



The first Nazi air raid on Britain occurred on October 16, 1939. Between that date and February 27 there were 74 reconnaissance and bombing raids on our shores. This chart shows the part of our coast reached on each occasion by the German planes. The distances travelled by the raiding plane, out and home, range from 400 miles (to the Norfolk coast) to over 1,000 miles (to the Shetlands). It is estimated that at least 38 of the planes employed on the raids were destroyed by our fighters, and that the raids thus cost Hitler £1,000,000.

1 *Unreal conflict*



The first Luftwaffe raids on Britain were hardly impressive during those early days of the 'Phoney War' between 3 September 1939 and 9 May 1940. In many ways it seemed an odd sort of war. For a number of years some leading observers had forecast swarms of Luftwaffe bombers filling up the sky and raining death and destruction on a terrified populace. Apart from two major attacks on 9 October and 16 October against elements of the Home Fleet, most of the early raiders made their appearance in ones and twos, and enemy bombs were mainly discharged on strictly military, or rather, naval targets. The bulk of the aerial activity consisted of exploratory raids, mine-laying and reconnaissance sorties.

Fresh from their successes in Poland, the battle-hardened crews of the crack Luftwaffe squadrons had been issued with strict orders not to drop bombs on the country of the antagonist. Hitler had decreed that attacks on shipping were permitted but only as long as they were on the High Seas. Not a single civilian was to be killed as Berlin still hoped to obtain a quick settlement of the conflict with Great Britain. Military necessities at that stage of the war were to be subordinated to political considerations.

Mistakes by both Britain and Germany were, of course, inevitable during the tense early days of this unreal conflict. Early in September 1939 an RAF raider dropped a bomb over the port of Esbjerg, Denmark and killed two persons. A few days later three RAF bombers flew over Belgium and, when a Belgian plane signalled them to land, shot it down. A week later, near Warsaw, German planes unloaded six bombs on the villa of the US Ambassador, A. J. Drexel Biddle, jun., who claimed that the raid was deliberate. The first British civilian was killed on 16 March 1940, during a German raid at Hatston in the Orkney Islands.

Following Hitler's march into Czechoslovakia, which was aimed at outflanking Poland, he began to press for the return of the German part of Poland.

At the beginning of June 1939 the Home Fleet sailed into Weymouth for a review. By the end of August 1939 the ships were gathering at Scapa Flow under war orders although war had still not broken out. The arrival of the Royal Naval Hospital Ship *St Abba*, painted white with red crosses, was an ominous sign to the sailors. Defences were poor at Scapa and obviously did not take into account the aerial photography employed by the Germans. Warships were at great risk from an air attack, lying in an underdefended base.

The Luftwaffe was thought capable of an 800-bomber attack on Scapa Flow, a ratio of 100 bombers to every heavy AA gun there. The Commander in Chief of the Home Fleet, Admiral

Forbes, heard this startling news on 7 September. All leading units of the Home Fleet had been moved from one anchorage to another in the hope of evading attack. The main threat was considered to be from the air. The 29,000 ton battleship *Royal Oak* was anchored in the remote north-east corner of the Flow, where her AA guns could protect her from air attack.

Ironically, the first real successes against the British were achieved by the U-boats. On 17 September *U-29*, under Lieutenant Commander Schuhard, had sunk the British aircraft carrier *Courageous*, west of Ireland. And in the early hours of 14 October Lieutenant Commander Prien, with *U-47*, made a daring entry into the Flow to achieve only partial success. The British Fleet, presumed to be in anchorage there, had already put out to sea. Prien promptly dealt with *Royal Oak*, holing her with two salvos of three torpedoes each, before she sank with the loss of 833 officers and men. Prien's audacious exploit led, two days later, to an action by Ju 88 dive bombers. German air reconnaissance units were now continually shadowing the passage of ships on the Scottish east coast.

There had been a tendency to overestimate the strength of the Luftwaffe. Churchill had once referred to Germany's 20,000 first-line aircraft, which had caused the aeronautical press in Britain to regard this as a joke. In September 1939 the Luftwaffe numbered about 4,500 first-line aircraft and the German aircraft industry was producing 700 planes a month but had the capability of producing double. The Heinkel He III, a medium bomber, was built at Heinkel's Orientburg factory and delivered on 22 August 1939 as III EN of 5/KG 26 based at Westerland, on the Frisian island of Sylt.

