

THEIR FINEST HOUR

Background and Introduction

In June 1940, Nazi Germany stood as close to victory as it would ever do during the five years of conflict to come. Many people still think of World War II as having begun with the invasion of Poland in 1939, but in 1940 it wasn't a 'world war' at all. It was a war between Germany (and, from June, Italy) on one side, and Britain and France on the other. In June, France fell, and Hitler had only one enemy still fighting. If Britain could be made to settle for peace — and two members of Winston Churchill's five-man emergency war cabinet favoured the opening of negotiations with Germany — the war would be over, and the Axis powers would stand astride Europe from the Atlantic to the Soviet border.

An immediate invasion of Britain in June might have had a reasonable chance of success, but the Axis planners were as unprepared as the British for the sudden collapse of France. It was not, therefore, until July 21st that the invasion — Operation Sea Lion — was decided upon in principle. On July 31st, Adolf Hitler fixed the date for Sea Lion to be September 15th.

The German Army prepared a grand plan to invade the whole of the south coast of England, with possible diversions into East Anglia. The German navy felt that the plan was not feasible. All that was available for the crossing was a limited and motley fleet of launches, barges, pleasure steamers and other light vessels. This was considered to be just enough to get a good-sized invasion force ashore on a limited front, but only if the RAF and Royal Navy could be kept away.

If the RAF could be destroyed, however, it was likely that the Luftwaffe could keep the British fleet at bay. In fact, it was thought possible that the big Royal Navy ships would not be committed to battle, but would flee to Canada to fight another day. In short, therefore, the prospects for Operation Sea Lion came down to one simple question — could the Luftwaffe shoot the RAF out of the sky during the next two months before the Autumn equinox made a channel crossing with light ships impossible?

Reichsmarschall Herman Goering, the Luftwaffe Commander, had no doubts, and he persuaded the Axis High Command to let him try. On August 12th, the Battle of Britain began. Goering had at his disposal over fifty per cent more fighter aircraft than the RAF, in addition to a huge bombing force poised to strike at British airfields, radar stations, ports and, ultimately, cities.

The future of Britain hinged on the skill and bravery of the few hundred RAF fighter pilots ready for action. Many times during the following months the outcome hung in the balance; but slowly the outnumbered RAF pilots turned the tide, to inflict on the Luftwaffe the first German defeat of the war.

In *Their Finest Hour*, you control RAF Fighter Command in southern England, over which the battle was fought. You will probably play over several sessions using the Save Game option, but it is recommended that you try a few 'one day' battles initially to improve your skill and reflexes. The battle can continue up to September 21st, when the British will win if you haven't been defeated; but after each day's play, Churchill will call you from his bunker to inform you how the War Cabinet assesses the current situation. If the struggle swings decisively in your favour, the Luftwaffe will call off the offensive and Churchill will inform you that you have won the day. If your losses are too severe, and you are overwhelmed, Churchill will ask you for your resignation. You can stop a campaign at the end of a day's play, and you will be told whether or not you have won or lost on the basis of the current balance of strength, even if both sides have plenty of fight left in them.

HINTS TO PLAYERS

At the start, the map looks fairly simple, but when numerous German raids are in progress, it is easy to panic and lose control. Watch out for raids that have evaded radar detection until the last moment and for your interceptions which have missed the enemy formations. Be ready to change the interception course when you need to. After lunch each day, your pilots will start to tire, and you will want to recall the most exhausted to base. You may decide not to alert some squadrons in the morning, to keep them fresh for afternoon interceptions while others are resting after earlier battles. If you do this, however, be careful that German raids don't catch them on the ground. Squadrons on cockpit or runway alert can get themselves into the air to fight off intruders approaching their airfield, but unalerted or hut alert bases will be caught hopping.

Well rested pilots of average or better experience are more than a match for the Luftwaffe, so choose high aggression interceptions while your men are still fresh. If they are tired, it is probably better to avoid combat, unless it is with the more vulnerable German formations with minimal fighter escort. Squadrons which are exhausted and 'at the end of their tether' should normally be rotated to Scotland, especially if the weather forecast is bad (making enemy raids less dangerous).

The Luftwaffe will mainly go for radar installations and airfields at first, trying to crack your defences before they attack the ports and soften them up for the invasion. Ports are not repairable and play no part in the game except to give victory points to the Germans when they successfully raid them. You should always, in general, try to prevent raids from succeeding, but if enemy forces are heading for a radar site or airfield, defence is more crucial since damage to these will be important in the hours and days to come. Your best planes are the Spitfires; they are slightly faster and more effective. Use them carefully!



