

Aerial bombing at sea

Neither the German navy nor the British one had a fully operational aerial arm at the beginning of WWII. The German Navy never got one. British Royal Air Force Coastal Command became operational in 1940. However, airplanes charged with bombing missions were operating frequently (British airplanes in the Helgoland Bight and German airplanes on England's East coast) or were attacking the enemy in the open sea. On the 3rd of September 1939, Britain was in possession of a fully operational unit of 2,600 aircrafts; the Germans had nothing less.

A few out of many hundred events are listed below in order to offer you an outline of what happened during the first few months of the WWII.

The 4th of September 1939: The First RAF raid of about 30 planes. Organised in separated groups, they targeted a fleet of Nazi naval vessels in the German Bight. About seven RAF planes were lost in mission.

The 27th of September 1939: In the middle of the North Sea, a squadron of British capital ships together with an aircraft carrier, a cruiser and destroyers were attacked by about twenty German aircrafts. Fourteen German land bombers made the attack.

The 29th of September 1939: British planes attacked a German naval squadron near Helgoland. Five out of 11 Hampdens (bomber planes) are shot down by German fighters.

The 9th of October 1939: British cruisers hunting submarines in the North Sea (southern coast of Norway) fought off German bombers, which attacked repeatedly. The Germans sent almost 150 planes to the scene of the battle.

The 17th of October 1939: Nazis bombed the naval base from the Firth of Forth near Rosyth, Scotland. Three ships were damaged; two bombers were shot down and crashed in flames into the sea.



The 21st of October 1939: Fighter planes shot down four German bombers out of nine which were deputed to attack a British convoy off the Humber estuary.

The 5th of November 1939: “Our outlook shouted, ‘Planes right ahead, Sir; three planes; they are diving, Sir’. Our foremost guns opened fire with a roar that drowned everything. The muzzles were elevated almost level with the bridge and yellow flames sprang out, obliterating the shapes of the German machines swooping over the convoy. The sea leapt up in columns where their bombs were dropped.”

The 14th of December 1939: Twelve RAF bombers attacked German warships in Helgoland Bight, but ended up by losing between six and ten bombers.

The 17th of December 1939: German bomber planes attacked trawlers near the English east coast and sank 10 boats of approx. 3,000 tons.

The 19th of December 1939: An air battle of significant proportions occurred the moment when British bombers encountered the German pursuit ships in the Helgoland Bight area. The loss was of 12 planes out of 24 RAF Wellington bombers deployed.

The 21st of December 1939: “German aircrafts attacked thirty-five vessels, including two neutral ships during the last three days. Of the ships attacked, one coasting steamer and six fishing trawlers sank.”