Eyes of The

Well loved by its crews, agile and for a floatplane – aesthetically pleasing, the distinctive radial-engined Arado Ar 196 is an unsung warplane of World War Two. Among its many credits, Ar 196s proved worthy adversaries against Short Sunderland flying boats and the type even managed to force a Royal Navy submarine to surrender. The part played by the Ar 196 throughout the conflict should not be underestimated.

As far back as 1933 the Germany Navy, the Kriegsmarine, specified a need for an aircraft that could be catapulted from its warships. The Heinkel He 60 biplane was chosen and first flew that same year. It was heavy and as a result under-powered, but with minor changes, it became the standard shipborne and shore-based maritime reconnaissance type.

Aware of the He 60's shortfalls, Heinkel produced the He 114, but it was only a marginal improvement on its predecessor. Its performance on water was so poor the Reichsluftfahrtministerium, the ministry of aviation, put out a tender for a replacement, stipulating the BMW 132 radial engine and the ability to incorporate either twin or single floats.

Dornier, Gotha and Focke-Wulf submitted biplane designs. Only Arado offered a monoplane and its Ar 196 won the contract. Prototypes were delivered in 1937 and 1938, with twin floats or a single float under the centre section with smaller, balancing floats underwing.

In the air, there was very little difference between both versions but the twin floats gave much better stability and performance on water. As a result, the twin-float version was chosen and the first production Ar 196 was delivered at the end of 1938.

Off to war

The Ar 196 was to act as the airborne eyes for the Kriegsmarine, carrying out reconnaissance and fleet shadowing duties. Shore-based examples were used for coastal reconnaissance and not for offensive action.

Initially, Ar 196A-1s were fitted with a single rearward-firing MG 15 machine gun. The 'A-2 variant had the ability to carry 50kg bombs, two 20mm MG FF cannon in the wings and a fixed MG 17 on the cowling as well as the rear gun.

The first examples went to the test centre at Travemünde and late in 1938 joined the

GERMAN RANKS AND RAF EQUIVALENTS

Hptm	Hauptmann (Flt Lt)
Oblt	Oberleutnant (Fg Off)
Lt	Leutnant (Plt Off)
Obfw	Oberfeldwebel (Flt Sgt)
Fw	Feldwebel (Sgt)
Uffz	Unteroffizier (Cpl)

Note: The suffix 'zur See' literally translates as 'at sea'; thus an Oblt zur See, is a naval oberleutnant.

Fleet

CHRIS GOSS REVEALS THE INCREDIBLE WARTIME CAREER OF A FLOATPLANE THAT HAD A REPUTATION AS A FLYING-BOAT KILLER

co-based 10 (See)/Lehrgeschwader 2 for operational trials. At the start of war, Ar 196A-1s equipped 1 Staffel/Bordfliegergruppe 196 (1/196) at Wilhelmshaven and by December 1939 at Kiel-Holtenau, 5/196. (See – sea/maritime, Lehr tactical development, Bordflieger – shipborne floatplane.)

The Wilhelmshaven-based staffel (squadron) predominantly supplied aircraft for the warships. The Ar 196As at Kiel-Holtenau were at first shore-based for coastal reconnaissance, but later adopted the shipborne role.

To reinforce the importance of the Ar 196 to the Kriegsmarine, these units were joint air force/navy outfits with the beobachter (observer) generally being a naval officer. The first combat loss, reflects this shared role: Ar 196A-1 0014 'T3+AH' of 1/196, was detached to the battleship *Graf Spee*, which was crippled by British warships and scuttled in the Rio de la Plata, off Montevideo, Uruguay on December 17, 1939.

The pilot was Uffz Heinrich Bongardts and the observer was naval officer Oblt zur See Hans-Detlef Spierling. Bongardts was killed during the first contact with the Royal Navy on December 13. Spierling returned to Germany on June 5, 1940, later transferring to the Luftwaffe. (See panel for details of German ranks.)

Sub capture

Other Ar 196s went down with their ship, including two during the invasion of Norway. The *Blücher* was sunk in Oslofjord on April 9, 1940, taking with it Ar 196A-2s 0046 '6W+ON' of 5/196 and 0048 of 1/196. The following day, the *Königsberg*, carrying 0042 'T3+CH' from 1/196, was bombed by the Fleet Air Arm at Bergen.

Prior to this, the Norwegians had managed to capture Ar 196A-2 0044 '6W+BN' of 5/196 from the cruiser *Hipper*. It force landed due to difficult weather conditions and it and Lt zur See Johannes Polzin and Oblt zur See Werner Techam were captured at Lyngstad. The floatplane was flown to Kristiansund on April 18 and onwards to the Shetlands. Unfortunately, on the 26th '6W+BN' was written off while alighting on a Scottish loch.

