1990): 127.
  - 42. Ibid.
  - 43. Barley, 405.
- 44. Stephan Wilkinson, "What We Learned from the Battle of Britain," *Military History* 25, no. 2 (May/June 2008): 17.
- 45. Richard Overy, "We Shall Never Surrender: WWII 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Series Part 2: Battle of Britain," *The Australian* (8 August 2005): W14.
  - 46. Puri, 421.
  - 47. Overy, "WWII," W09.
  - 48. Barley, 407.
  - 49. Ibid., 390.
  - 50. McGrath, 51.
  - 51. Parker, 90.
- 52. Williamson Murray, "Churchill Takes Charge," *Military History* 25, no. 1 (March/April 2008): 62.
  - 53. Barley, 390.
  - 54. Murray, "Churchill Takes Charge," 30.
  - 55. Ibid., 31.
  - 56. Correll, 63.
  - 57. McGrath, 53.
  - 58. Puri, 424.
  - 59. Klee, 87–88.
  - 60. Overy, "WWII," W14.

- 61. McGrath, 55.
- 62. Karl G. Larew, "The Royal Navy in the Battle of Britain," *Historian* 54, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 243.
- 63. Parker, 90.
- 64. Klee, 74.
- 65. Overy, "amerikabomber," 160.
- 66. Puri, 417.
- 67. Ibid.
- 68. McGrath, 54.
- 69. "Lesson 3: The German Conquest of Western Europe, 1939–1941," *HIE 342 Course Notes*: 7.
- 70. Kevin Jones, "From the Horse's Mouth: Luftwaffe POWs as Sources for Air Ministry Intelligence During the Battle of Britain," *Intelligence and National Security* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 63.