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Churchill the Agile Project Manager
Historical Events of June and July 1940

Part 22 in the Series

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Most people are very familiar with Winston Churchill but may not be familiar with his “agile” approach to project management and his skills as a PM in the summer of 1940. Parts 16-21 looked at how Churchill’s organization prepared itself for the air battle to meet his short term objectives of staving off the invasion, and how it put together a solution. Switching gears this article enters the final phase of the series that examines the historical sequence of events between June and October 1940. This analysis will reflect on the effectiveness of Churchill’s solution and how well it was utilized.

With any project one of the most difficult questions to answer is did it meet the requirements and reach its goals? Did the solution output accomplish what it was designed to do? Did it assist in a critical situation and help the organization react to it?

Most of the news for Churchill in early June 1940 is bad. It indicates an imminent invasion, and a poor state of readiness in the British defenses. While the Battle of France still rages the first phase of the battle opens up, the Luftwaffe makes small active operations against the UK to harass the civilian population, reconnoiter airfields, and disrupt industry. Here is a daily breakdown of key responses through June:

- 1st - Fighter command learns of 509 fighters lost in Norway and France. An adequate defense needs 52 squadrons, but only 28 are available. Beaverbrook steps production up (Part 18).
- 4th - Ultra indicates invasion preparation and massive troop movements on the French coast. So the War Cabinet targets the invasion barges for RAF Bomber Command. A significant first use of Ultra (Part 19) highlights for Churchill its enormous potential. On the same day Churchill learns the true cost of the Dunkirk evacuation. The British army has only 300 light tanks and 200 heavy/medium tanks left, so he orders production to be stepped up.

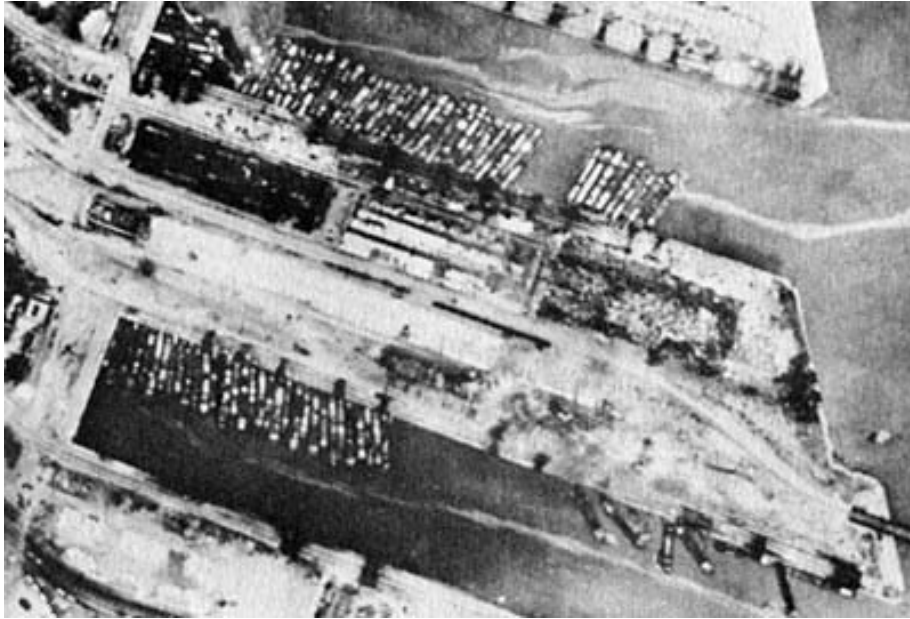


Figure 1: Invasion Barges off the French Coast Became Targets (Courtesy of Crown copyright)

- 5th - The war cabinet (Part 18) worried about labor unrest impacting essential war production bans strike action for workers.
- 6th – Storey Gate indicators (Part 21) still show a shortfall in military production. Vital resources are still being diverted. So the production of hundreds of household goods is banned.
- 17th – The tight supply of machine tools and their high cost in the U.S. dollars impacts fighter production. All production departments agree that future orders are brought under the single auspices of the British Purchasing Commission.
- 20th – The war cabinet learns that the French, under Marshall Petain, sign an armistice with Germany. An invasion alert is put out to military forces in the UK.
- 30th – Incredibly Beaverbrook (Part 17/18) manages to raise monthly fighter production from 292 to 446. Much of this can be attributed to sheer force of will with the removal of production bottlenecks and obstacles, and the reallocation of vital resources.

