

Introduction

The **Blitz** (shortened from German 'Blitzkrieg', "lightning war") was the period of sustained strategic bombing of the United Kingdom by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The Blitz began because on 24 August 1940 night bombers aiming for RAF airfields drifted off course and accidentally destroyed several London homes, killing civilians. With the UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill's immediate response of bombing Berlin on the following night, the Germans quickly increased the amount of raids on Britain.



Targets

Between 7 September 1940 and 21 May 1941 there were major aerial raids (attacks in which more than 100 tons of high



explosives were dropped) on 16 British cities. As a result, London was attacked 71 times (57 nights consecutively), Birmingham, Liverpool and Plymouth eight times, Bristol six, Glasgow five, Southampton four, Portsmouth and Hull three. However, there was also at least one large raid on another eight cities. Ports including Bristol, Cardiff, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Southampton, and Swansea were also targeted, as were the industrial cities of Birmingham, Belfast, Coventry,

Glasgow, Manchester and Sheffield. Birmingham and Coventry were heavily targeted because of the Spitfire and tank factories in Birmingham and the many munitions factories in Coventry; the city centre of Coventry was almost completely destroyed.

Damage

Dropping more than 100 tons of high explosives, the German air force raided the UK for 267 days, causing considerable damage. More than one million London houses were destroyed or damaged, and more than 40,000 civilians were killed, almost half of them in London. Furthermore, the major Atlantic seaport of Liverpool sustained nearly



4,000 deaths alone. One of the hardest hit, the North Sea port of Hull, a convenient and easily found target for bombers unable to locate their primary targets, was subjected to 86 raids. This resulted in at least 1200 civilians being killed, although exact numbers are unclear, and 95% of its housing stock was destroyed or damaged.

Was it successful?

The bombing did not achieve its intended goals of demoralising the British into surrender or significantly damaging their war economy. Subsequently, the eight months of bombing never seriously hampered British production. Therefore, the war industries continued to operate and expand. Moreover, the Blitz did not facilitate Operation Sea Lion, the planned German invasion of Britain. By May 1941 the threat of an invasion of Britain had passed, and Hitler's attention had turned elsewhere. Despite the large numbers of casualties, the Blitz, compared to Allied raids on Germany, resulted in relatively few deaths. For example, the British bombing of Hamburg in July 1943 alone inflicted over 42,000 civilian deaths, about the same as the entire Blitz.



A map of all the bombs dropped in London during the Blitz

Why did it fail?

Several reasons have been suggested for the failure of the German air offensive. Many believe the Luftwaffe High Command failed to develop a long-term strategy for destroying Britain's war industries. For example, they frequently switched from bombing one type of industry to another without exerting any sustained pressure on any one of them. Furthermore, the Luftwaffe was not equipped to carry out a long-term strategic air campaign, lacking both a heavy four-engined bomber and intelligence on British industry and capabilities. Therefore, all of these shortcomings denied the Luftwaffe the ability to help the Germans to Victory.