

The Battle of Britain



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出版者:

出版时间:2002-4

装帧:

isbn:9780393322972

June 1940: France has fallen to German forces in a mere six weeks, joining eight other European states in German occupation. British forces have suffered severe losses in the defeat. Hitler is confident of reaching a political settlement that will end hostilities with Britain. There is sentiment for peace with Hitler among the British leadership, but Churchill and his supporters have no intention of surrender. In July Hitler orders his armed forces to begin preparations for an invasion of England. In Churchill's words, "the Battle of France is over. I expect the battle of Britain is about to begin." Through the summer of 1940 the German Air Force waged an assault on Fighter Command, attacking its forces in the air and on the ground, bombing airfields and cities. But Fighter Command withstood the blow and returned battle in what became an extended, deadly war of attrition. In September Hitler announced that the German Air Force would concentrate the attack on British cities, especially London. From September 7, bombs fell on London day and night, but the Blitz was the turning point. Fighter Command attacked the overstretched German bombers relentlessly, causing them unsustainable losses. Although the nighttime bombing of British cities continued, popular morale proved strong. The German leadership realized that there would be no knockout blow, no early settlement with Britain. The Battle of Britain marked the end of Germany's string of victories. The Royal Air Force had forestalled a

German invasion, kept Britain in the war, and strengthened the determination of the people to fight. In his account, Richard Overy analyzes every element of the battle on both sides, from the men and machines who fought and the tactics they employed to the leadership and their strategies and clarifies the significance of this pivotal moment for Britain and the world.

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