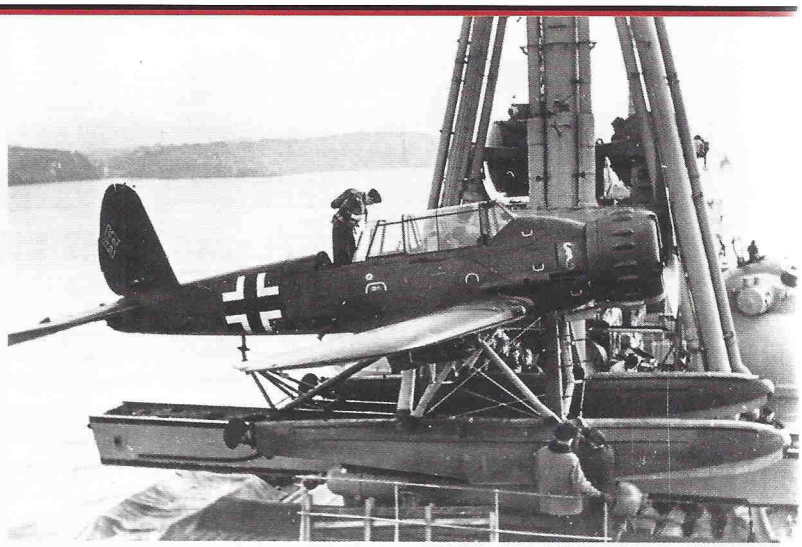
On May 4, the Ar 196s of 5/196 came into prominence with the capture of the British submarine HMS *Seal*. While mine-laying in the Kattegat, between Denmark and Sweden, the submarine was badly damaged by a German mine and forced to surface.

Below
An Ar 196A-2 of 1/196, with underwing bombs, leaves the catapult.

AR 196 SURVIVORS

Just under 550 Ar 196s were built and only three complete examples exist. Displayed in Bulgarian markings at the Museum of Aviation and Air Force at Plovdiv in Bulgaria is Ar 196A-3 0249, which flew with the nation's Navy as late as July 1955.

In late May 1945 the German warship *Prinz Eugen* was escorted by the Royal Navy to Wilhelmshaven and it was allocated to the USA as a war prize. It cruised to the USA, arriving in January 1946. On board were a pair of Ar 196A-5s, 623167 'T3+BH' and 623183 'T3+CH' of 1/196. The former is stored by the National Air and Space Museum, Washington DC, the latter went on to the Marinefliegermuseum Aeronauticum at Nordholz, Germany, from the US National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, Florida.



Above right *Ar 196A-2 'T3+HH' of 1/196. Note the fixed MG 17 machine gun below the cockpit.*

Right *Pre-production Ar 196A-0 2586 D-IYFS being lifted off the warship 'Gneisenau' in 1939.*

The following day, *Seal* was spotted and attacked by two Ar 196s of 5/196 commanded by Lt zur See Günther Mehrens and Lt zur See Karl-Ernst Schmidt and an He 115 twin-engined floatplane of 1/906. Unable to submerge, with no effective means of defending itself and wounded crew, the vessel's commander, Lt Cdr Rupert Lonsdale, had no option but to surrender.

Channel combat

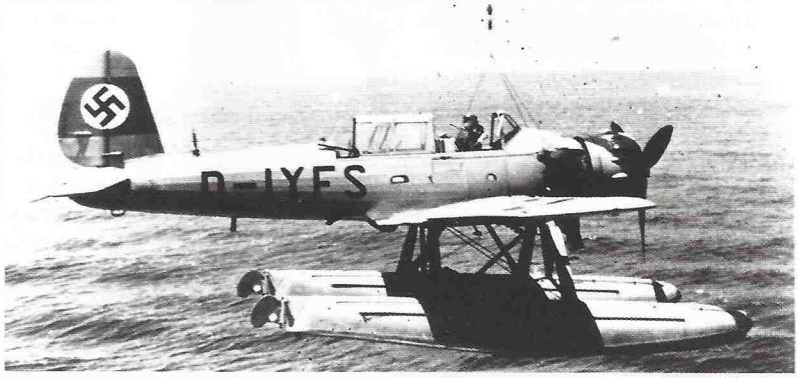
Following the fall of France, 5/196 moved to Cherbourg and in April 1941 to Brest-Hourtin, where it remained until mid-1943. It was inevitable that there would be clashes with the RAF and on August 15, Hptm Gerrit Wiegmink staffel kapitän (commanding officer) of 1/196 and Lt zur See Dieter Schlenker were reported as being shot down in the Channel in Ar 196A-2 0068 'T3+DH'. The only RAF floatplane claim was for a He 115 off Deal at 1710hrs by Spitfire pilots of 266 Squadron.

