

**REMEMBERING 75th ANNIVERSARY of BATTLE OF BRITAIN**  
**(18<sup>th</sup> August 2016)**  
**Excuse the journalist's flowery language!)**



Veterans gather by a Spitfire at the commemoration day of the Battle of Britain, at Biggin Hill airport in Kent. It was the airborne fight that saved Britain from falling to the Nazis

The skies above southern Britain echoed to the sound of massed Spitfires and Hurricanes today as the iconic aircraft took to the skies over south-east England to commemorate 75 years since the heaviest day of fighting during the Battle of Britain. The famous planes patrolled the skies once again after what was known as The Hardest Day, when the Luftwaffe launched a major offensive in a bid to wipe out RAF fighter command and achieve aerial superiority over the Channel. Just 600 RAF and Fleet Air Arm air crew managed to fly 927 sorties in an effort to stop 2,200 Germans who flew 850 missions on August 18, 1940. By nightfall, the RAF and Fleet Air Arm had lost 68 aircraft, with 31 shot down during air-to-air combat, while the Germans had 69 aircraft destroyed or written off. The act of defiance, while incredibly costly to the RAF, was not the decisive blow intended by Hitler, which would have allowed him to launch Operation Sealion, the invasion of Britain.

Earlier today, [18<sup>th</sup> August] 18 Spitfires and five Hurricanes took off from Biggin Hill and patrolled the south coast of England, a quarter-of-a-century since The Hardest Day.



These special two-seat Spitfires were among the veteran aircraft to take part in today's magnificent commemoration



These three Spitfires patrolled the skies over the south coast 75 years to the day when the Nazis tried to wipe out RAF Fighter Command



While the Spitfire was the schoolboy favourite, the Hurricane, pictured, was more influential during the Battle of Britain



The World War II Spitfire looks every inch as majestic as it did almost 80 years ago, when it was key to saving Britain from invasion



The perfectly restored planes looked as iconic as ever as they flew together in memory of all those who lost their lives in the battle



Buzzing through the skies, the Spitfires - which were joined by Hurricanes - flew exactly 75 years to the day since German bombing began



Both the Spitfire and the Hurricane were powered by the glorious-sounding Rolls Royce Merlin engine



The Hurricane, pictured, was cheaper to produce and was easier to fly, but was not as aerobatic as its more glamorous stablemate



The Luftwaffe wanted to wipe out Britain's air defences 75 years ago today in an effort to launch Operation Sealion

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN: WHEN THE MANY WERE SAVED BY THE BRAVERY OF THE FEW



During the summer of 1940, the skies over the south of England became a battle ground as the Luftwaffe launched a war of attrition with the RAF.

The Luftwaffe began by attacking coastal shipping and dive-bombing ports, but in August, the Germans switched their tactics towards targeting the RAF directly.

Hermann Goering predicted that he could destroy the RAF within four days if he had clear weather and started pounding air strips across the south of England.

From August 13, the Germans sent a mixture of light, medium and dive bombers protected by fighters to attack the RAF. Fighter command responded by sending their force of Hurricanes after the bombers, while the Spitfires were ordered to patrol higher and engage the Luftwaffe's fighters.

On The Hardest Day, the Luftwaffe had assembled 2,200 aircrew and launched 850 missions against targets in the south of England.

Earlier in the Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe launched attacks from Norway targeting the north east of England, in an effort to divide the RAF's resources.

On August 18, the Germans launched three major strikes during the day, looking to destroy the airfields at Kenley, Biggin Hill, Gosport, Ford, Thorney Island, Hornchurch and North Weald. Following the raids on August 18, the RAF and Fleet Air Arm had lost 68 aircraft with the Germans losing 69.

Over the course of the summer, the RAF lost 1,012 aircraft and 537 crew compared with 1,918 German aircraft and more than 2,600 aircrew.

Pilots during the Battle of Britain had to race to their planes, sometimes several times a day, in order to get airborne in time



A large group of re-enactors dressed up in period uniforms as part of today's commemoration of the Hardest Day



After failing to provide air superiority over the Channel, Hitler instead turned his attentions to the Soviet Union



The RAF launched more than 920 sorties on August 18, 1940 in what was the bloodiest day of the Battle of Britain



Just 600 RAF crew were involved in more than 900 missions on that one day when more than 130 British and German aircraft were lost

Seventy-five years on and the date is still remembered as Britain's 'hardest day', as more aircraft losses were recorded by both the RAF and the German air force than at any other single time during the arduous air battle. In hoping to bomb Britain to submission, Germany flew 850 sorties involving 2200 aircrew. The RAF retaliated by sending 927 out in response. Sixty-eight of those planes were destroyed. The Luftwaffe lost 69.



