

## Further Reading: The Battle of Britain

**TASK:** Read this account written by **ACW** (Aircraftwoman) Heap. What was the Battle of Britain like for the **WAAFs** (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) and the pilots involved? Identify two or three challenges (emotional and physical) that they faced.

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**ACW Heap describes what happened when the RAF base she worked at was attacked by the Luftwaffe.**

'I have been asked if I was frightened under fire – yes, before and afterwards but not at the time, and I only remember one girl breaking down. We were shocked, for we had been brought up not to show our feelings and keep control. Another girl who sat through our first attack, absolutely rigid (I glanced along the faces) went home on leave to Ireland and never came back. Calmness reigned, amongst the frenzied activity, the controller gave the squadrons vectors to the enemy and we heard shouts of "Tally-ho" over the R.T. and a running commentary followed, it was grim and tense. We always managed to hear it all, anxious eyes on the clock, with fuel states in mind, and desperate moments as one heard 'Blue Two going down in flames' and whether or not he had managed to bale out, not always possible to see. Then "Who's Blue Two?" for we didn't know which pilot in a flight flew what in a sortie, it changed every time. Then anxious waits for the squadrons to pancake, only to be refuelled and rearmed and up again as quickly as possible. The pilots got so tired that it was not unknown for them to fall asleep over the controls on landing, or stagger off to the dispersal hut or deck chair and flake out.'

*Transcript from 'Memoirs of a Wartime WAAF' by Mrs Edith A. Kup (nee Heap, and ranked as ACW Heap during the Battle of Britain). 1988.*