As early as 1936 a squadron for 'special purposes' had been subordinated to the General Staff of the Luftwaffe's 5th Branch (intelligence). Goering obtained top personnel, aircraft and equipment. Pilots were recruited who had the necessary background knowledge. Most of them had worked for aerial photography firms, international commercial carriers and aircraft manufacturers. Air adventurers such as Count Hoensbroech and Count Saurma joined the squadron. The camera-manufacturing company Carl Zeiss had developed advanced aerial cameras which were later used effectively by the Luftwaffe during the war. The squadron's first functional aircraft was the new twin-engine low-wing monoplane developed by Ernst Heinkel in the mid-1930s as the fastest passenger plane in the world, and as a speedy medium bomber. This was the He III, capable of carrying a four-man crew to a normal range of 2,000 miles. Its great quality was its stability in the air (due to its great weight), which made it ideal for aerial photography.

In the late 1930s the squadron flew missions against Britain, Poland, France, Russia and Czechoslovakia. Although most of the 'spy' missions started from Germany, some planes were stationed in Budapest. Flying from the Hungarian capital posed no problems as the Hungarians were considered to be friendly. Sites in south-eastern Europe were easily accessible from Budapest. The squadron was acting under instructions from Josef 'Beppo' Schmid, head of Luftwaffe Intelligence. Many missions provided photographs of potential bomb targets, while some photographs were of strategic importance only, such as armaments factories. Other missions were operational, such as those to photograph border fortifications and interior road networks. Some of the pilots even pretended to be testing out new airline routes. From Stavanger, in southern Norway, German aircraft could reach Scapa Flow in less than forty minutes.

Each reconnaissance unit had a photographic section situated at the airfield. The dark-rooms, evaluation areas and reproduction sections were housed in half a dozen trucks to make

the section as mobile as the air unit itself, and it moved from airfield to airfield as the force advanced or retreated. The photo section was self-contained with its own hundred-gallon water supply, light tables, enlargers, celluloid triangles, graduated steel rules, loupes, magnifying glasses, slide rules and coloured pencils.

During the war Germany built some 6,299 reconnaissance aircraft, which represented 5.5 per cent of its total production of 113,515 aircraft. At the outbreak of war, the Luftwaffe had 260 long-range reconnaissance aircraft. In the early days of the war the Luftwaffe's chief long-range reconnaissance plane was the Dornier Do 17F, an adaptation of a medium bomber originally designed in about 1935. It was a long-fuselage twin-engine, twin-tail machine, with pilot, observer/cameraman, radioman/gunner, but had a very low service ceiling of 18,000 feet. Two such machines, which proved to be easy prey for RAF fighters, were shot down over southern England in late November 1939.

One of the most prominent squadrons to take part in early raids over the British coastline was the Kampfgeschwader (KG) 26 unit, which mainly operated from its base at Lübeck-Blankensee. The squadron had received the name of 'Lion Squadron' from its first commander, later to be Generalfeldmarschall Freiherr von Richthofen.

Operating from bases in France, Denmark, Norway and northern Germany Kampfgeschwader 26 with its special crews attacked important targets on the coastal regions of Britain. All of the squadron's aircraft took part in the 9 October raid and a Heinkel He III of KG 26 crash-landed on a Scottish hillside on 28 October, the first enemy aircraft to be brought down intact on the British mainland during the Second World War.

The Germans were strong, but only in comparison to British weaknesses. In reality the Luftwaffe, by sacrificing bomb-loads for fuel, was capable of attacking with 400 bombers. Scapa had eight heavy AA guns but there were no short-range AA guns and no high-performance fighters.

As the last shots of the Polish campaign died away, Hitler turned his attention to the main enemy, the British Fleet. He was unable to match it at sea and in a direct action because his main interests were focused on the East, which prevented him from building an adequate number of ships. He was weak, even in submarines, but as the former High Seas Fleet had been scuttled in Scapa Flow during the First World War, those he did have were mostly new, whereas what the Royal Navy had were mostly old.

