

## PM WORLD TODAY – FEATURED PAPER – JULY 2008

## Churchill the Agile Project Manager

*Historical Events of August 1940*

Part 23 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. Part 22 looked at the historical sequence of events between June and July 1940. This article examines August 1940 for the utilization and the effectiveness of Churchill’s solution. It tries to answer the most difficult question of any project namely did it meet the project requirements and reach its goals? Did it assist in a critical situation and help the organization react to it? Did the solution (output) achieve what it was designed to do?



Figure 1.1: Channel Action (Courtesy of Crown copyright)

In August the third phase of the battle starts as the attacks on shipping continue but bombing raids start to concentrate on RAF airfields. The Luftwaffe strikes its first real blow against

Fighter Command's ground organization. Here is a daily breakdown of key responses through August:

- 1<sup>st</sup> - Hitler's order No.17 instructs the Luftwaffe to begin air attacks on Britain in preparation for invasion. Churchill and Dowding learn of the order and prepare for the ensuing air battle.
- 8<sup>th</sup> - 150 aircraft are involved as heavy fights breakout over the Channel. The Luftwaffe loses 31 aircraft, the RAF 19. Dowding monitors the air battle closely and Beaverbrook monitors the losses so he can adjust production (Part 17).
- 9<sup>th</sup> - Bletchley Park (Part 19) passes repeated warning messages that indicate a massive forthcoming attack on "Eagle day." Intelligence indicates the enemy believes the RAF can be defeated in four days. Dowding learns that Göring is looking for an all-out assault, and to destroy as many fighters in large set battles.
- 10<sup>th</sup> - Bentley Priory learns of a shortfall in pilot replacement numbers. The operation training period for qualified pilots is cut from six months to two weeks.
- 12<sup>th</sup> - Bentley Priory learns of attacks on its airfields and coastal radar stations. The attack in the southeast is met. Surprisingly, it does not continue on subsequent days. The Luftwaffe does not recognize the importance of radar towers (Part 20) which are very difficult to knock out from the air. On the same day worried about a food crisis the wasting of food becomes illegal.
- 13<sup>th</sup> - Eagle day and enemy aircraft activity over the U.K. is on a scale far in excess of anything before. Storey's Gate learns of enemy night raids on two fighter factories. The attack indicates night bombers carry a sophisticated guidance system. Beaverbrook is on high alert as it could have a major impact on production.
- 14<sup>th</sup> - Roosevelt offers Churchill a trade of destroyers/planes for U.S. military bases on British soil. The offer is immediately accepted and seen as a step towards Churchill's longer term strategy (Part 10).
- 15<sup>th</sup> - Apprised by Ultra, radar, and observer corps, Dowding is ready for battle. Bentley Priory carefully preserves its resources and avoids stretching these to the utmost. Dowding seeks to prevent all-out fighter battle. A day of intense attacks the Luftwaffe launches 1,790 sorties and lose 75 planes to the RAF's 34.
- 16<sup>th</sup> - Bentley Priory recognizes the attacks are only against its airfields and fighters within Group 11 and the vital sector stations which control its squadrons. Targets spared include the vital radar stations. Bentley Priory learns of heavy fighter losses so

the defensive strategy is adjusted accordingly where faster Spitfire fighters are sent in first whilst the slower Hurricanes are pitted against bombers.



Figure 2: a trade of destroyers/planes for U.S. military bases on British soil

- 18<sup>th</sup> - Dowding learns that fighter command is under tremendous pressure. A fourth day of raids continues to devastate sector stations around London.
- 19<sup>th</sup> - Luftwaffe losses are 236 against 213 RAF (in ten days). Dowding knows RAF losses are unsustainable. As the Luftwaffe pauses Bentley Priory gets a short respite, Bentley Priory learns from Whitehall of fighter production-rate shortfall. Beaverbrook appeals to the CRO to increase their shifts, to get aircraft back in the air (Part 18). On the same day the whole of the U.K. is declared a defense area.
- 20<sup>th</sup> - Churchill broadcasts his recognition of pilot's speech from Storey's Gate, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." An important part of his communication plan (Part 13) this broadcast rallies morale, but also reaches the U.S. audience and Roosevelt simultaneously.
- 21<sup>st</sup> - Nationalist forces of Poland, Norway, Belgium, Holland, France and Czechoslovakia can train in the U.K. under their own flags.

- 22<sup>nd</sup> - Storey's Gate learns of the worsening situation in the Middle East. Churchill takes a massive gamble and dispatches a convoy with 150 tanks. The war cabinet learns financial reserves will be exhausted in four months. Beaverbrook urges continued purchase of American materials to tie the U.S. closer to Britain's cause, part of Churchill's longer term strategy (Part 9).
- 24<sup>th</sup> - Dowding learns of further attacks on the RAF resulting in the very bad damage of main sector airfields. At this point *the RAF is 24 hours from defeat if attacks are sustained* because the losses are running at a fatal rate. Whitehall informs Storey's Gate of further raids on aircraft factories where Spitfire and Hurricane production is affected. Churchill learns of an attack on the suburbs of London. Enemy bombers had disregarded orders and accidentally unloaded bombs in their haste to return back to France.
- 25<sup>th</sup> - After some discussion the war cabinet orders a reprisal raid on Berlin. Although the British raid is small, the German population is shocked. Hitler and Göring are dismayed, order massive retaliation, and change the target to London.
- 30<sup>th</sup> - Bentley Priory is aware of a huge fighter attack. Dowding orders RAF fighters to disengage where possible against such odds. Bletchley Park decodes a message stating that Hitler will determine the invasion date on September 10th potentially September 20th. Bentley Priory is aware that the RAF is at its breaking point. RAF pilots fly a total of 1,000 sorties in a single day; some pilots fly four sorties without rest. The Luftwaffe has lost 600 aircraft versus the RAF's 260, but the cost is heavy for RAF in terms of experienced pilots.

## Conclusion

In this middle period the solution was providing the key players (Churchill, Beaverbrook, Dowding) with critical information to improve their decision making and better meet objectives. The focus was principally on Dowding's organization and it helped by tracking the battle (Part 20) and providing accurate metrics. Dowding could readily adjust his tactics and rode out what the enemy perceived to be a short 4 day battle. In this period *Churchill's decisions were also truly monumental*, the first dispatching two armored divisions to the Middle East, and the second to retaliate with bombers against Berlin. The latter changed the course of the air battle.

**About the Author:*****Mark Kozak-Holland****Author*

**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](http://www.lessons-from-history.com).