1 LOADING AND SELECTING OPTIONS 1

Follow the loading instructions given on the cassette label. The initial screen display is bordered by a series of pictures or icons, with a hand pointing to one of them. By pressing the BREAK/SPACE key, you can move the hand to each of the other icons. Pressing ENTER with the hand pointing to a particular icon, confirms the action for that icon:

KEYBOARD — specifies that you will play the game through the keyboard.

JOYSTICK — you specify joystick for control of the cursor (must be Kempston type).

CLOCK — you are prompted for the game speed (see below) and are then asked whether you want the one day game option.

I (for information) — not used at this stage.

M (for main) — you tell the computer to start the game.

TAPE — you tell the computer that you wish to reload a game previously saved.

Note on game speed

You can decide how fast the action will be by activating the 'clock' icon. You are then asked to choose the 'pulse' rate (at which time passes) between 1 and 255. If you do not activate the 'clock' icon, the computer will operate on the 'default' speed of 50, which will give a fairly fast game. Beginners should start at about 70 to give themselves time to get used to the game. If you choose a speed of 255, each day will pass extremely slowly and give ample opportunity to plan every disposition; effectively, you will be playing it like a board game. A reasonable range is from 30 (for experts with lightning thought processes) to 150 (for players anxious to have ample planning time).

After you have entered your chosen pulse rate, you will be asked whether you want to play the one day option. Answer Y or N as appropriate. When you have finished selecting options, select the M icon and press ENTER to start.

2 THE WEATHER FORECAST 2

The game starts with a brief weather forecast report for the morning of August 12th. Generally speaking, the better the weather, the earlier radar and ground observers will be able to detect enemy raids (but the easier it will be for the Luftwaffe to hit their targets). There will be a new weather forecast each day. When you have taken note of the weather forecast, press ENTER.

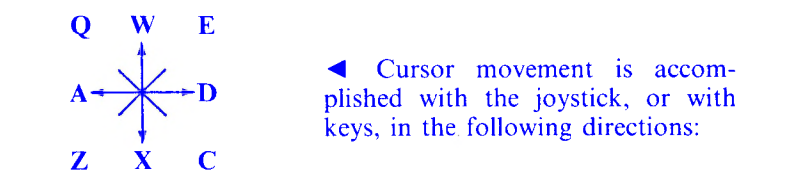
3 THE INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT 3

You will be shown a picture of Winston Churchill and the current Intelligence Assessment of enemy strength, for each type of aircraft. ME109s are the main German fighters; ME110s are fighter bombers; the remaining types are bombers. HE 111s and JU 88s are the heaviest bombers, but the slowest; DO 17s (the 'Flying Pencils') slightly lighter, but faster; the JU 87s ('Stukas') lighter and faster still. Heavy bombers do more damage if they reach the target. Note that the initial Intelligence Assessment may differ each time that you play the game, but losses are always measured against this initial assessment. Press ENTER when you have finished looking at the Intelligence Assessment.

4 MAPS 4

The next display shows three new icons in the yellow shaded area on the left and a small map of southern Britain. Each dot on the map marks a target which the enemy may be planning to attack (see printed map for further details). These targets include six radar stations, ten air bases (numbered 0-9 for easy reference) and nine ports.

The main battle map is crowded with information, and for detailed study of each area you will normally want a bigger scale. Press the FIRE button on your joystick or CAPS SHIFT in keyboard mode to get the current area of the map shown in more detail. You will jump to a larger scale map of the area where the cursor (a large +) is currently positioned. You will also see each 'target' more clearly. Dots inside squares □ are air bases, anchors are ports and five dots (as on dice) are radar stations. Press CAPS/SHIFT again to return to the smaller scale map. The cursor will be in the same position.



All actions mentioned in these instructions can be carried out on both the sub-map and the main map in the same way. You may scroll across the four quarters of the large map by moving the cursor off the edge of each sub-map to the next. To return to the main map, press FIRE/CAPS SHIFT as before. Try moving the cursor off to the sides and top and bottom of the large scale maps, and switch between the large scale and smaller scale maps using FIRE/CAPS SHIFT until you are familiar with the way the cursor works. You will see that you cannot move beyond the boundary of area of the overall map, but can scroll between the larger scale maps as you move the cursor.

