

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: BATTLE OF BRITAIN

These photographs show different sections of the Battle of Britain monument

German bomber: the Battle of Britain monument



Part of the Battle of Britain monument, 2007 © Andrew Payne.

What is this source?

These photographs show different sections from the Battle of Britain monument in London, which was unveiled in 2005. The memorial was commissioned and paid for by the Battle of Britain Historical Society and sculpted by Paul Day.

It is made up of two bronze friezes set in an 82ft-long granite structure. One frieze depicts all the achievements of Fighter Command, while the other focuses on the people of London, featuring St Paul's Cathedral and an Anderson air-raid shelter. Accompanying them is a plaque inscribed with the names of the 2,936 pilots and ground crew from Britain and 14 other countries.

What's the background to this source?

The war started in 1939 and went well for Hitler at first. By May 1940 he had conquered Poland, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands. Despite British help, France surrendered in June 1940. Many people expected Britain to try and negotiate a settlement, but new British Prime Minister Winston Churchill decided to fight on.

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The Germans produced serious plans to invade Britain and began major preparations involving something like 35 army divisions (600 000 men). Their problem was crossing the English Channel against the Royal Navy. They thought that they might achieve this if they controlled the air and could attack Royal Navy ships. As a result, the first stage of the German invasion plan (Operation Sealion) was to try and destroy the Royal Air Force.

It's worth knowing that...

The pilots who fought in the Battle of Britain became known as 'The Few'. This was because of a speech by Winston Churchill who said: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

The full complement of RAF pilots

Australia (32 pilots)	Jamaica (1)
Barbados (1)	Newfoundland (now a province of Canada) (1)
Belgium (28)	New Zealand (127)
Britain (544)	Poland (145)
Canada (112)	Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) (3)
Czechoslovakia (88)	South Africa (25)
France (13)	US (9)
Ireland (10)	

This was just the Battle of Britain, 10 July to 31 October 1940. Many more pilots from these and other countries fought in the RAF in the rest of the war.

What conclusions can you draw from this source?

1. Study the photograph and write your own caption.
2. Why do you think the artist has included this scene as part his design?
3. Why do you think there were so many non-British pilots in the RAF during the Battle of Britain?
4. Look at the plan for your TV documentary.
 - o Do you think you will give some time in the documentary to the fact that pilots came from many countries?
 - o How much of the 30 minutes do you think you will give?

Use this storyboard framework to plan your documentary.