

MILITARY HISTORY

Gothic Gothas and the Rise of the Riesen

And Ludendorff Loses his Bottle

The First Air Campaign Against UK 1914 to 1918 Part 3

Before the Beginning (Part Three)

Before the Beginning was the
Word, and the Word was:

‘Der Feuerplan’

The Worlds First Dedicated Strategic Bomber

The worlds first dedicated strategic bombers were converted from the worlds first multi engine passenger carrier, The Ilya Muromets (Sikorsky S-22). Itself an improvement on earlier designs.

They could carry sixteen passengers

They had an insulated and heated passenger saloon, bedroom, and washroom complete with the first aerial toilet!

Sikorsky Ilya Muromets



Bomber Variant



Fliegerkorps der OHL

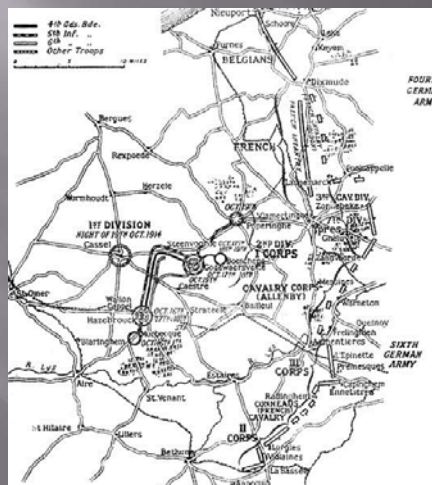
- ▣ On 19 October 1914 von Falkenhayn Chief of General Staff for the German Army, appointed Maj. Wilhelm Siegert to head of the Army's Air Corps.
- ▣ He proposed a strategic air bombardment of London, in order to force Britain's hand.
- ▣ The only area from which the aeroplanes available at that point could have reached London was the Pas de Calais, which was in French hands

Briefentauben Abteilung



Gustav Otto Flugmaschinenfabrik in 1914

First Battle of Ypres



Almost an Air Force

- ▣ The Imperial German Air Service (Die Fliegertruppen des deutschen Kaiserreiches) and other branches concerned with air matters such as anti-aircraft, home defence and air intelligence were unified in the Luftstreitkräfte on 8 October 1916.
- ▣ The Luftstreitkräfte organization changed substantially as the war progressed, to accommodate new types of aircraft, doctrine, tactics and the needs of the ground troops, in particularly the artillery. During this time the system of organisation and unit designations evolved that would form the basis of those used in the Luftwaffe of Nazi Germany, when it was revealed in 1935.

Ernst von Höppner



Ernst Brandenburg



Enter Kampfgeschwader der Obersten Heeresleitung 3

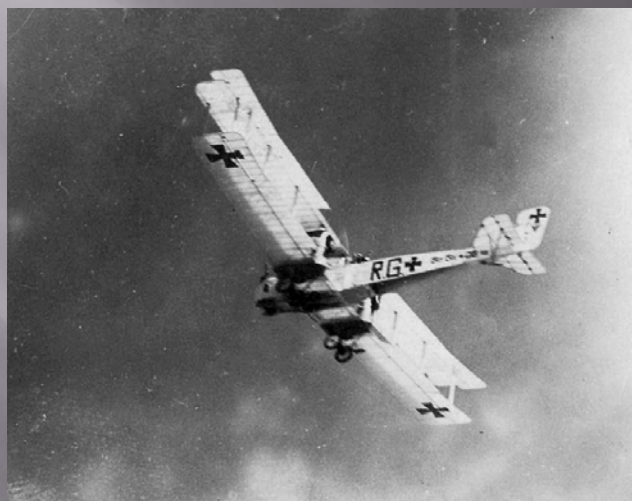
- ▣ In March 1917, the G.IV entered service with Kagohl 1, which was redesignated Kagohl 3 upon receipt of the new machines, and the G.IVs were soon to be put to use in Operation Türkenkreuz - the strategic bombing of London
- ▣ This was delayed when practice missions revealed faulty engine bearings that had to be replaced, and that the prevailing winds were stronger than expected, requiring the addition of extra fuel tanks. Additionally, it was discovered that the design of the fuel system prevented the main tanks from being completely utilised, and this problem had to be addressed as well.