A carefully planned campaign including warships, submarines, mines and aircraft could all contribute to him eliminating, within a few months, a sizeable proportion of the British Home Fleet. After that, his armies would then be able to gain forward bases in Holland, Belgium and northern France. From such bases he would then be able to wage war on British sea communications, resulting, if successful, in a peace settlement with Britain and France. This would enable him to be free for his assault on Russia.

On 6 September 1939 the first German reconnaissance flight over Scapa was made by a weather aircraft of Luftflotte 2 (Air Fleet 2) and a day later the Admiralty warned Admiral Forbes that with the Home Fleet at Scapa an attack by 800 bombers was possible. A photograph taken on 6 September which showed both the main fleet anchorage and destroyer anchorage, with ships in them, reached the desk of Kommodore Doenitz, commanding the U-boat arm on 11 September. Doenitz wanted more information and on the 13th sent out *U-14* to patrol the Orkneys and report on the coast defences and the currents. When it returned on the 29th its captain said he thought a U-boat could penetrate Hoxa Sound when

the gate was opened. More reconnaissance aircraft flew over Scapa, so high that the sound of their engines could not be heard, out of range of the AA guns and the reach of British naval fighters.

The British Government had purchased from the Marquis of Linlithgow in 1903 the shorelines surrounding Rosyth Castle, which was built in 1560, and constructed a base which became one of the largest in the world, capable of docking and repairing all classes of war vessels and minor craft making use of Port Edgar on the South Shore. The Firth of Forth, with a succession of powerful batteries along both sides and on the islands, was generally considered impregnable, and the strategic value of the base was fully proved in both world wars. The first German air attack on British territory took place against warships in the Firth of Forth on 16 October. Two cruisers and a destroyer were damaged and two Ju 88s were shot down by Spitfires, the first victories by Britain-based fighters.

Fundamental lessons about the vulnerability of unescorted bombers in daylight were learnt during December 1939 in three attacks made on the Heligoland area by a formation of RAF Wellingtons. On the second occasion five of the twelve aircraft were shot down, and on the 18th, when 24 bombers were unable to find German shipping due to cloud, BF 109s and BF 110s attacked and shot down twelve of them; three more made forced landings on return.

Throughout this period both sides had refrained from making bombing attacks on each other's territory, though British and French bombers had flown many night sorties over Germany only to drop propaganda leaflets.

However, as a result of the first German bombs falling on British soil during the Hatston raid, Bomber Command Whitleys raided Hornum seaplane base on Sylt the next night. The French, however, requested that no further such attacks be made for fear of escalation in the air war with the Luftwaffe.

The RAF's first raid of the war took place on 4 September, when Blenheim and Wellington bombers raided Wilhelmshaven naval base. Five Blenheims and two Wellingtons were shot down, the Wellingtons claimed by Feldwebel Aldred Held was the first Luftwaffe victory in the West. Damage to German warships was only slight. The RAF, restricted like the Germans to purely maritime targets, began daylight operations in force across the North Sea late in September.

The Chief of Staff's review of the defence of Scapa Flow after the declaration of war had made it clear that many interests and many pressures were involved in maintaining the security of the Fleet. The War Office had to provide the guns but could not consider weakening Britain's air defence programme, which consumed all the 3.7 inch artillery available. Despite the recommendations that two fighter squadrons, which could, in an emergency, be reinforced by five more, should be made available, it was felt that the air defence of Britain, still short of 15 squadrons, would be further depleted by moving two to Scapa Flow.

The attack on Scapa Flow and loss of the *Royal Oak* provoked instant reactions in the Admiralty. On 31 October, accompanied by the First Sea Lord, Churchill went to Scapa Flow to hold a second conference on these matters in Admiral Forbes's flagship. Against air attack it was planned to mount 88 heavy and 40 light AA guns together with numerous searchlights and increased barrage-balloon defences. Substantial fighter protection was to be maintained both at Orkney and at Wick on the mainland. It was hoped that all the arrangements could be completed to enable the Fleet to return by March 1940.