Wiegmink survived, but Schlenker was killed. The former reported that they had shot down one and damaged another Spitfire. Sgt Fred Hawley was shot down and reported missing in this combat.

Hptm Karl Thewaldt, staffel kapitän of 5/196 in Ar 196A-2 0088 '6W+FN' was downed by two Hurricanes of 145 Squadron flown by Flt Lt Adrian Boyd and Fg Off Dudley Honor south of the Isle of Wight on October 12. Thewaldt and his pilot, Uffz Willi Kottwitz, were killed.

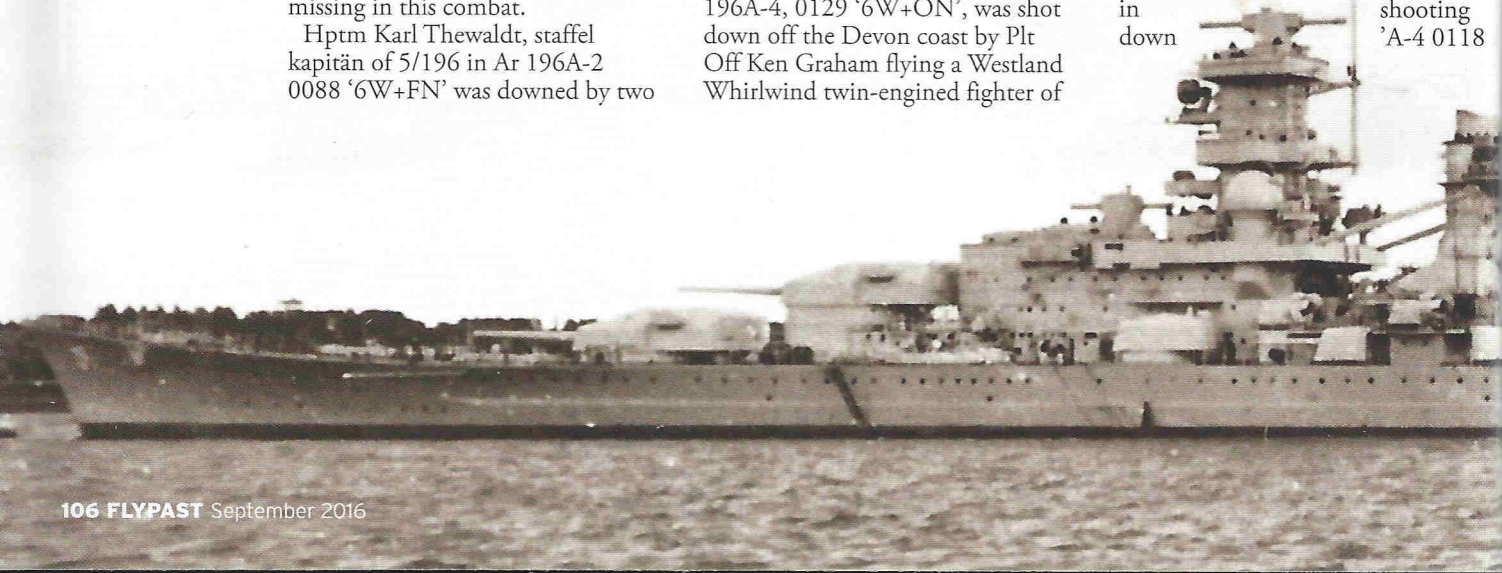
The first Ar 196 combat loss of 1941 also resulted in a victory. New 5/196 staffel kapitän, Hptm Adolf Berger, and Lt zur See Hans Erich Hirtz strayed too close to the British coastline on February 8. Their Ar 196A-4, 0129 '6W+ON', was shot down off the Devon coast by Plt Off Ken Graham flying a Westland Whirlwind twin-engined fighter of 263 Squadron. The Ar 196 gave as good as it got and Graham was also killed in the combat.

