

The Phony War

A few days after the German invasion of Poland, France and Britain declared war on Germany. Except for a few naval battles between British and German ships, however, there was no actual fighting in Europe throughout the fall and winter of 1939-40. Journalists nicknamed this period of inactivity the "Phony War."

While the Germans planned their next move, the British and French troops sat confidently behind the Maginot Line. The Maginot Line was a string of concrete and steel fortifications stretching for 125 miles along the France/Germany border, from Belgium to Switzerland. It was constructed after World War I to protect France's eastern border from German attacks. The French mistakenly thought it would keep the Germans out.

Deep below the forts of the Maginot Line lay an underground world of bunkers and storage compartments. Here the troops lived in reasonably comfortable quarters. There was a large movie theater and a gymnasium for the soldiers' use. There was also a hospital.

Circle the letter of each correct answer.

1. France built the Maginot Line to defend itself against an attack from
 - a. the Soviet Union
 - b. Belgium
 - c. Germany
2. The Maginot Line extended southward from Belgium to
 - a. Switzerland
 - b. Italy
 - c. Austria
3. The Phony War referred to
 - a. a war of words between France and Germany
 - b. an argument between Germany and the Soviet Union
 - c. a period of little or no fighting during the fall and winter of 1939-1940
4. Which of the following statements is true?
 - a. France built the Maginot line to protect itself during World War I.
 - b. The soldiers behind the Maginot Line had very uncomfortable quarters.
 - c. While French and British soldiers sat behind the Maginot Line, Germany was planning its next move.
5. One kilometer equals .62 miles. What was the length of the Maginot Line in kilometers?
 - a. 202 km
 - b. 102 km
 - c. 77.5 km

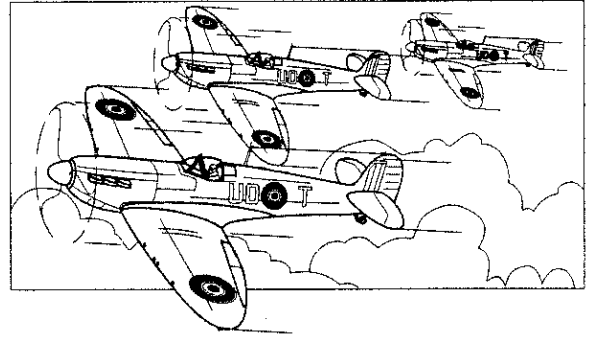
The Battle of Britain

Three weeks after the evacuation at Dunkerque, France surrendered to the Germans. Great Britain stood alone against Hitler. With its army beaten and supplies and ammunition dangerously low, the island nation braced for an expected invasion.

Throughout the summer of 1940, the Germans assembled landing barges along the French coast. They intended to use these to ferry their troops across the English Channel into Great Britain. Beginning in August, the *Luftwaffe*, the German air force, began bombing airfields in Great Britain, hoping to destroy the Royal Air Force. They failed. England's radar stations warned the R.A.F. of approaching German planes, and British pilots inflicted such heavy losses on the *Luftwaffe* that the invasion of Great Britain was called off.

With their invasion plans ruined, the Nazis changed tactics. Hitler ordered the *Luftwaffe* to concentrate its efforts on bombing Great Britain's principal cities. These air raids were known as the "Blitz." Hitler believed that continuous attacks on the civilian population would force England to withdraw from the war. From September 7 through the end of October, 1940, the Germans bombed London and other cities relentlessly. Though occasional bombing still occurred until May of 1941, the Battle of Britain was considered over in October.

Estimates place the total number of civilians killed during the Battle of Britain at more than 30,000. But the British people never wavered in their determination to remain free. In spite of their suffering and hardships, they refused to give in to Hitler's demands. In the end, Royal Air Force pilots shot down so many German bombers that Hitler gave up on Great Britain and turned his attention to the Balkans.



The Battle of Britain was the first battle fought to control the air.

Put the following events in chronological order by writing the numbers 1 to 6 in the blanks to the left.

1. _____ The Germans switch to bombing British cities.
2. _____ The British win the Battle of Britain.
3. _____ Hitler cancels his plan to invade Great Britain in the summer of 1940.
4. _____ France surrenders.
5. _____ The Germans assemble landing barges for their scheduled invasion of Great Britain.
6. _____ Thousands of Allied soldiers are rescued at Dunkerque.