Gotha-Ursinus G.I



Gotha-Ursinus GUH G.I - Groß - Kampfflugzeug der Gothaer Waggonfabrik A. G.,
Sanke Postkarte Nr. 1021

Gotha G.IV



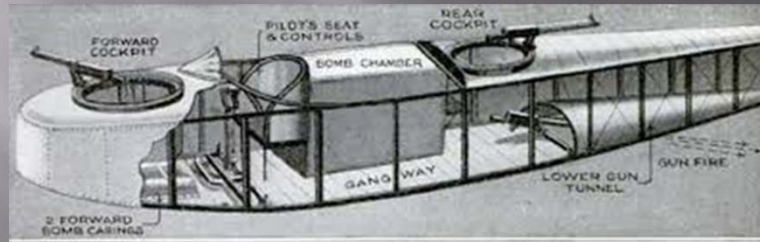
Gotha G.IV Command Structure



Gotha G. IV Offensive Armament



Gotha G. IV Defensive Armament



Mk 1 Emergency Communications Device





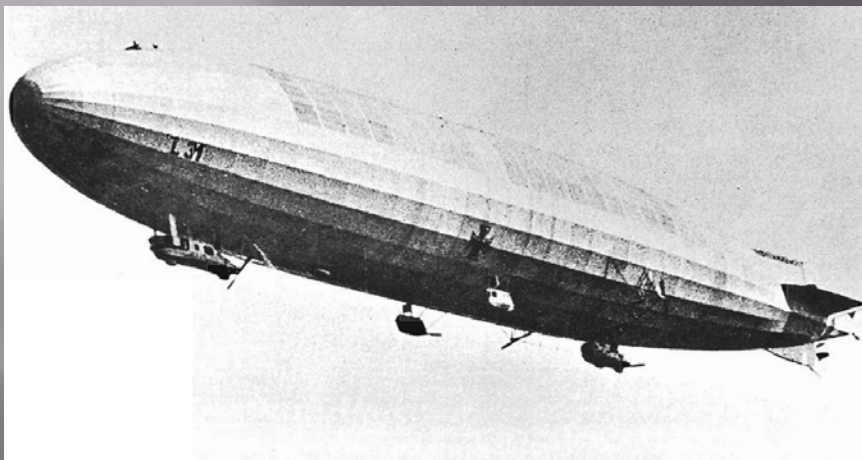
1917

The Second Half Begins

Silvertown explosion



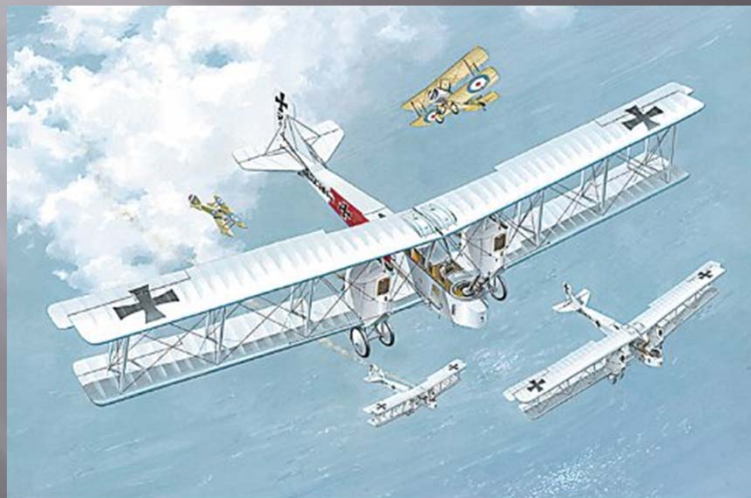
R Class Zeppelin



Felixtowe F2a (an Aerial Shark)



The Daylight Raids



Slaughter of the Innocents



The Shape of Things to Come



British Stereophonic Sound DF Installation

"I think that I can hear the sea!"