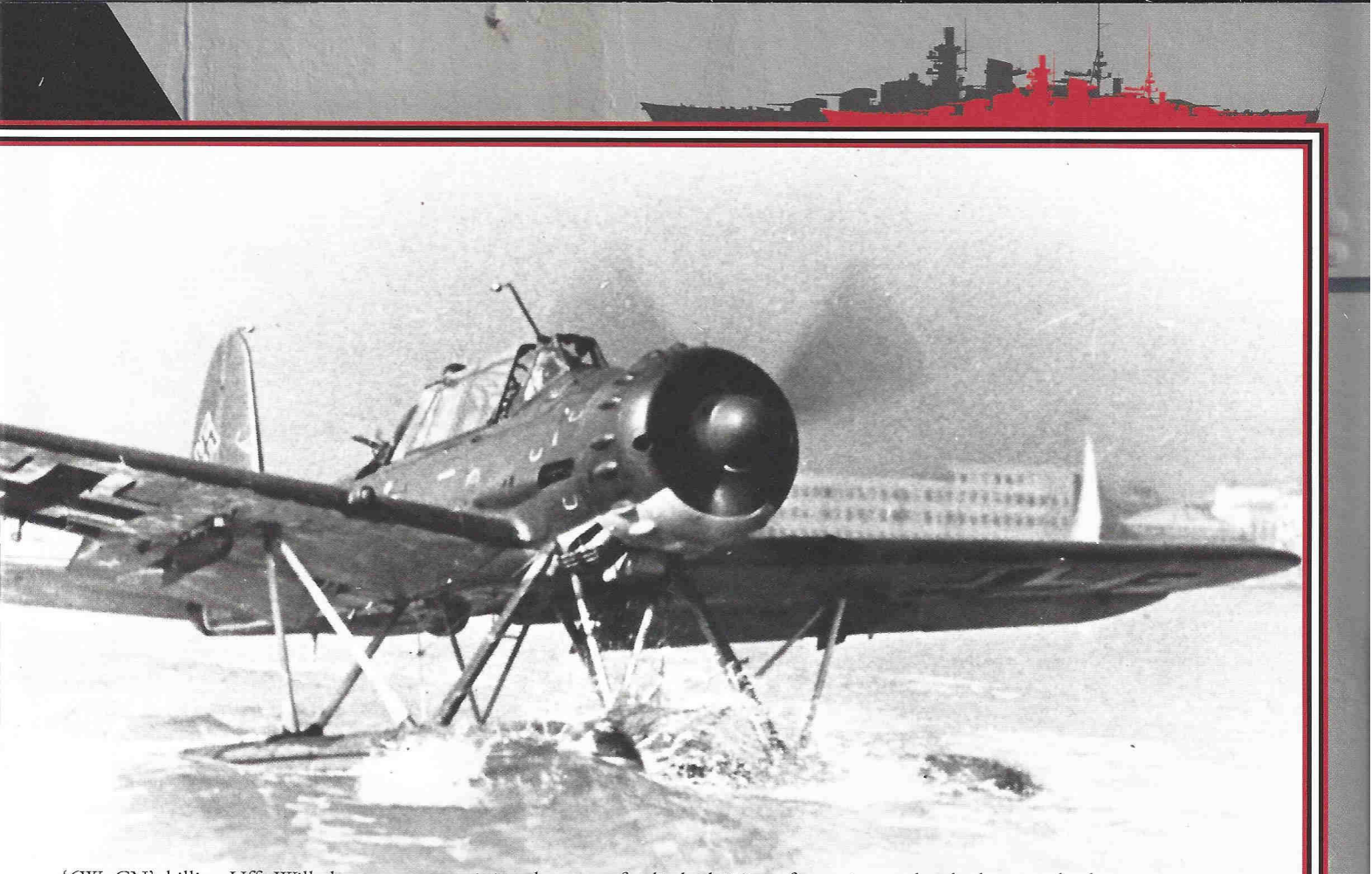
"There were hits in the mid-upper turret and the rear gunner was put out of action. ...The flames worked through the fuselage, a part of it was engulfed in flames, the Sunderland ditched"



Bay of Biscay

Captaining a Sunderland of 10 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), Flt Lt Gilbert Thurston was engaged by a pair of Ar 196s of 5/196 at 20:45 on June 5, 1941. Down at sea-level the flying-boat's gunners succeeded in shooting down 'A-4 0118





'6W+CN', killing Uffz Wilhelm Kreis and observer Lt zur See Hans-Heinrich Filter.

Staged over the Bay of Biscay, west of France, this combat was a sign of things to come. With the U-boat war escalating, the RAF began to commit more aircraft to anti-submarine patrols of the area.

Countering this threat were the agile Ar 196s of 5/196. Under the command of Hptm Werner Techam his crews enjoyed successes over the Bay of Biscay.

Bearing in mind that the staffel was not particularly good at listing all its combats, the first 'kill' recorded was between an Oberfeldwebel named only as 'D' and Sunderland W3999 of 10 Squadron RAAF captained by Flt Lt Maurice Judell on June 21, 1942. Together with AW Whitley V Z9442 of 58 Squadron, Judell was looking for a dinghy containing the crew of a ditched 172 Squadron Vickers Wellington.

The German report reads as follows: "Low-level flying, suddenly, about 20m above them, a Sunderland, escorted by a Whitley. 'D' rapidly closed in, followed the flying boat and opened fire at a short distance. There were hits in the mid-upper turret and the rear gunner was put out of action.

"But the Arado also received hits in fuselage and wings and the MG FF cannon stopped. Once more 'D' fired with the remaining machine guns. A jet of flame at the rear end of the Sunderland's fuselage. 'D' turned away and climbed.