Possible alternative bases were considered. Admiralty opinion favoured the Clyde, but Admiral Forbes felt that the distance factor was too great. The other alternative was Rosyth, which had been Britain's main base towards the end of the First World War. Although its location was considered suitable, it was thought to be vulnerable to air attack.

During the first month's raids, the RAF fighters proved themselves more than a match for the enemy machines. Equally, the ground and naval anti-aircraft defences, equipped with ultra-modern detecting and gun-laying equipment, provided a deadly barrage against enemy air activity.

The early raids, with the possible exception of the Firth of Forth attacks, were, for the most part, little more than reconnaissance 'feelers' aimed at locating and testing the British coastal defences.

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The Moray Firth raid

It was General Hans Ferdinand Geisler's 10th Air Corps, which included KG 26, equipped with the Heinkel III, and KG 30, equipped with the fast, up-to-date Ju 88s, that had spear-headed the early attacks on British shipping around the British coastline. Geisler's squadrons were heavily committed to daylight missions, known as 'armed reconnaissance' over mainland Scotland, Orkney and Shetland. For more than six months Geisler's crews had conducted a series of well co-ordinated and systematic attacks on British naval units along the north-east coastline from Yorkshire to Orkney and Shetland. On 9 April Hitler gave the green light for the invasion of Norway and Denmark. The Luftwaffe objectives were now to be directed at the Norway theatre and so the raids over the British coastline were drastically cut back.

The following day Oberleutnant Harald Vogel, a tall, lean Bavarian, along with his four man crew in a Heinkel III of 4/KG 26, were preparing for one of the last attacks in British coastal waters during that stage of the Phoney War. Their target was to be a convoy in the Moray Firth area. It was the 20-year-old pilot's first operational flight and proved to be a true baptism of fire. Pressing home his attacks from a height of 18,000 feet, where no naval



Rudolph Behnisch (left) along with Harold Vogel (right) at their POW camp in Canada

guns could reach him, Vogel's aircraft was set upon by five Hurricanes of 603 (City of Edinburgh) and 605 (County of Warwick) Squadrons. The Hurricanes' combined fire-power of 40 .303 Browning machine guns proved too much for Vogel's aircraft as it plunged into the sea some ten miles off Kinnaird Head, near Fraserburgh. Although 603 Squadron had already achieved some spectacular victories in the early days of the conflict, for the 605 fliers it was

their first real taste of success. Describing the dramatic events of that spring morning, Vogel recalled:

Of the crew of four, two other ranks (a mechanic-gunner and a wireless operator-gunner) were shot during the first stages of the attack. The observer (who had been promoted to corporal that very day) and I left the plane by parachutes after both engines had caught fire. I was the only one to survive and was picked out of the water by the British destroyer *Ulster* which had escorted the convoy under attack.

As far as I could ascertain later, the destroyer was part of the navy reserve immobilised in peace time and re-activated for the war. As I was slightly wounded, the medical staff aboard took care of my wounds and placed me in a hammock. Then the commander of the vessel paid me a formal visit, regretted that we were at war as he had some good friends in Germany, and left a package of Players cigarettes with me.

About 24 hours later the *Ulster* disembarked me at the Royal Navy installations at the shore of the Firth of Forth opposite Edinburgh city, and an ambulance brought me to the military hospital in the castle. I was accommodated in a small one-bed room containing a small window, left open, within the mighty walls of the castle. From that instant on I was guarded by an Army soldier sitting beside my bed day and night. I remember especially one, a Scotchman, apparently drafted for the daylight shift, with whom I tried to maintain conversation as good as my very poor knowledge of the English language allowed it.

In civilian life he was a coalminer, and he gave me a very interesting account of the normal manner of living of his family and of Scottish coalminers generally. Of the many hours of conversation I had with him, two features prevail in my memory – his deep devotion to the Royal Family and his acceptance of the social system apparently prevailing in Scotland at that time, with high class people and low class people existing by the will of God. But one thing he resented very much – that he was forced to stand to attention each time a Sister entered the room. Needless to say that we could not agree in our conversations, in spite of the friendly manner in which they were maintained, on the reasons for the outbreak for the war and on the chances to win it.