"Was hat er gesagt Manfred?"



And Another One Bites the Dust

- ▣ On 16-17 June, an attempted raid by six Zeppelins was met with some success; two airships were unable to leave their shed due to high winds and two more turned back with engine problems.
- ▣ Of the two that reached England, L 42 hit a naval ammunition store in Ramsgate.
- ▣ While L 48, the first U-class Zeppelin, was intercepted near Harwich and attacked by a DH.2 flown by Captain Robert Saundby, an F.E. 2b flown by Lt F. D. Holder and Sgt S. Ashby, and a B.E.12 flown by Pierce Watkins.
- ▣ The Zeppelin came down in flames near Theberton in Suffolk: Watkins was officially credited with the victory.
- ▣ Amazingly 2 of the Zeppelin crew survived!

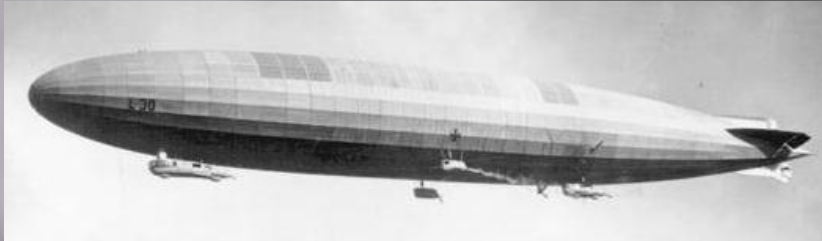
- ▣ A further Gotha raid of 22 aircraft was made on 7 July, resulting in 57 deaths and 193 injuries on the ground.
- ▣ One hundred sorties were flown against the formation, resulting in one Gotha shot down, three damaged and two fighters shot down.
- ▣ Felixstowe and Harwich were bombed on 22 July and Southend and Shoeburyness on 12 August, with the loss of one Gotha, four others crashing on landing.

- ▣ On 18 August, the largest raid of the war was attempted, despite a warning of unfavourable weather.
- ▣ Twenty-eight aircraft took off and soon encountered the predicted high winds, after nearly two hours in the air they had made so little progress that Zeebrugge was still in sight.
- ▣ After a further hour the English coast came into sight, revealing that the Gothas were some 40 mi off course.
- ▣ With barely enough fuel left to return to Belgium, the flight commander called off the attack. The high wind caused two aircraft to come down in the North Sea and others ran out of fuel and were lost making forced landings, two coming down in neutral Holland.

It All Becomes Too Hard

- ▣ On 22 August, 15 aircraft set out to attack Margate and Dover.
- ▣ Five turned back over the North Sea and the rest were met by heavy anti-aircraft fire and fighter aircraft over the Isle of Thanet.
- ▣ Two Gothas were shot down almost immediately and a third was shot down over Dover.

LZ 120



Long Range Trials

Gothic Creatures of the Night



- ▣ The first night raid by the Gothas took place on 3 September against Chatham, as an experiment by five aircraft.
- ▣ The 152 deaths included 130 naval recruits whose dormitory was hit, the worst bombing incident of the war.
- ▣ Encouraged by the lack of night defences, a raid on London was carried out the following night. Of the eleven aircraft which set out, nine reached England and five got as far as London; 18 defensive sorties were flown but none made contact.
- ▣ The defensive flights were significant in that the aircraft used included Sopwith Camels, proving that it was practical to fly the type at night.
- ▣ One Gotha failed to return, probably shot down by anti-aircraft fire from Fort Borstal near Rochester.

Urban Myths and Legends!



