

# GERMAN AIR RAIDS ON GREAT BRITAIN

9000 German bombs were dropped in 51 airship and 52 aeroplane attacks on London, killing 670 and injuring 1962.

In 1916 extra air defences were set up to form an outer ring of 40 miles round London.

**Crockenhill was one of the sites between Southfleet in the north and Purley to the west.**

On 20 February 1916 an **anti-aircraft gun was stationed at Wested on what is now Crockenhill Football Gound**, and a **searchlight installed at Harvestfield.**

The searchlights were to work with the planes from 7 control centres connected by phone to the HQ of the Home Forces.

**A landing field at Farningham** had a pilot detailed daily for night duty in the event of a raid. Each station sent up its aeroplane at 2-hour intervals to patrol the line, making it a better aerial shield for London.

The new system was tested on 2 September 1916 when 16 Zeppelins swooped on London.

## GERMAN AIR RAIDS ON GREAT BRITAIN

Site of searchlight station at  
Harvestfield, Crockenhill



Top SE corner of allotment track, looking towards Highcroft Hall boundary. The searchlight was sited on concrete on the inner part of the corner here.



## **GERMAN AIR RAIDS - NUISANCE OF THE SOLDIERS MANNING THE SEARCHLIGHT STATION, CROCKENHILL**



### **Eynsford Parish Council Minutes**

12 June 1917

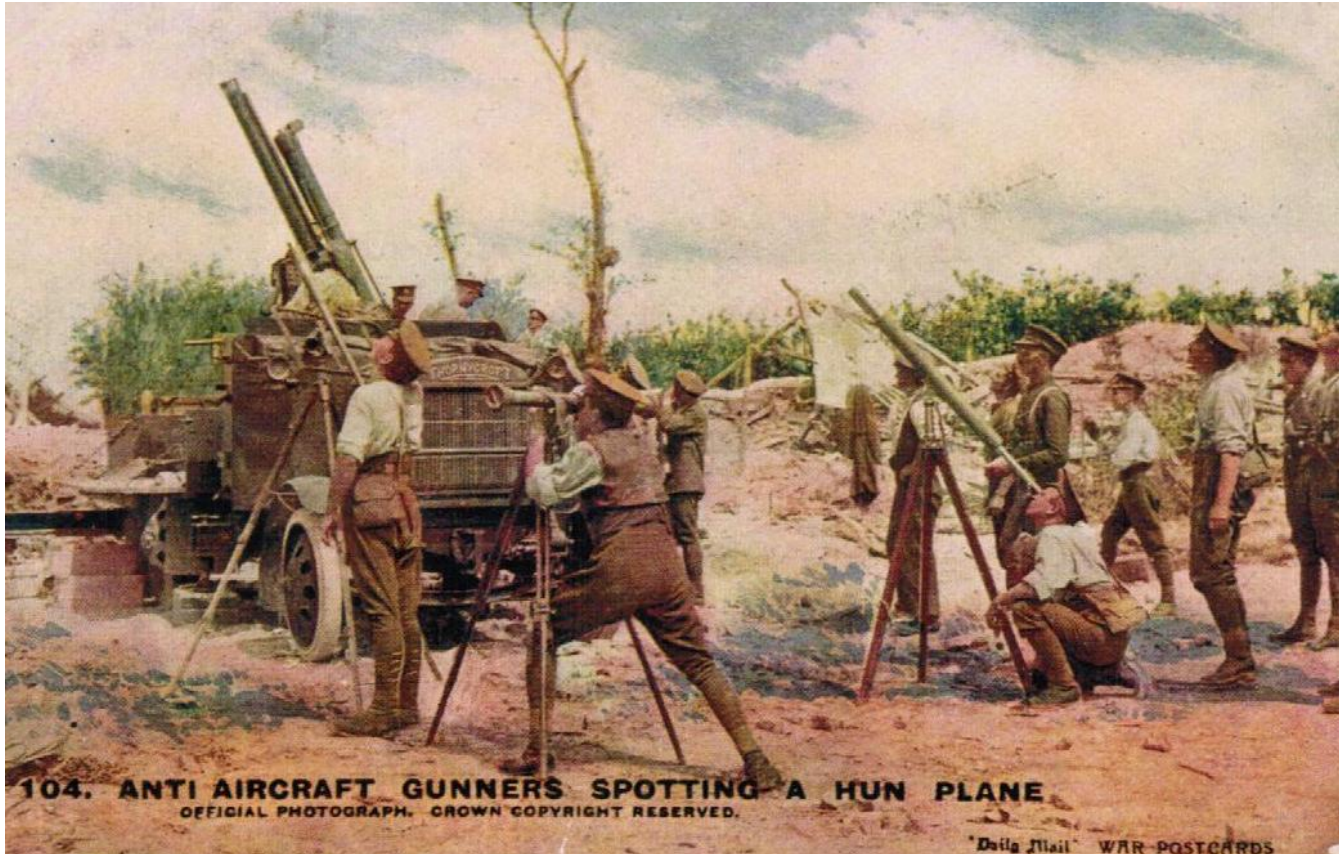
Dogs belonging to the soldiers stationed at the searchlight had been running over and damaging crops on the allotments. The nuisance continued even though the soldiers had been spoken to on several occasions.