"The flames worked through the fuselage, a part of it was engulfed in flames, the Sunderland ditched. The Whitley turned away. A huge plume of smoke, a 200m high fountain of smoke and debris. A big oil spot and drifting aircraft parts.

"The Whitley jettisoned bombs and with full speed set course direction home. 'D' followed it for four minutes, but had to turn back because of lack of fuel. Twenty-eight hits in the Arado 196."

Rising score

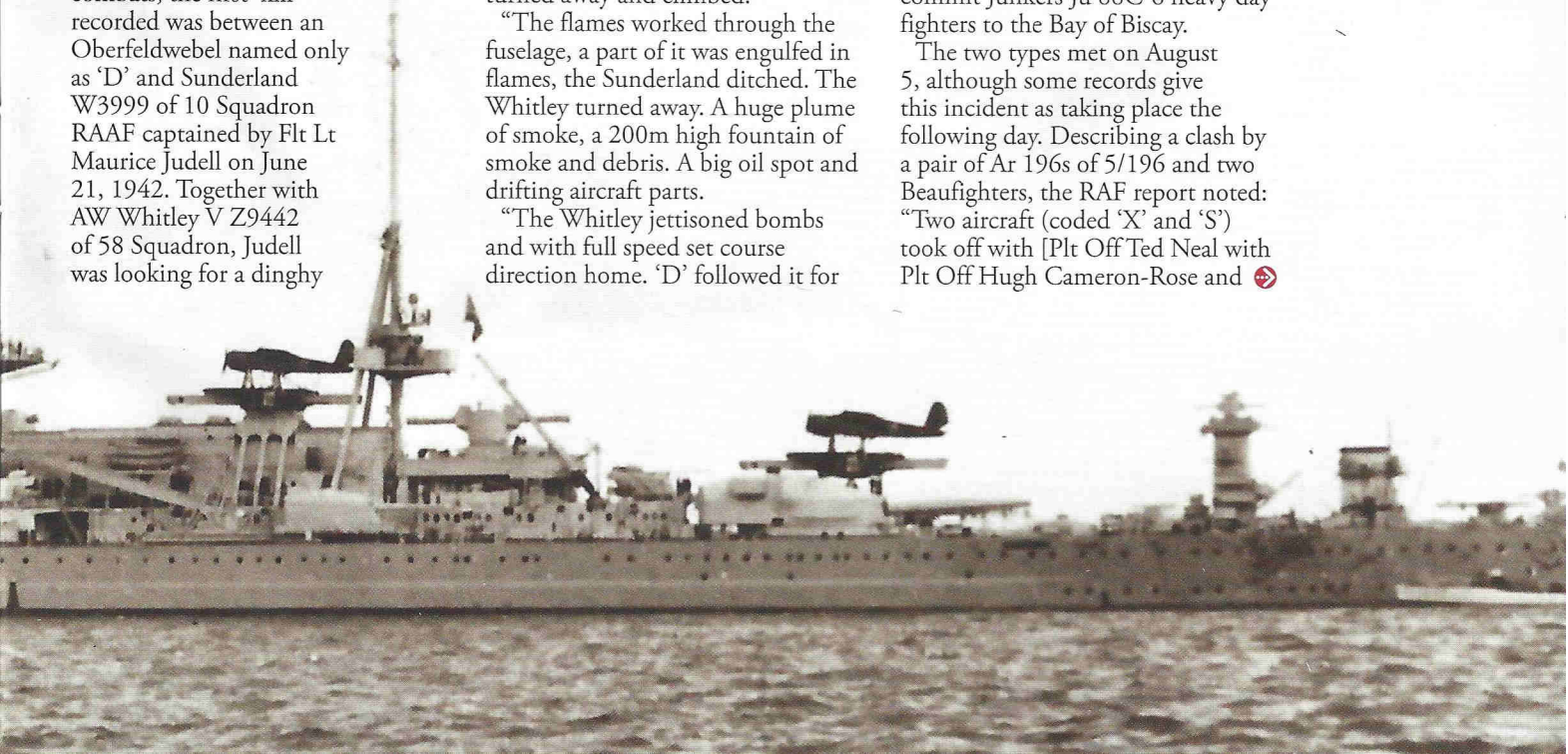
Obfw Friedrich Jost shot down a Whitley of 51 Squadron on July 12, 1942 and two days later Techam despatched a Consolidated Catalina of 119 Squadron. By the end of 1942, it is believed that 5/196 had probably accounted for at least one Wellington, three Whitleys, one Catalina and three Sunderlands.

Such losses made the RAF task more Bristol Beaufighters for fighter protection, forcing the Germans to commit Junkers Ju 88C-6 heavy day fighters to the Bay of Biscay.