A total of 18 Spitfires and six Hurricanes took to the skies over Biggin Hill to mark the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain's Hardest Day





A stream of Spitfire aircraft fly through the skies over south east England in commemoration of the Battle of Britain 75 years on



The ancient Spitfire aircraft show that they are more than still capable in the skies, taking on this huge Qantas Airbus A380 - or so it would appear



Today marks exactly three-quarters of a century to the day since the airfield - and other South-East military bases - were targeted by the German Luftwaffe



These actors played out roles in commemoration of the battle, which lasted the whole of the summer in 1940 when Britain united to keep the country from falling into Nazi hands



Also on show today was this sneering Mustang fighter, the American air force's own equivalent of our famous Hurricane and Spitfire planes



Today's commemoration saw 18 Spitfires and six Hurricanes cut through the skies, watched on by hundreds of supporters and veterans from the ground



Flames lick from the exhaust of a stunning, remodeled Hurricane as its engine is started.



Many of the planes - including this pristine Spitfire - have been lovingly restored by experts, costing as much as £2million a time



Dozens of Hurricanes and Spitfires stand parked with their noses to the sky as they await take off in today's ceremonial fly-past.

Today's commemoration saw 18 Spitfires and six Hurricanes - blasting the roar of their famous Rolls-Royce Merlin engines - cut through the skies, watched on by thousands of supporters and veterans from the ground. The 24 aircraft scrambled before forming up into three flights, with one flying west over Surrey, West Sussex, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, a second flying east over the former RAF bases in Kent and the third going south east over Seven Oaks and Ashford to make a special salute over the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-Le-Ferne on the white cliffs of Dover. They then returned to Biggin Hill for several fly pasts, before a lone Spitfire performed a victory roll over the crowd and runway.



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These two Hurricanes were part of the afternoon fly-past across southern Britain



A group of four Spitfires zoom past, as they complete their anniversary journey with a fly-past at Biggin Hill in south London



A second flying east over the former RAF bases in Kent and the third going south east over Seven Oaks and Ashford to make a special salute over the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-Le-Ferne on the white cliffs of Dover



A pilot prepares to take off in his Spitfire. Seventy-five years on and August 18 is still remembered as Britain's 'hardest day', as more aircraft losses were recorded by both the RAF and the German air force than at any other single time during the arduous air battle



A re-enactor wearing an old Army Air Force uniform smokes a pipe, while the man in the life-jacket helps recreate a battle scramble.



The famous planes whizzed through the air in memory of all those who lost their lives throughout the lengthy summer fight to stop the Nazis from invading

Will Curtis, managing director of Biggin Hill Airport, himself a modern day Spitfire pilot, said: 'It's great isn't it. This is probably the largest number of Rolls-Royce Merlin engines run on this airport since the Second World War, so it is a great privilege to see such a large number of

aircraft airborne at once.' He added that Spitfire remained an 'iconic aircraft', saying: 'The remarkable thing is that today it is still a joy to fly. If you think about how an 80 year-old car would feel today to drive, it is a real credit to [Spitfire designer] RJ Mitchell that to fly the Spitfire today, it is as finely tuned and as well-balanced, if not better balanced, than a modern aircraft.'



Today's commemoration saw 18 Spitfires and six Hurricanes fly over the country, watched on by thousands of supporters and veterans from the ground



World War II Air Transport Auxiliary pilot Mary Ellis looks at one of the Spitfire planes which featured in this afternoon's memorial



Veterans gather by a Spitfire at the commemoration day of the Battle of Britain, at Biggin Hill airport in Kent. It was the airborne fight that saved Britain from falling to the Nazis



The iconic aircraft flew in formation - just like their heroic pilots would have to take on the German air force during the famous battle





In hoping to bomb Britain to submission, Germany flew 850 sorties - made up of both Hurricanes and Spitfires - involving 2200 aircrew. The RAF retaliated by sending 927 out in response



A pair of Spitfire aircraft fly over Biggin Hill to the delight of thousands of gathered spectators, including many medal clad veterans



This exquisite Sea Hurricane (note hook), is given a once over by an engineer before being given the green light to take to the skies once more



Smoke billows from the exhaust of this Spitfire as its engine is started in preparation for flying high over Great Britain once more



This US Mustang fighter, pictured, painted in an RAF livery, as it taxied at Biggin Hill.