14 August 1917

The soldiers at the searchlight station had continued to trespass on the allotments. The Woolwich Authorities were contacted to ask what the approved footpath to the searchlight was. A reply was received in October, but its contents were not reported in the Minutes.

Searchlight, formerly at Manston airfield, Kent. A similar searchlight, sited at Harvestfield, was manned by a Royal Artillery party from Woolwich

## GERMAN AIR RAIDS - ANTI-AIRCRAFT POST



Official postcard of an anti-aircraft lorry-mounted gun post, perhaps like the one sited at Wested, issued by the Daily Mail.

The guns were able to fill the sky with enough bursting shrapnel to keep the raiders hovering on the fringes of London – the killing zone of the British fighters.

They fired 15 rounds a minute to a maximum vertical range of 18,000 feet.

The 3-inch quick firing gun was either in a fixed position, or mounted on a lorry.





## Elsie Clements noted 36 occasions when Zeppelins and German aeroplane raiders passed over Crockenhill (1)

The first air raid of the war was on Dover on 21 December 1914, and the first Zeppelin raid in January 1915, with the first attack on London on 31 May.

Comments in bold are how Elsie's observations fitted in with aerial attacks overall. These have been taken mainly from Brian Hussey's notes from the official history of 6 volumes, *The War in the Air* by H.A. Jones and Sir Walter Raleigh, and Susan Pittman's notes from *The 'Baby Killers'* by Thomas Fegan, published 2002, in Swanley Library.

### 1914

**25 December 1st bomb fell on British soil on Dover**

### 1915

**19 January 1st Zepp. raid, Great Yarmouth**

**31 May, 1st Zepp. raid on London, 2 killed**

9 September Up nearly all night, Zeppelins dropping bombs near.

**Zeppelin L13 dropped bombs over Holborn, 22 killed, and Bloomsbury. Damage of over £500,000 highest for any single raid of the war**

14 October Trains stopped running because of the Zeppelins. Aleck saw 2 at Swanley station.

**This was a very heavy raid by 5 airships on London, killing 71 and injuring 128. Inns of Court, Holborn, struck. Zepp. L15 bombed Strand and Aldwych, killing 17. Woolwich Arsenal hit by L13, killing 13. 18 bombs on Croydon**

27 October Zeppelins about

31 October Heard Zeppelins just before 9 pm

## Elsie Clements' diary (2)

### 1916

20 February Anti-aircraft gun installed at Wested: Searchlight on Harvestfield

24 August Zepps over early morning. Elsie watched searchlights on a Zepp as it came down the Thames.

**13 Zepps took off, bad weather only L31 reached London, 9 killed**

3 September Had news that a Zepp had been brought down in flames at Enfield at 2 am. Did not hear anything but others watched it. Papers said 13 Zepps were in the raid.

**Many Zepps. 1st to reach London dropped bombs at Tilbury.**

**William Leefe Robinson, 1st airman to attack and shoot down Zepp by plane, awarded V.C. (See separate sheet about his stay in Farningham)**

**24 September Raid on Crockenhill (see separate sheet)**

1 October Just before 12 o'clock heard shouting and clapping, another airship had been brought down.

**This was Zepp L31 at Potters Bar**

28 November 2 Zepps brought down early morning

**Zepp L34 at Hartlepool and L21 off Lowestoft**

In the latter part of 1916, British planes able to shoot airships down with explosive incendiary bullets, which broke through the outer casing of the gas cells, enabling an alternate phosphorous bullet to ignite the escaping hydrogen. 5 airships were soon brought down by planes, and Zeppelins were gradually replaced with more twin-

### Elsie Clements' diary (3)

engined bombers, called Gothas. Elsie stopped using the word 'Zeppelin' after May 1917, and mentioned aeroplanes more often.

#### 1917

- 24 March Aleck on duty as Zepps were on their way, home before 9, Zepps had turned back.
- 25 May Dreadful noise at 4.14 am . Squadron of aeroplanes and 2 zepps. Much damage at Folkestone and Ashford and killed a lot of people.  
**1st Gotha raid intended for London. 21 Gothas attacked Folkestone, 95 killed, 195 injured.**
- 5 June Air raid. Aleck on duty.  
**Sheerness bombed, 13 killed**
- 13 June Air raid on London 11.30 am.  
**1st daylight raid on London. 3 bombs from Gothas fell on Liverpool Street Station, 13 killed. 18 children killed in Poplar school. Total 162 killed, worst of any raid.**
- 14 June Another air raid expected  
**4 Zepps took off but only two reached the coast**
- 7 July Air raid on London at 11 o'clock in the morning. Large number of planes could be seen from here. Bernard came in at 11.30 had seen a lot of aeroplanes. Beryl set to watch and let Elsie know directly Aleck was in sight. He came home safe enough. Had been to Brixton with Arthur and saw some of the raiders. Aleck to work after dinnner. Came home with Arthur with news that Per(cy Clements) had phoned Archibald Lee that two of his girls could not be found and the building where one worked had been burned down. So Aleck and Arthur caught train soon after and went to Woodside (near Croydon). Found girls home safe after narrow escape.  
**2nd daylight raid on London by 21 Gothas, 1 brought down. 54 deaths. City heavily bombed.**



## Elsie Clements' diary (4)

1917

22 July

Air raid at 8.30 am.

