

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL AS IT APPEARED
DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE NAZI
FIRE RAID OF DECEMBER 29, 1940



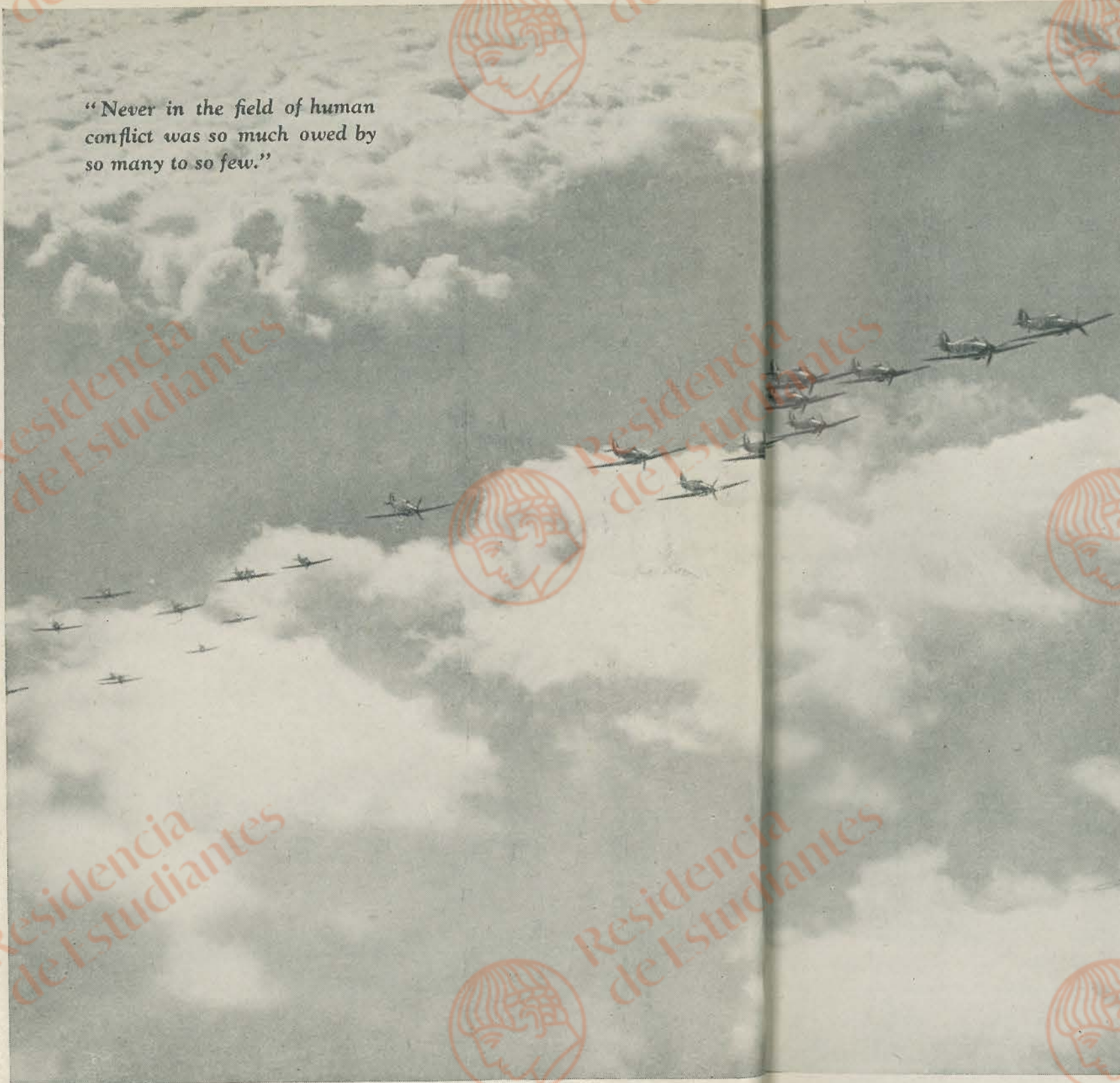
THE WAR

IN PICTURES

SECOND YEAR

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"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."



BRITAIN AT BAY

ON 3 SEPTEMBER, 1940, Britain had been at war with Germany for one year. The enemy, employing blitzkrieg tactics, had overrun six countries; Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France had in turn succumbed, and Britain's armies, driven back to the sea, had only escaped from Continental soil by a miracle. Small wonder that the Germans boasted that the war would be over by the end of 1940, that their Fuehrer would enter London in triumph before Christmas.

The collapse of all Continental resistance gave the enemy complete command of Europe's western seaboard from Narvik in the north to the Spanish frontier in the south. It gave him air and naval bases on the very doorstep of Britain, the coasts of which were now within easy range of his guns.

But if Germany was to win the war before the end of the year an invasion of Britain was necessary. This could only be attempted after crippling or destroying her fleet and driving her air force from the skies.

To achieve this end Hitler relied upon his air force, the Luftwaffe, and plans were drawn up during June, July and the first week in August for what was to have been the final attack. By 8 August the enemy was ready, and on that day he launched massed formations of dive bombers, powerfully escorted by fighters, on British convoys in the neighbourhood of Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight. His airmen were soon to learn that this was to be no easy victory, that the calibre of the British fighter pilots was greater than their own and that the eight-gun "Spitfires" and "Hurricanes" were more than a match for Germany's much-vaunted Messerschmitt and Heinkel fighters.

By 12 August German losses had amounted to 182 planes, and the enemy began to realize that he had underestimated the strength of the opposition. If he was to achieve his purpose British fighters must be destroyed on the ground. So, whilst still maintaining his attacks on shipping and coastal towns, he sent large forces to attack fighter stations in south and south-east England. Again the pilots of the R.A.F. were equal to the

8-18 August, 1940

German attacks made during the first phase of the Battle of Britain

8-18 August, 1940



BEGINNING OF THE AIR OFFENSIVE. On 8 August, Germany decided that the time had come to launch the carefully prepared air attack on Britain which was to prelude an invasion of her shores. Her principal need—to establish full mastery of the air—was to be secured by putting fighter airfields out of action, thus keeping the R.A.F. to the ground. As a first step massed bomber formations, escorted by fighters, attacked Channel convoys and coastal towns. These attacks soon showed that British fighter strength was greater and more formidable than had been anticipated, for in the first five days 182 German planes were destroyed. On 15, 16 and 18 August heavy attacks were launched against fighter aerodromes between London and the

coast—the above map, reproduced from the Ministry of Information booklet, "The Battle of Britain," shows the direction and objectives of the attacks, which cost Germany 435 planes. The tactics usually adopted by the Luftwaffe was to begin an attack by bombing coastal objectives, in an attempt to draw off British fighters while making the main assault on its real objective, whether aerodrome or port, about half an hour later. In the ten days—8 to 18 August—of this first phase of the Battle of Britain, the total German losses amounted to 697 aircraft against a British loss of 153 machines, sixty of whose pilots were safe. An even greater proportion of British pilots would have been saved, had not so much of the fighting taken place over the sea.