NAME DATE CLASS

# Primary and Secondary Sources Activity

## World War II and the Holocaust

### The Battle of Britain

#### Background

The Battle of Britain marked a turning point in the European theater of World War II. After Nazi forces conquered France, they turned their attention to Britain. But to be able to invade Britain, the German forces needed to control both the air and sea surrounding the island nation.

At the beginning of August 1940, Luftwaffe, Germany’s air force, launched daily air attacks. The first targets were towns along Britain’s southern coast as well as convoys in the area, including radio direction finder (RDF) stations. Luftwaffe then increased both the size and the number of raids on coastal cities and also moved inland to destroy British airfields. Vastly outnumbered—2600 German aircraft versus 640 British aircraft— Great Britain’s Royal Air Force proved the superiority of its planes and pilots’ skills.

Frustrated, the Germans switched the attacks to civilian targets, especially the city of London. The Royal Air Force stubbornly defended their land by repeatedly destroying German aircraft. By the end of September 1940, the Germans broke off the attacks. The British had won the Battle of Britain and turned the tide of the war.

**Directions:** The following selections address the Battle of Britain. Read the selections. Then, using information from these excerpts, answer the questions.

The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the World War by their prowess and their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

—Winston Churchill, Speech in House of Commons, August 20, 1940

I now want to take this opportunity of speaking to you, to say this moment is an historic one. As a result of the provocative British attacks on Berlin on recent nights, the Führer has decided to order a mighty blow to be struck in revenge against the capital of the British Empire. I personally have assumed the leadership of this attack and today I have heard above me the roaring of the victorious German squadrons which now, for the first time, are driving towards the heart of the enemy in full daylight, accompanied by countless fighter squadrons . . . this is an historic hour, in which for the first time the German Luftwaffe has struck at the heart of the enemy.

—Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, speaking to senior Luftwaffe officers,

September 7, 1940

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**1. Analyzing Information** What does Churchill mean when he says, “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”?

**2. Drawing Conclusions** To what is Göring referring when he says “the German Luftwaffe has struck at the heart of the enemy”?

**3. Contrasting** In what ways does Göring’s speech differ from Churchill’s?

**4. Identifying Perspectives** Look at the dates on which these speeches were made. Why does each speech seem to be optimistic?

**5. Analyzing Information** What additional information would you need to have that would allow you to conclude that the Battle of Britain was a turning point in the European Theater of World War II?