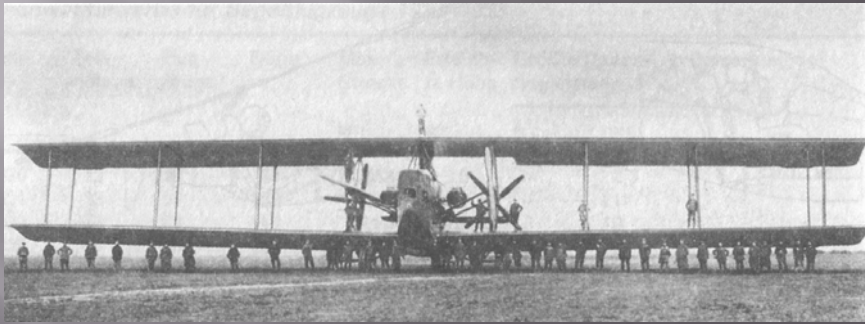
The Rise of the Riesen

- ▣ Six raids followed at the end of September. These included the first raids on England by the enormous Zeppelin-Staaken Riesenflugzeug of Riesenflugzeugabteilung 501

Riesenflugzeugabteilung 501

- ▣ This translates to Giant Aeroplane Detachment 501, which the German military referred to as Rfa 501
- ▣ Rfa 501 joined Kagohl 3 in attacks on Britain in September 1917.
- ▣ Why were they called a 'Giant Aeroplane Detachment'?

BECAUSE THEY WERE!



- ▣ On 24 September 16 Gothas set off and 13 reached England, most bombing Dover and other targets in Kent, with only five reaching London. This coincided with an unsuccessful Zeppelin attack on the Midlands.
- ▣ The following night 15 Gothas set out, with similar results, only three aircraft reaching London. One of the bombers came down in the North Sea, probably the victim of a Sopwith 1½ Strutter flown by Douglas Bell and George Williams of 78 Squadron.

- ▣ On 28 September, 25 Gothas and two R Planes took off but most turned back due to adverse weather. Three people were wounded and £129 damage was caused, for the cost of three Gothas lost and six damaged on landing.
- ▣ The following night seven Gothas and three R Planes took off, killing 40 and injuring 87 for the loss of one aircraft.
- ▣ By this time the population of London was thoroughly alarmed, with up to 300,000 people seeking shelter in Underground stations and others leaving London to sleep in whatever accommodation was available, some in fields.

- ▣ On 30 September, 11 Gothas set off to raid London and on 1 October 18 took off, eleven reaching England.
- ▣ Over 14,000 rounds were fired by British anti-aircraft guns without scoring a single hit.
- ▣ By now shells were in short supply and many of the guns had fired so many rounds that their barrels were worn out. The Government reallocated new 3 inch guns from arming merchant ships against submarines, to the defence of London.
- ▣ The barrage was also proving hazardous to those on the ground, in that week eight people had been killed and another 67 injured by falling fragments.

- ▣ The RNAS and RFC carried out bombing raids on German bomber airfields at St. Denis-Westrem and Gontrode, forcing the squadrons to relocate to Mariakerke and Oostakker, with the staff headquarters moving to Ghent.
- ▣ The next raid against England was carried out on 29 October, when three aircraft set out, two diverting to Calais because of the weather and the third dropping its bombs on the Essex coast.
- ▣ The following night a big raid was mounted, the bomb load including large numbers of a newly developed 4.5 kg incendiary bomb. 22 Gothas took off, of which over half released their bombs over Kent, with little effect other than the destruction of a gasometer in Ramsgate. Bombs were dropped on the eastern suburbs of London but many of the incendiaries failed to ignite and five aircraft crashed when attempting to land

L59 The Africa Flight

- ▣ On 21 November 1917 L59, carrying 22 crew and loaded with 14 tons of supplies set out from Jamboli in Bulgaria for the Makonde heights in East Africa in an attempt to re-supply the forces of Gen. von Lettow-Vorbeck
- ▣ On 23 November flying 100 miles west of Khartoum they received a recall message as their target was now in enemy hands.
- ▣ Arriving back at base on 25 November, they still had fuel for a further sixty hours of flight, having covered 4,200 miles!

It Gets Worse

- ▣ On 5 January at the new HQ base at Alhorn L51 and L47 were undergoing maintenance work, when a small fire started under the control gondola of L51 (thought to have been caused by an electrical fault).
- ▣ Some of the crew managed to escape moments before L51, followed immediately by L47 exploded. Their new state of the art shed was also totally destroyed.
- ▣ What can you say? These things were dangerous!