5 THE PLAN OF DEFENCE 5

The icons allow you to do various things at each of the 'targets' as part of your current day's Plan of Defence. To implement any of these options, place the cursor over the location — it will be easier if you use the large scale map — and press the BREAK/SPACE key to select the appropriate icon from around the edge of the screen display, pressing ENTER when the hand is pointing at the icon of your choice. If the cursor is not over a 'target' nothing will happen when you press ENTER, except a warning beep. The icons and their actions are as follows:

ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN (top left) — press ENTER and two more pictures appear showing guns with UP and DOWN arrows; choose one (using BREAK/SPACE) and press ENTER again to augment (UP) or decrease (DOWN) the amount of anti-aircraft gunfire (flak) at the current location. Changes can be made each day.

AIRCRAFT (centre left) — press ENTER and two more aircraft pictures appear with UP and DOWN arrows; choose one (using BREAK/SPACE) to reinforce the base or rotate aircraft off the map. The aircraft with the UP arrow is used for reinforcing air bases with fresh pilots. You will be told each day how many fresh pilots you have available. The aircraft with the DOWN arrow is used for rotating tired squadrons off the map to Scotland. Tired squadrons will gradually recuperate in Scotland (25% of pilots become fresh each day), enabling you to bring them back later. On the day of rotation the base cannot be used, but is still vulnerable to attack.

REPAIRS (bottom left) — if you press ENTER with the hand pointing at this icon, nothing will happen unless your cursor is over a 'target' that has been damaged. If the target is undamaged, you will be given a message to this effect. Organising intensive repair of any damaged radar station or air base removes damage more quickly, but will prevent the installation from operating that day. (On the first day of the Battle, nothing is damaged.)

INFORMATION (i icon) — press ENTER for information on the current status and damage of the location. If the cursor is not over a dot, you will get information on the current disposition of flak.

TAPE — if you press ENTER with the hand pointing at this icon, you will be given the opportunity to Save or Restart the game. If you select this option by mistake, press BREAK/SPACE to get back to where you were.

M (Main) — this icon starts the clock and immediately takes you into the main game. So, when you have completed your Plan of Defence, select this icon.

6 THE BATTLE 6

Now the screen is filled with the main battle map, showing the targets and the current date and time. At the start it is 06.00 before daybreak. The minutes will tick away, depending on your pulse setting. Forces will continue to move all over the screen, until the end of the day. *Their Finest Hour* is a game of continuous action; just because you are examining the situation in one corner of the map doesn't mean that important things aren't happening elsewhere! It is up to you, the player, to keep track of the whole battle. If you linger too long in one area of the battle map, you may find that one of your key airfields or installations has been attacked in the meantime.

The left side of the screen now has three new icons. You can move the hand and select the required action as before. The new icons and their actions are as follows:

ALARM BELL (top left) — alerts one or more of your bases (see ALERTS).

AIRCRAFT (centre left) — is used for issuing flying orders to your planes. You can order a force (you are prompted for its base number) to head for the current cursor location and stay there, circling, until it runs low on fuel or receives new orders. If it meets a Luftwaffe formation, it will attack.

ARROWS (lower left) — if the cursor is positioned on a base, it will jump to wherever the force (ie. planes) for that base is. If it is on a formation of fighters, it will jump to the base where they came from. If the pilots are still 'at home' on the base, the cursor will not move. This option is to help you to keep track of forces from a particular airfield.

7 INFORMATION 7

If you place the cursor over any target and select i you will get information on its status (damage), and in the case of airbases, the number and type of aircraft, whether they are in flight or on the ground, and the current pilot status (quality and degree of tiredness).

Experienced and well rested pilots fight much better than novice and exhausted ones; if you get the message from an airbase that the pilots are 'at the end of their tether', you should recall them as soon as possible, since they will be easy victims for the Luftwaffe. If you place the cursor over a large cross, which shows a German formation, you will get the best available estimate of its size, strength and composition (ie. if it is a bomber formation, a fighter formation, or a combination of both). Initially there will be no German forces in the air at all; as they take off and fly into the radar range they may be detected, and once they cross the British coastline they will usually be spotted by ground observers. When an enemy formation is detected, it will suddenly appear on the battle map. You will normally want to attack the bomber formations which have minimal enemy fighter cover, and ignore the fighter-only formations which have been sent in to lure your aircraft into battle.