The two types met on August 5, although some records give this incident as taking place the following day. Describing a clash by a pair of Ar 196s of 5/196 and two Beaufighters, the RAF report noted: "Two aircraft (coded 'X' and 'S') took off with [Plt Off Ted Neal with Plt Off Hugh Cameron-Rose and

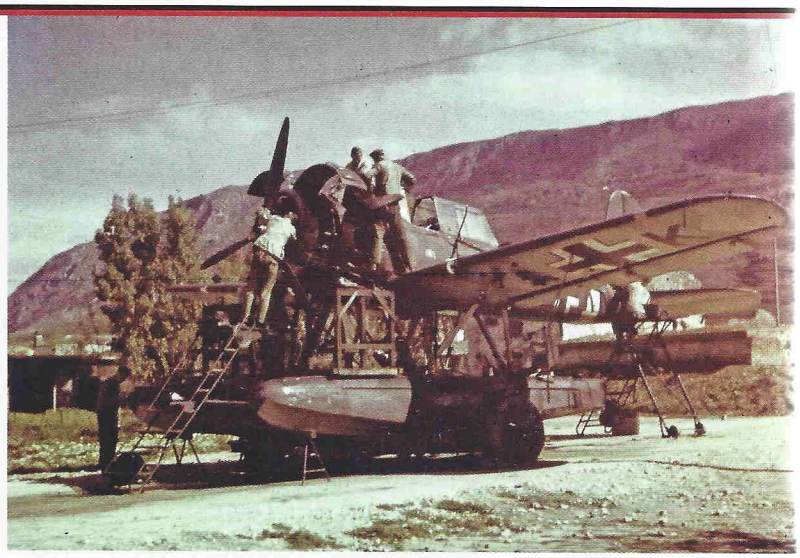
Above
With underwing bombs, an Ar 196A-3 or 'A-4 in the Mediterranean.

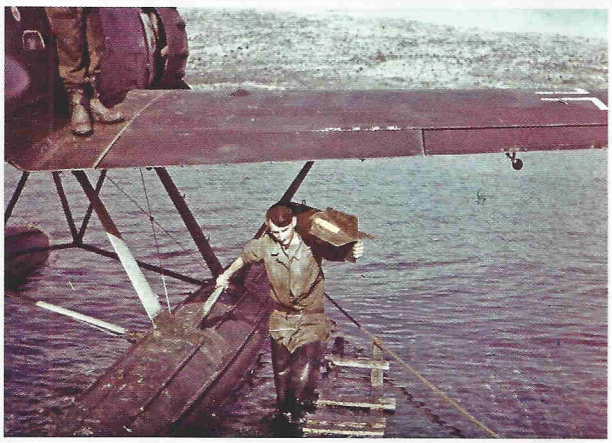
Below
The 'Scharnhorst' in 1939 with two Ar 196s mounted on their catapults. A Deutschland-class pocket battleship can be seen far right.

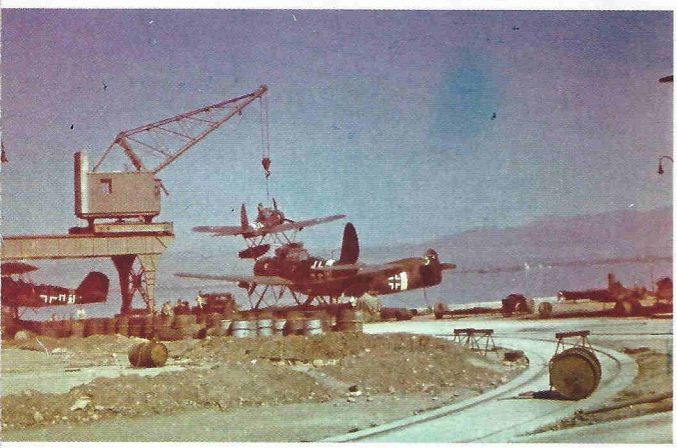


A CENTURY FOR *TIRPITZ*

This aircraft was specially painted for the 100th catapult launch of an Ar 196 from the warship *Tirpitz*. Pilot for the event was Uffz Meissner with observer Lt zur See Wilhelm Rosenbaum.







"It went down and hit the sea with a big splash. As it was going down, the rear gunner was still firing at us, well wide of the mark, but we did admire his courage..."

Sgt George Woodcock with Sgt Bill Ginger] on a search for Arados. Two Ar 196s were sighted at six miles distance from a patrol line flying at 2,500ft. 'X' and 'S' were flying in line formation, 'X' leading.

"Plt Off Neal altered course to starboard and made a beam attack and in two minutes, one Ar 196 went straight into the sea. Meanwhile second Ar 196 was attacked by 'S' but enemy aircraft was lost to view in haze but was picked up again and over 20 attacks were delivered during which lumps were shot off it.

