
The Battle of Britain.

❶ Richard Hillary (1919-1943) was an English fighter ace of the Battle of Britain. In his book, *The last enemy*, he explains how his Spitfire was shot down on 3 September 1940.

I was peering anxiously ahead, for the controller had given us warning of at least fifty enemy fighters approaching very high. [...] the next moment we were in among them and it was each man for himself. As soon as they saw us they spread out and dived, and the next ten minutes was a blur of twisting machines and tracer bullets.[...] Then, just below me and to my left, I saw what I had been praying for—a Messerschmitt climbing and away from the sun. I closed in to 200 yards, and from slightly to one side gave him a two-second burst: fabric ripped off the wing and black smoke poured from the engine, but he did not go down. Like a fool, I did not break away, but put in another three-second burst. Red flames shot upwards and he spiralled out of sight. At that moment, I felt a terrific explosion which knocked the control stick from my hand, and the whole machine quivered like a stricken animal. In a second, the cockpit was a mass of flames: instinctively, I reached up to open the hood. It would not move. I tore off my straps and managed to force it back; but this took time, and when I dropped back into the seat and reached for the stick in an effort to turn the plane on its back, the heat was so intense that I could feel myself going. I remember a second of sharp agony, remember thinking ‘So this is it!’ and putting both hands to my eyes. Then I passed out.

❷ This photograph was taken on 9 October 1940 by photographer Fred Morley, after a German raid: a London milkman deliberately picking his way over the rubble. The picture was staged. Morley borrowed a milkman’s outfit and a craft of bottles.



➤ Using the document and your knowledge, describe the Battle of Britain and assess its importance.