8 ALERTS 8

If you want to order a squadron to take off, first the pilots will have to be 'scrambled' from whatever they are doing (playing cards, listening to the radio), and some time will pass before they can respond. Therefore, if you expect to use a force soon, you should 'alert' it. You can give three levels of alert: **hut** (pilots sit tensely at the dispersal point awaiting orders), **cockpit** (they sit in their aircraft near the hangers), and **runway** (they are poised to take off). The higher the alert level, the more tired the pilots will become while waiting, so it is a bad idea to go to a high level of alert too early!

When you want to alert a base, first you must select the alarm bell icon (top left) in the normal way. The effect of the alert selection depends on whether the cursor is over a base or not. If it is, the computer assumes you want to change the status of the force stationed there. Otherwise you will be asked whether you want to give a 'Global' or 'Local' alert (either G or L to choose). A *local* alert is for one base only, and you will be asked for its number (see printed map). A *global* alert is for a whole region of Southern Fighter Command. You can choose between the three Western, the four Central, and the three Eastern bases, and all will be given the same orders.

Whatever you choose to do, you will be given a new set of four icons to use in the normal way. There are:

ALARM BELL with CROSS — cancel alert; if the force is already in the air it will return to base. This is useful for tired pilots.

HUT — Hut alert (no effect if in flight).

COCKPIT — Cockpit alert (no effect if in flight).

AIRCRAFT — Runway alert (no effect if in flight).

Fighters on runway alert will be able to take off and engage the enemy formations. Those on a lower level of alert or not alerted at all, might well be bombed and strafed on the ground (*not* good planning!).

9 AIRCRAFT MOVEMENT 9

To instruct a squadron to take off and move in a particular direction, move the cursor to wherever you want it to go, and use the Aircraft icon. You will be prompted for the base number (from 0 to 9). The aircraft based there will take off as soon as possible and head for the spot you have indicated; if they are already in flight, they will change course to go there instead. They will intercept and attack any German force they move close to on their way. When they reach their destination, they will stay there (circling over the spot) until their fuel runs low, when they will automatically fly home.

To instruct a force to fly home before their fuel runs out (or because they are tired or because you see no German forces in their area), move the cursor over the force and use the alert icon; when you get the list of options, press '0' to cancel their alert and let them go home (no other changes to alert will be accepted when the planes are in flight).

10 RAIDS 10

If a German force reaches its target (its direction is controlled by the computer), it will carry out a raid. Any flak you have at the target will shoot down one enemy aircraft per flak point. The remaining intruders will drop their bombs, and you will get a report of any damage to the target. Remember that planes on the ground are very vulnerable. Press ENTER when you have read a report, and are ready for the game to continue.

11 AIR BATTLES 11

When the RAF and Luftwaffe come close to contact, there will be an interception and you will get an accurate report on the strengths of each side. Press ENTER when you have read each message. You will be asked for an aggression level between 0 and 5. If you enter 0, the RAF will be intimidated by the relative enemy strength and return to base. It is sometimes wise to be cautious and to preserve your available fighters! They will attack, with increasing ferocity for higher aggression levels. Aggressive attacks lead to higher losses on both sides. You will get reports of the results of the attack; the battle may continue through several reports until one side or other breaks away or loses.

12 INTERRUPTING THE GAME 12

You can interrupt the game by pressing P (for pause). The action will halt and you will be given the option to save or stop the game. You can use this to pause by not responding to the prompt, and may return to the game later by pressing BREAK/SPACE, when the game will continue, unaffected.

13 MESSAGES 13

From time to time throughout the game, you will receive messages which you may find influence you in your day to day operations. It is up to you to act upon each message in the best way that you can — or even to ignore it.

14 SPEEDING UP THE ACTION 14

If you want to increase the speed of the game temporarily (for example, because you want to bring the first German raids into view), you should press S. When you release it, the game speed will return to your original pulse setting.

15 ERRORS AND PROBLEMS 15

If you select the wrong icon by mistake, pressing ENTER again will usually cancel your selection. If the game seems to freeze, it is waiting for input from you — look for a message at the bottom of the screen. If there is no message, it has been giving you information of some kind previously and is now waiting for you to press ENTER to resume play.