"[A total of] 900 rounds from cannon and 12,000 rounds of 0.303 were expended and only when ammo was exhausted was the Arado allowed to go limping home with its rear gun pointing skywards as if the rear gunner had no further interest..."

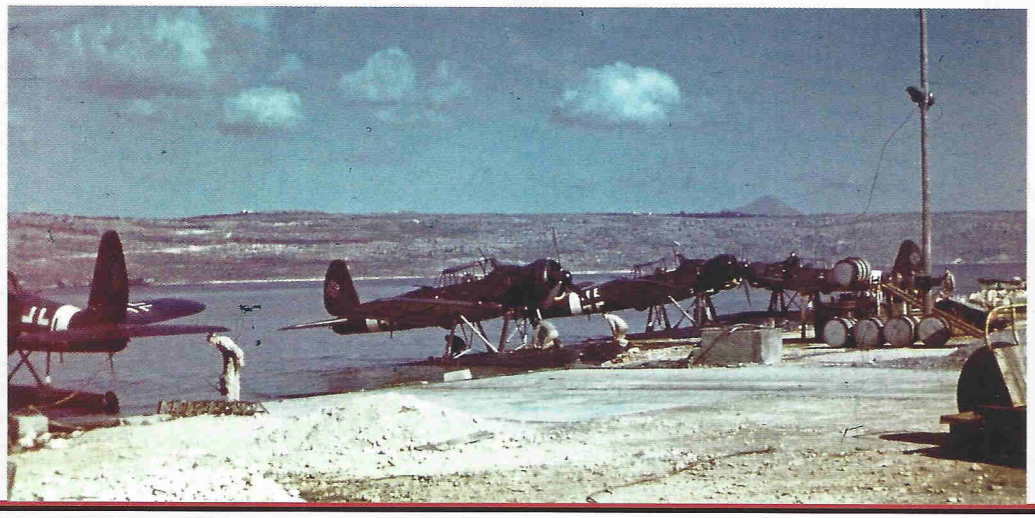
The loss of Ar 196A-3 0162 was reported by 5/196, along with the deaths of Obfw Anton Jox and Fw Hermann Krüger.

It soon became clear that the Bay of Biscay was no longer a healthy place for Ar 196s. With just one confirmed kill in the first six months of 1943 – a Douglas Boston of 226 Squadron shot down by Oblt Heinz Wurm – Ar 196s were gradually replaced by Focke-Wulf Fw 190As.

Caught on the water

In addition to 1/196 and 5/196, Arado floatplanes served predominantly with 2/Aufklärungsgruppe 125 (See) which was formed in the spring of 1941. (Aufklärungs reconnaissance.) This unit operated over the Baltic before moving to the Mediterranean after which it became part of Seeaufklärungsgruppe 126 in 1943.

Four Ar 196s of SAGr 126 were tasked to escort the patrol boat S511 on December 4, 1943 while



it searched for aircrew reported in a dinghy. The quartet, including Uffz Karl Steinbrecher in Ar 196A-3 1015 'D1+MK' of 2/126, sighted S511 as it headed towards Leros in the Aegean Sea.

Just short of the island, the engine on Steinbrecher's floatplane failed and he was forced to alight: "The beobachter, Lt Eberhard Ahrends, radioed our position and because of the heavy swell which was breaking over the Arado's floats, I stripped to my underpants and jumped in and was able to fasten the drag anchor.

"At this very moment, we were attacked by four Beaufighters. I tried hiding behind the radial engine and after I had managed to get my lifejacket and trousers on again, I was hit in my left leg by shell splinters. Then we climbed into our dinghy and the aircraft sank…"

The attacker was Sgt Bob Willis of 47 Squadron. After attacking Steinbrecher's Arado, Willis set his sights on Ar 196A-3 0306 'D1+KL' of 3/126, crewed by Obfw Walter Schindler and observer Obfw Otto Albrecht.