The Spitfires, Hurricanes and a lone P-51 Mustang fighter paid their respects to 'the few', the pilots who took to the sky, as well as the engineers and other ground crews who kept them in the fight against the Luftwaffe. Only 15 Hurricanes and 45 Spitfires are currently capable of still flying, but another 25 Spitfires are under restoration. In total, 14,800 were manufactured to defend Britain and attack Germany during the Second World War.



Spectators on the ground could follow the course of the battle by watching the vapor trails, pictured, from a patrol of Spitfires



The various aircraft painted these vapor trails which could be seen from the ground as pilots battled for their lives



Aircraft such as this German Junkers Ju 87 Stuka dive bomber, pictured, were shot out of the sky and crashed into the ground at high speed

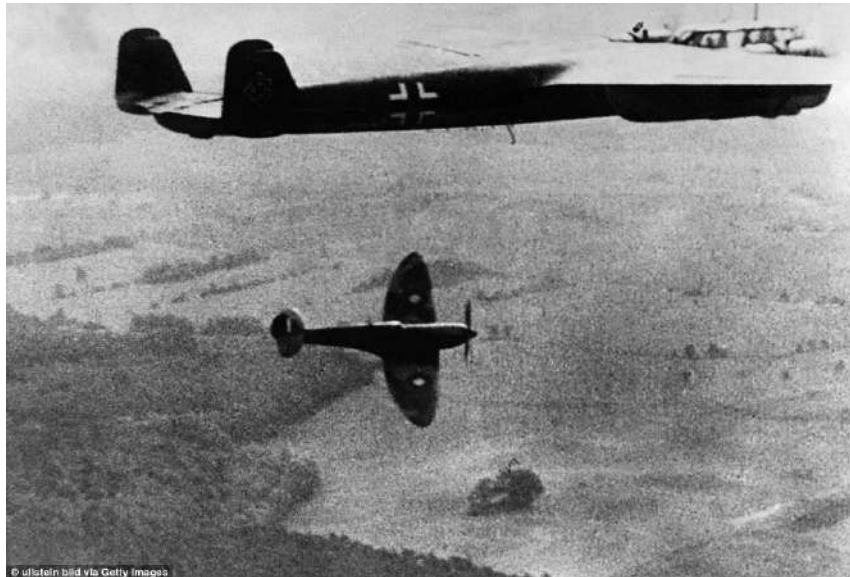


Some of the aircraft, such as this Messerschmitt Bf 109 were destroyed only yards away from iconic locations in London, pictured



The pilot of this Messerschmitt Bf109E managed to crash land after being forced from the sky during the Battle of Britain





This Dornier Do 17 Bomber is being targeted by the Spitfire somewhere over the south east of England during the Battle of Britain



RAF ace Douglas Bader created his idea of a 'Big Wing' pictured, to cause maximum damage to attacking Luftwaffe aircraft



This image shows an RAF Hurricane trailing smoke while it attempts to attack a Heinkel 111 bomber over the English Channel



At the end of the day's battle, the RAF had lost 68 planes. However, the Luftwaffe lost more, with 69 of their aircraft destroyed



After their flights, the aircraft today returned to Biggin Hill for several fly pasts, before a lone Spitfire performed a victory roll over the crowd and runway



With his medals worn proudly on chest, Battle of Britain Hurricane pilot veteran Tony Pickering and his wife Chris walk around one of the planes ahead of today's fly-past



An engineer ensures that one of the Spitfires is ready for take-off. In total, 24 restored aircraft joined in today's commemoration



A Hurricane - painted in its famous camouflage design - lands back at Biggin Hill after performing in the display flight commemoration



Re-enactors, who were on hand to try and bring the experience of 75 years ago to a new generation, look up to watch the stunning planes as they fly overhead



Wife Chris led Hurricane pilot Squadron Leader Tony Pickering around the airfield, allowing him to return to the iconic aircraft that he so bravely flew while defending Britain in the Second World War





Large crowds turned out at Biggin Hill set on viewing the fly-past from outside the airport. In turn, that brought passing traffic to a standstill

Battle of Britain-era Supermarine Spitfire versus the Hawker Hurricane  
(Stats from [raf.mod.uk](http://raf.mod.uk))

	SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE	HAWKER HURRICANE
ENGINE	1,030 h.p. Rolls-Royce Merlin	1,030 h.p. Rolls-Royce Merlin
WINGSPAN	36ft 11"	40 ft
LENGTH	29ft 11"	31 ft 4"
TOP SPEED	362 m.p.h.	328 m.p.h.
ARMAMENT	8 x .303 Browning machine guns	8 x .303 Browning machine guns