As far as I remember, I arrived at the hospital on a Wednesday. A surgeon inspected the bandages on my wounds as applied at the *Ulster*, and found them OK. I was a little puzzled that he preferred not to change them, including one at my right shoulder where, apparently, a bullet was stuck.

The following Saturday Vogel found that his right arm was swollen and painful and that it had assumed a dark colour. He indicated to a nurse that he thought his arm required immediate attention. The nurse's first reaction was that he could not expect such special attention during a weekend. In desperation the wounded pilot persuaded her to alert another member of the hospital staff, who took a further look at his injured arm concluding that the injury was indeed very bad. A few minutes later Vogel was strapped to a stretcher and carried up a narrow spiral staircase into another ward to await an operation.

Vogel further recalled:

A surgeon informed me that he had to narcotise me for an operation. Upon my request he assured me that he would not amputate my arm. Within a few days after the operation my condition improved considerably under the kind care of the nurses. Later the Sister



Left: Vogel with his ID 'mug shot'

Below: George Pinkerton displaying the map where Pohl's aircraft plunged into the sea



and the surgeon even prescribed a bottle of stout daily to me. Jokingly he said that he could not prescribe a bottle of Lowenbrau. Continuing in this friendly atmosphere he told me that he had spent some of his student days in Munich where he had acquired a knowledge of German. One of the nurses even bought from her own funds a small English/German pocket dictionary which she donated to me.

My room was close to a fairly large sick-room with, perhaps, 20 beds where a German non-commissioned officer was accommodated among British forces personnel. I was not allowed, however, to establish contact with him, although I could see him one day when I could attend a concert given in the large room for the entertainment of the patients. Probably he was a member of the crew of Hauptmann Pohle who had been shot down while attacking a British cruiser in the Firth of Forth with a Ju 88 dive-bomber, thereby flying under the famous bridge. He was much more seriously wounded than I and had spent a long time in the hospital before I had arrived. Later I met Pohle in officers' POW camps in England and Canada, but have not heard of him for more than 40 years.



Luftwaffe bomber crews prior to an attack on the British coastline from their base at Lubeck Blankensee

I was also pleased to meet a British naval officer sometimes during the morning toilet in the lavatory of the hospital. Unfortunately, I cannot remember his name but he spoke fluent German and said that he had done a lot of travelling in Germany for 'observation'. He claimed to have been a member of the Runciman Committee which had investigated the situation in the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and had (as far as I can remember), recommended the handing over of that area to Hitler's Germany, as later decided at the Munich Conference.

Three weeks later Vogel was discharged from the castle hospital and transferred to the famous 'London Cage' interrogation centre at Cockfosters in north London. Vogel was questioned there over a one-week period and it was there he made his first contact with other imprisoned German officers. Along with other captured Luftwaffe crews he was sent to the then No. 1 Officers' POW camp at Grizedale Hall near Lake Windermere. In June 1940 he was transferred by sea from Liverpool to Montreal, and for the next six years he was interned in various camps in Ontario and Alberta, before being returned to Britain in 1946. He was discharged from captivity on 23 November 1946.

Vogel continued:

Today I am looking back with gratitude on the fair treatment in Great Britain, Canada and especially at the castle in Edinburgh. My sojourn there was not yet over-shadowed by the extreme hatred developed during the later stages of the war or by the knowledge of incredible atrocities committed later by German personnel especially in Eastern Europe. No German bomb had fallen at that time on British soil, as far as I know, except perhaps for some attacks on navy installations at Scapa Flow.

The above recollections were conveyed in a letter to the Scottish United Services Museum at Edinburgh Castle in late November 1986. After the war ended, Vogel spent six years with the Joint Export/Import Agency, established by the British and United States military governments in the then West Germany for the revival of German trade. Later he was employed by the British and US High Commissions. Like many other former Second World War Luftwaffe personnel, Vogel later enlisted in the West German Air Force. He attained the rank of major, and recalled, with a certain amount of humour, that he became a member of the RAF officers mess at 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force HQ at Mönchengladbach. Following his retirement from the Air Force he served for ten years as a commercial officer with the Canadian Consulate General in Düsseldorf.