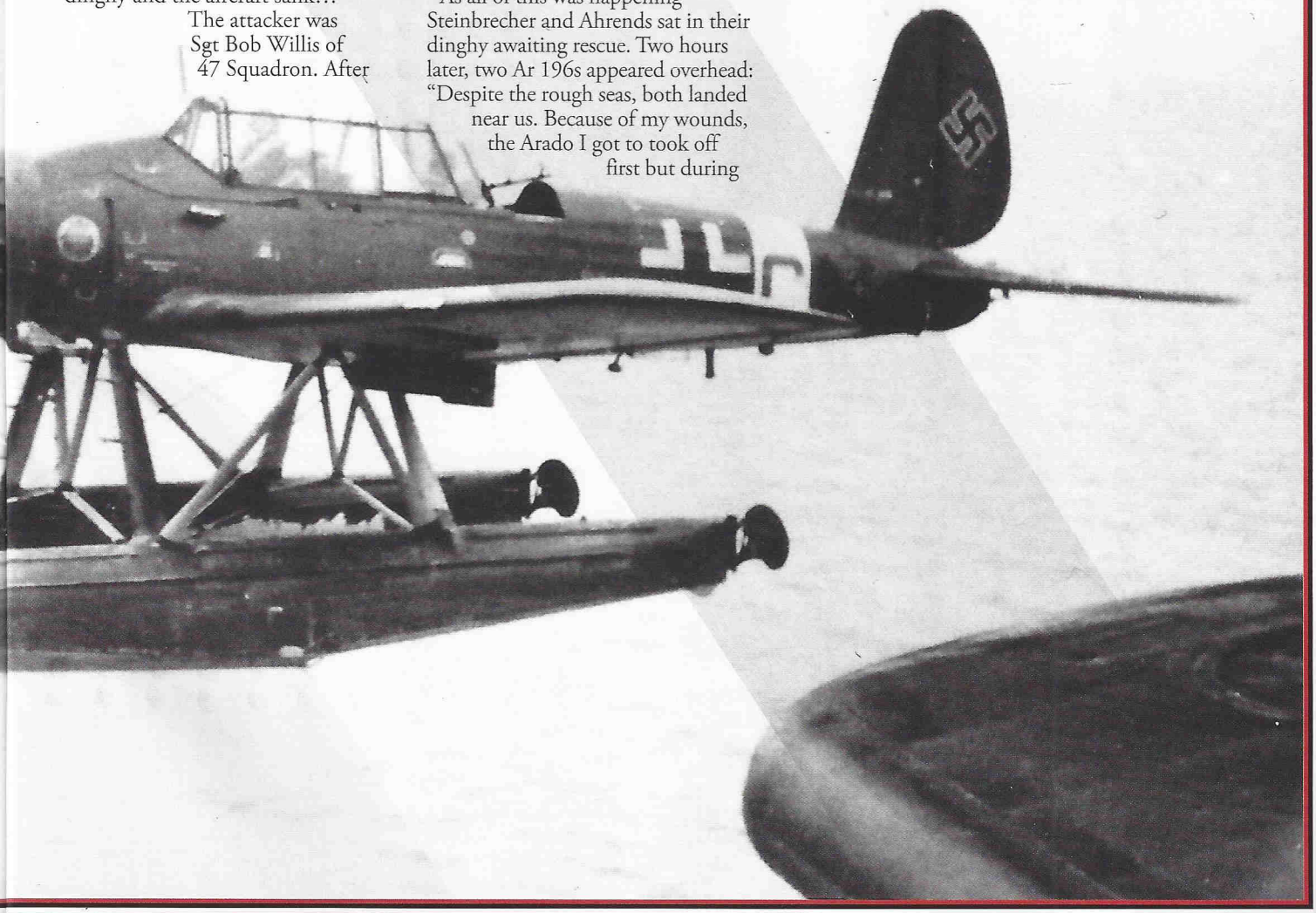
Willis reported: "Climbing at full throttle, I made a quarter turn attack. I shot off the support of one of his floats which, as it was hanging down, made the aircraft unflyable. It went down and hit the sea with a big splash. As it was going down, the rear gunner was still firing at us, well wide of the mark, but we did admire his courage…"

With two Ar 196s destroyed, the Beaufighters spotted S511 which they promptly attacked, leaving it damaged and stationary on the water with two of its crew dead.

As all of this was happening Steinbrecher and Ahrends sat in their dinghy awaiting rescue. Two hours later, two Ar 196s appeared overhead: "Despite the rough seas, both landed near us. Because of my wounds, the Arado I got to took off first but during the take-off, the rough seas damaged the flaps which is why the second aircraft decided to taxi back to Leros on the sea."

That Arado, 'A-3 0302 'D1+BN' of 4/126, rescued Ahrends. Piloted by Uffz Hubert Thurner with observer Lt Friedrich Brunswig, slowly water taxiing its way to Leos, the Arado was exposed and very vulnerable.

Four Beaufighters of 252 Squadron heading for Leros spotted the floatplane. Steinbrecher: "Just before ['D1+BN'] reached Leros, they were again attacked and the aircraft exploded [along with] my beobachter." All three on board perished in the waters of the Aegean.



Clockwise from bottom left
Moored Ar 196s of 4/126 at Suda Bay, Crete, 1943-1944.

Skaramanga, Greece, in 1942. Visible are a Heinkel He 60, two Ar 196As of 2/125 and a Fokker T.VIIIW.

Removing a 110lb bomb from an Ar 196A of 2/125, Crete 1943.

Working on a beached Ar 196A of 2/125.

Ar 196s of 4/126 photographed from a Dornier Do 24. ALL CHRIS GOSS COLLECTION