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Churchill the Agile Project Manager

Historical Events of September 1940

Part 24 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 23 looked at the sequence of historical events in August 1940 for the utilization and the effectiveness of Churchill’s solution. To date it had performed well and proven its value. This article looks at how it allowed the team to react with agility in the phase four (final phase) of the battle. This starts in September when the city of London is heavily bombed “the Blitz”, as the Luftwaffe retaliate to the RAF bombing raids on Berlin (August 24-29) and hope to destroy British morale. Here is a daily breakdown of key responses through September:

- 1st - The war cabinet learns of concerted attacks on the populations and big cities. Simultaneously, Hitler mistakenly believes his fighters have mastery of the skies.
- 5th – Bentley Priory (Part 20) realizes the switch in enemy tactics to London is ongoing which allows Dowding to rebuild Group 11 squadrons.
- 6th - The war cabinet learns RAF losses were creeping up to Luftwaffe levels. The RAF loses 466 fighters and receives 269 new ones; 103 pilots are killed and 128 wounded. The RAF is very close to defeat.
- 7th - Bletchley Park (Part 19) fails to warn Dowding of a massive 900-aircraft attack. As a result, too few pilots are in position to adequately defend London, which sustains major damage. Storey’s Gate (Part 21) issues an alert: “invasion imminent and probable in 12 hours.” Churchill orders Bomber Command to attack the channel ports crammed with 1,000 barges. Meanwhile Goering travels to French ports to see off 300 German bombers escorted by 600 fighters attack London docks, the heart of the largest trading empire. At night the bombers use blazing fires to guide attacks, with severe damage.



Figure 1: Blitz in London Docks (Courtesy of Crown copyright)

- 8th - Churchill broadcasts his defiance to bombing in a speech from Storey's Gate. "*..A people who will not flinch of the struggle—hard and protracted though it will be.*" He continues to stiffen resolve with his communication (Part 15).
- 9th - Dowding learns of huge incoming raids and again switches tactics to operate squadron pairs. Outnumbered, enemy fighters break off.
- 10th - Bletchley Park learns that Hitler has postponed invasion until September 21st. Göring assures Hitler that the RAF will be defeated by then.
- 13th - Italian forces in Libya attack Egypt And after a short advance they halt to reorganize their supply lines. Churchill is apprised of the worsening situation in Egypt. Churchill's dispatch of 150 tanks seems very justified (Part 23).
- 15th - The day the "Battle of Britain" turned. Bentley Priory learns of a massive attack of 328 bombers and 769 fighters, or 80% of the entire fighter strength. All available RAF fighters are thrown into battle. Luftwaffe pilots are shocked to see the RAF's fighter strength. Dowding puts everything into the sky to demonstrate that RAF

Fighter Command is not destroyed. Churchill travels to Group 11's operations center at Uxbridge to see the battle for himself unfold in real time on the map table. Churchill asks Park "what reserves are left." "None" was the reply. At the end of the day as Churchill left the center he muttered the words "*Never in the face of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few*" as he realized the true impact of the solution on the RAF. These words immortalized the battle for the nation.

- Churchill is speechless as he realizes Dowding's massive gamble and all of his fighters are committed. Bentley Priory realizes a second raid is afoot and Dowding sets a trap with multiple layers of fighters. By 2:30pm RAF refuel, rearm, and put up 20 squadrons once again to meet the Luftwaffe. For the first time the RAF outnumber Luftwaffe. The second wave is beaten back, and the RAF destroy 187 planes to break the offensive. Luftwaffe pilots are shocked at RAF's fighter strength, **and their morale collapses**. If a third wave had been sent out then RAF would not have been able to defeat it.

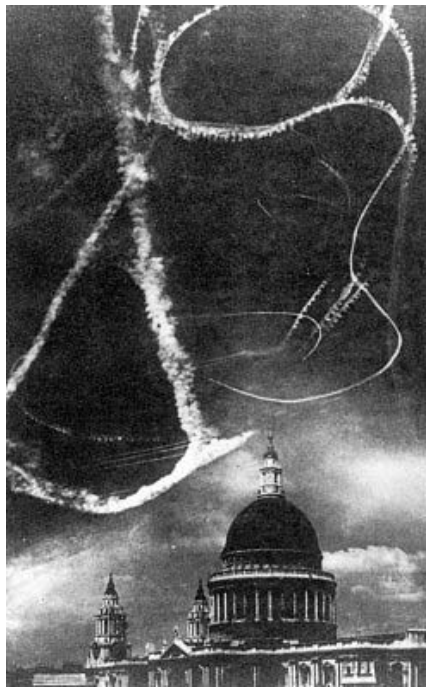


Figure 2: 15th September (Courtesy of Crown copyright)

- 17th - Bletchley Park decrypts orders to dismantle equipment at airfields. This was Hitler's order to postpone Operation Sea Lion. Churchill broadcasts to the people of Czechoslovakia from Storey's Gate. "*Be of good cheer, the time of your deliverance will come.*" Churchill is a rallying voice bolstering morale.
- 18th -RAF bombers knock out 150 barges and Hitler cancels Sea Lion.



Figure 25.3: Exhausted Pilots recoup on the 18th of September (Courtesy of Crown copyright)

- 21st - Churchill fears large civilian casualties from bombing raids. The London Underground is opened up at night and allowed for use as a bomb shelter.
- 24th – The Luftwaffe raids hit the vital Supermarine works at Woolston. Plans are made by Beaverbrook (Part 18) for the further dispersal of production facilities.
- 26th - Woolston is bombed again severely damaging the factory, and halting production. This results in large scale dispersal to some 60 different sites.
- 28th – the last Luftwaffe daylight raid, but this is a major mistake as with no clouds there are severe losses to Luftwaffe pilots.

Conclusion

By the end of September the Luftwaffe switched to night time bombing only and the battle was over, although it was a very close run thing. RAF losses were 715 aircraft destroyed, 544 pilots were killed (1 in 5). In comparison the Luftwaffe losses were 900 aircraft destroyed, and 3000 aircrew killed/taken prisoner. Beaverbrook's supply chain and Dowding's system were significant factors in the victory. So did Churchill's solution meet the requirements and reach its goals?

In this final period the solution was providing key players (Churchill, Beaverbrook, Dowding) with critical information to improve their decision making so they could better meet objectives. In particular, Beaverbrook for 2 months had superseded expectations in fighter production. The answer is a conclusive yes.

Did the output achieve what it was designed to do?

The last part of the battle almost results in defeat as the RAF is overwhelmed. However, with the real time information from his system Dowding was able to produce the knockout blow. The answer is a conclusive yes.

Did it assist in a critical situation and help the organization react to it?

It provided enemy intent so the organization could react proactively and rapidly change tactics as required. The answer is a conclusive yes.

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.