The above decisions and actions highlight the increased awareness in the War Cabinet of what was happening in the economy at a macro level. All stops were pulled out to accelerate fighter production to reach truly impressive numbers by the end of the month.

In July 1940 the news gets worse for Churchill and indicates the start of the second phase of the air battle when Luftwaffe bombers attack coastal convoys, ports on the south coast to

assess the air defenses, and the agility of the RAF response. Churchill recognizes the potential of the solution and skillfully buys time to complete it. Here is a daily breakdown of key responses through July:

- 1st - Churchill was so pleased with the map room that his architects created a “traveling” map room (Part 21) inside his personal railway carriage. As he travels across the UK visiting military installations it provides him all the lead indicators to read the war with, understand battle situations, and determine short-term needs.
- 2nd – Churchill learns what troops and guns are available in coastal areas, and grills field commanders on the state of readiness, and increases pressure on them.
- 3rd - French Admiral Gensoul was offered choices to ensure his fleet stayed out of Axis hands. All were turned down and the Royal Navy opened fire on the anchored ships. One blew up and the other 3 ships were badly damaged. For the British “a hateful decision but no act more necessary...” against their former French allies showed Churchill’s ruthless determination to cause and impressed Roosevelt that Churchill was a man of action and not bluster.
- 4th - Churchill learns through Ultra (Part 19) that Italian troops enter Sudan and is faced with a second battlefield, and a difficult decision to direct resources there.
- 10th - Beaverbrook learns of shortages in essential materials for fighter production (Part 17). He appeals for aluminum goods, pots and pans. The collection raises public morale, as they believed that “they were doing their bit.
- 14th – Based on low morale indicators (Part 13) Churchill is motivated to broadcast a rousing speech. Not since Elizabeth I had anyone spoken of the English like this and the nation’s morale is elevated.
- 15th – Ultra messages decoded by Bletchley Park (Part 17) reveal enemy intent and strength of 1,700 bombers and 1,100 fighters against 600 British fighters. On the same day Dowding is under pressure to change tactics and respond en masse. He resists and relies on his early-warning system with Churchill’s full support.
- 16th - Ultra (Part 17) reveals the scale of “Operation Sea Lion” but with Ultra established up to 200 decoded messages a day are passed to Bentley Priory.
- 19th - Churchill learns of Hitler’s peace offers were Germany has control of Europe and in return Britain's empire remains safe. Churchill eventually rejects the terms, but only after he buys precious time to further prepare for battle.

- 20th - Churchill sees conflicting priorities impacting essential war production (Part 21). The buying and selling of new cars is banned.
- 23rd - Churchill learns that the Soviet Union occupies Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. There is no possibility of an alliance as long as the Soviets/Nazis pact holds.



Figure 2: 24th July Taken from a Luftwaffe Bomber a RAF Fighter Crossing its Path
(Courtesy of Crown copyright)

- 28th - Fighting intensifies in the Channel as the Luftwaffe attacks convoys. The Royal Navy withdraws its destroyers from Dover to safer harbors.
- 31st - Beaverbrook learns of spare aircraft part storage controlled by the Air Ministry (Part 17). He forcibly gains control and moves the parts into production to eliminate the inventory.

Overall there is a frantic preparation to complete early releases of the solution. Churchill has to convince the nation to fight on and initiates his communication plan.

Conclusion

In this early period the solution was providing critical information to key players (Churchill, Beaverbrook, Dowding) to improve their decision making and better meet objectives. The focus was principally on Beaverbrook's organization and in a short time the progress was remarkable when measured just in production numbers. However, Beaverbrook was aware that workers in the main aircraft fighter factories were working long shifts of 12/14 hours per day and this rate could not be kept up over several months.

About the Author:



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Mark Kozak-Holland's latest book in the Lessons-From-History series is titled "*Project Lessons from the Great Escape (Luft III)*" <http://www.mmpubs.com/books-LFH.html>. It draws parallels from this event in World War II to today's business challenges. His previous books include "*Churchill's Adaptive Enterprise: Lessons for Business Today*", "*Titanic Lessons for IT Projects*", and "*Avoiding Titanic Disasters: Project Lessons for IT Executives*". Mark is a Senior Business Architect with HP Services and regularly writes and speaks (presentations and workshops) on the subject of emerging technologies and lessons that can be learned from historical projects. He can be contacted via his Web site at www.lessons-from-history.com or via email to mark.kozak-holl@sympatico.ca. Further information on Storey's Gate, visit: <http://cwr.iwm.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.923>.