- ▣ Poor weather prevented raids in November and the Gotha crews occupied themselves with training flights.
- ▣ To lessen the chance of a raid meeting adverse weather, in December the Germans began to send out a radio-equipped Rumpler C.IV to make weather observations off the English coast.
- ▣ The weather cleared on 5 December, when 19 Gothas and two R Planes attacked in waves. Casualties were light but over £100,000 of damage was caused, mostly in London. Two Gothas were brought down by anti-aircraft fire and one with an engine disabled, attempted a landing at Rochford aerodrome, struck a tree on approach and crashed. The second aircraft came down near Canterbury and in both cases all the crew survived but a third aircraft and crew was reported missing.

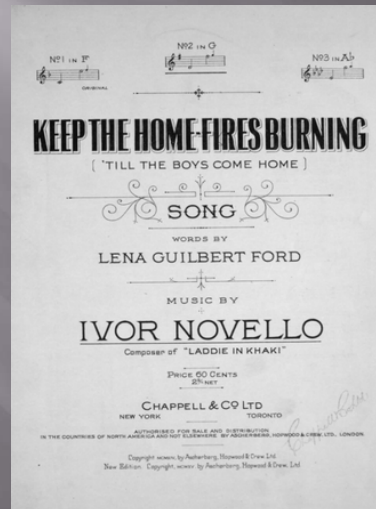
1918

The Beginning of the End

- ▣ On 28 January 13 Gothas and two Giants set off, six of the Gothas turning back because of poor visibility. Over a hundred defensive sorties were flown, resulting in one Gotha being shot down after being attacked by two Sopwith Camels from the 40 Squadron RFC. The first victory for night fighters against a heavier-than-air bomber over Britain.
- ▣ On the ground, 67 people were killed and 166 injured: the casualties included 14 dead and 14 injured in stampedes, when people queuing for admission to shelters were alarmed by maroons set off as a warning that a raid was expected; another 11 were injured by shrapnel from anti-aircraft fire.
- ▣ Many of the other casualties were caused by a 300 kg bomb, which fell on the **Odham's** printing works in Long Acre, which was being used as a shelter.

- ▣ The following night, the first raid undertaken by Giants unaccompanied by Gothas took place. Four aircraft from Rfa 501 took off, one turning back before reaching England and casualties and damage were light.
- ▣ Eighty defensive sorties were flown and one Giant was attacked by five aircraft, one attack succeeding in disabling an engine.
- ▣ British fighter pilots' efforts against the Giants were handicapped by poor intelligence work, although the existence of these aircraft was known, the information had not been passed on, and many pilots may have underestimated the range from which they were firing.