16 NIGHTFALL 16

When the last German raid has reached its target or been forced to retreat, the day's fighting is over, and all your pilots automatically return to base. Churchill will call you to his bunker to tell you how the War Cabinet assesses the battle. If you have dealt the enemy a crippling blow, you may win the game outright. Otherwise you will be given a trend assessment and the game will continue into the next day. You will receive a new weather forecast and will be able to put the new day's Plan of Defence into action. The clock will then start and the battle will continue as on the previous day.

A note from Nicholas Palmer, the game designer

Their Finest Hour is designed to mix the challenge of strategy games with the excitement of fast computer action. Having written *The Comprehensive Guide to Board Wargaming* and other books on board wargames, I wanted to give computer gamers the same depth of simulation: if you play a wargame you should be put in the historical dilemmas, and have the chance to try out different strategies in every game. There are many computer games which pretend to simulate air battles; very few have *Their Finest Hour*'s base in historical reality.

At the same time, I wanted to use the computer to add the tension and excitement which board wargames tend to lack. Above all, I wanted to give players the claustrophobic feeling of crouching in the command centre, struggling with insufficient information. Even on the first day, the German raids will not be detected by radar till they are about half-way over the Channel, but once the enemy has started devastating the radar stations the raids will shift more and more into the gaps in the British 'eyes', and raids will be seen only at the last moment as they thrust in over the coastlines: in bad weather they may be overlooked even then, for a few precious seconds. If you do spot a German force, you don't know where it is heading, nor exactly what is in it, especially if your radar is badly battered. But by fast reactions when the raids are detected, and intelligent guesswork as they head for their targets, you should be able to develop your skill to the point that you can win games with a pulse rate even faster than the tough default of 50.

The computer is a far from unintelligent opponent: give it a chance to exploit damaged radar and bases, and you may be dealt a series of hammer-blows from which your forces will never recover. Every game sees a different German strategy adopted: in one, the Luftwaffe may opt for massive attacks on key targets; in another, for swamping the defences with numerous small raids, and the strategy will vary from day to day, according to the flow of battle.

Finally, I believe *Their Finest Hour* is unique in allowing the player to choose the 'feel' of the game, from fast action to reflective analysis, through the pulse rate setting. Many players will want to start relatively slowly (using the S key to speed up when desired), and gradually progress to the ultimate challenge of pulse rate 30.

Some simplifications have been made for easy play. The bulk of the British effort was made by the Spitfires and Hurricanes; the few squadrons of Beauforts, Defiants, etc. have been ignored. The squadrons have been grouped in ten bases (generally using the historical Sector Airfields of 10 and 11 groups), and the radar stations into six radar complexes. The game takes no account of the attacks on cities in the later stage of the Battle of Britain, since the decision to switch to these targets was a gesture of despair by the German commanders at their inability to defeat the RAF at their bases: if the Luftwaffe reaches this stage in the game, the player will be recognised as the winner.

Players interested in background reading are referred to:

Fighter, Len Deighton (Jonathan Cape)
Eagle Day, Richard Collier (Pan)
The Battle of Britain, Marcel Julien (Panther)

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Program © John Wilson 1985

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SUMMARY OF THE ICONS

Move the hand by pressing BREAK/SPACE and select your choice by pressing ENTER. If at any time the game pauses, this is usually a prompt for you to press ENTER to close a window of information.

FIRST SCREEN		
Select input from keyboard.	Select input from Kempston joystick.	Change pulse rate and select one day option.
Not used at this stage.	Start the game.	Load a game saved previously.

DEFENCE PLAN		
This produces a sub-menu: ↑ adds flak. ↓ removes flak.	Also produces a sub-menu: ↑ reinforces the squadron. ↓ rotates pilots.	This allows you to carry out intensive repairs at damaged locations.
Gives information about the location the cursor is over.	When satisfied with your plan, select the main game: <i>The Battle</i> .	Used to save a game in progress.

THE BATTLE		
Used to alert a base (see ALARM menu below).	Used to move forces.	Used to toggle the cursor between a force in flight and its home base.
As above.	Not used at this stage.	Not used at this stage.

ALARM SUB-MENU		
If the cursor is <i>not</i> over a location when the alert icon is selected, you are asked if the alert is to be global or local, and which part of Britain or which force to alert. However, if the cursor is over a location, this sub-menu of icons appears:		
Cancel the alert.	The lowest alert, pilots wait in their huts.	Next stage of alert, pilots sit in their planes.
		Highest alert, pilots and planes ready for take-off.