The Critics Can be Tough Sometimes

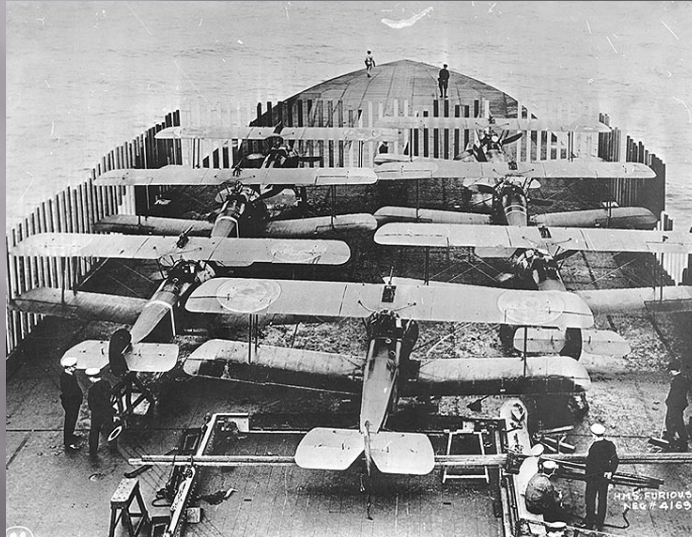


- On 12 March, five Zeppelins attempted a raid on the Midlands: headwinds caused them to mistake their position and two dropped their bombs in the sea, the rest bombing the Hull area with little effect, their commanders thinking that they were over Leeds.
- Another raid was attempted the following night but only one of the three airships reached England, bombing Hartlepool. The bombs killed eight people and an RFC pilot was killed when he flew into Pontop Pike near Dipton, County Durham.
- A third airship raid took place on 12 April: again the altitude and weather caused navigational problems and although attacks were claimed on a number of towns in the Midlands, most of the bombs fell in open countryside. Seven people were killed, 20 injured and £11,673 damage was caused.

- ▣ By the middle of March, the Gotha squadron was once again ready to attack England but had to support the Spring Offensive on the Western Front which started on 21 March, being used to bomb Calais, Dunkirk, Boulogne and troop concentrations and railways.
- ▣ On 9 May, Rfa 501 suffered a catastrophic blow when four aircraft attempted to bomb Dover. High winds caused them to be recalled when over the Channel, by which time fog had covered their base.
- ▣ One aircraft landed safely, the crew of a second survived a crash in which the aircraft was damaged beyond repair and the remaining two crashed with the loss of all but one member of each crew

- ▣ The last and largest aeroplane raid of the war took place on the night of 19 May 1918, when 38 Gothas and 3 Giants took off against London.
- ▣ Six Gothas were shot down by interceptors and anti-aircraft fire and a seventh aircraft was forced to land after a protracted close quarters engagement with a Bristol fighter of 141 Squadron from Biggin Hill. This was the first victory of the war for Biggin Hill.
- ▣ 3,200 lb. of bombs were dropped. 49 people were killed, 177 injured and damage was £117,317.
- ▣ After this raid, both Kagohl 3 and Rfa 501 were principally used for army support.

The Tøndern Raid



Götterdämmerung

- ❑ The last Zeppelin raid on Britain took place on 5 August 1918, when four Zeppelins bombed targets in the Midlands and the North of England.
- ❑ The airships reached the British coast before dark and were sighted by the Leman Tail lightship 30 miles north-east of Happingburgh at 20:10, although defending aircraft were not alerted until 20:50.
- ❑ Despite thick cloud two aircraft intercepted the recently commissioned L 70, which was carrying Peter Strasser, Führer der Luftschiffe of the German Imperial Navy, as an observer.
- ❑ The Zeppelin was shot down in flames by an RFC DH4, with no survivors.
- ❑ The remaining airships dropped their bombs blind, relying on radio bearings for navigational information and none fell on land.

The Last of the Leviathans



'Der Feuerplan' Again

- ▣ The development of the 1 kg B-1E "Elektron" incendiary bomb, led to the revival of Der Feuerplan (The Fire Plan), which involved the use of the whole German heavy bomber fleet, flying in waves over London and Paris and dropping all the incendiaries that they could carry, until they were either all shot down or the crews were too exhausted to fly.
- ▣ The hope was that the two capitals would be destroyed in an inextinguishable blaze, causing the Allies to sue for peace.

British Retaliation



Handley Page O/100 of the Royal Naval Air Service, 1917

Ludendorff Loses His Bottle

- ▣ The launch of the Fire Plan was to begin in August 1918, but was postponed until the following month.
- ▣ On the evening of 23 September, as all available aircraft sat fully bombed up, engines running, and awaiting the signal to take off, the attack order was cancelled!
- ▣ Ludendorff had personally intervened.

Handley Page V/1500



The Final Accounting

- ▣ Airships made about 51 bombing raids on Britain during the war. These killed 557 and injured another 1,358 people.
- ▣ More than 5,000 bombs were dropped on towns across Britain, causing £1.5 million in damage. 84 airships took part, of which 30 were either shot down or lost in accidents.
- ▣ Aeroplanes carried out 27 raids, dropping 246,774 lb of bombs for the loss of 62 aircraft, resulting in ground casualties of 835 dead, 1,972 injured and £1,418,272 of material damage.