**This raid was over Felixstowe and Harwich**

12 August

Aleck was called out on special duty at 6 o'clock for expected air raid.

**1st night raid by Gothas. Raid on Southend-on-Sea by 12 Gothas, over 30 killed.**

5 September

Aleck called out just before 12 o'clock at night. Aeroplane went over and our gun fired for the first time. **1st night raid on London by 10 Gothas, 3 killed by bomb near**

**Cleopatra's needle.**

24 September

Aleck called out at 1 o'clock. Air raid. Heard Chislehurst gun fire.

**3 Gothas bombed London, bomb hit Bedford Hotel, Bloomsbury, killing 13. 7 killed in Piccadilly Circus. Dozens more killed in Camberwell and Lewisham**

28 September

Someone calling at the gate for Aleck to go on duty as there was an air raid.

**27 planes but bad weather so only 3 pressed home the attack**

29 September

Air raid at night. Aeroplanes over and guns firing

**4 planes reached London, 14 killed**

1 October

Air raid again

**8 planes reached London, 11 killed, 38 bombs fell in Kent**

2 October      Another air raid



## Elsie Clements' diary (5)

### 1917

1 November A lot of firing from our guns. Some bombs had been dropped at Speedgate.

**Crockenhill Church of England School log – air raid throughout last night, many children absent**

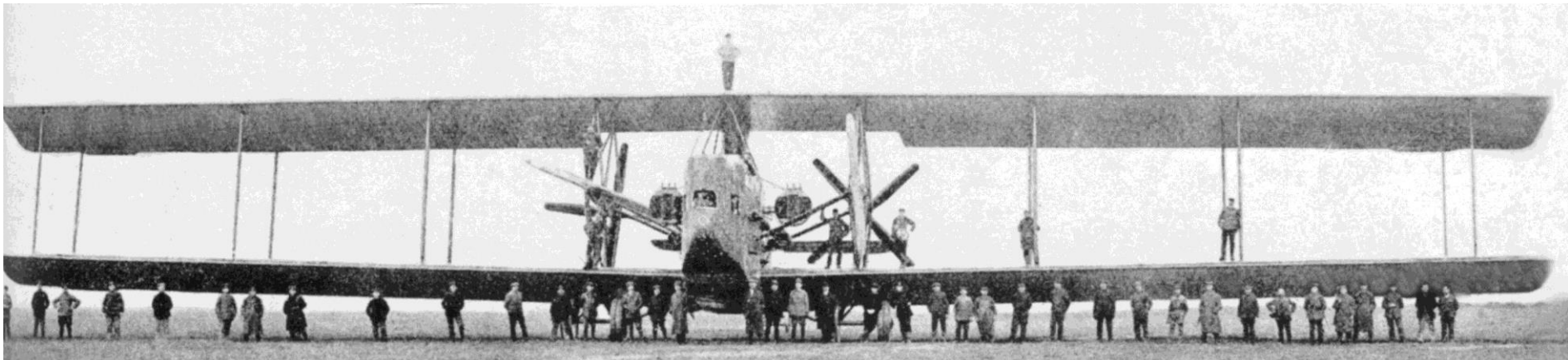
### **31 October/ 1 November - Major raid (see Farningham Air Raids sheet)**

5 December Had no more sleep after 2.30 am as there was an air raid.

6 December Our gun fired soon after 4.30 am, watched a German aeroplane with our searchlight on it and the shells going for it.

**6 Gothas attacked London, 1 brought down near Canterbury on way back. 8 killed**

18 December Air raid just as children were going to bed. Watched shells bursting near an aeroplane.  
**Raid on London, Kent and Essex. 14 killed. 15 Gothas and giant aeroplane, R12's 1st APPEARANCE OVER GB**



This is an R8, similar to R12, wingspan 157 feet, half as much again as a Lancaster bomber of the Second World War. The plane was so complicated to build that only 18 were completed.

## Elsie Clements' diary (6)

1918

- 28 January Air raid in the evening. 2nd one early morning.  
**3 Gothas and one giant attacked London, Thanet and Sheerness. 65 killed. Most casualties caused by single bomb from the giant on London. Odhams Printing Works, Covent Garden, struck, basement sheltering 500. 38 killed, 85 seriously hurt. 1st Gotha shot down on land by British planes over Essex.**
- 29 January Air raid after we got to bed. Our gun fired over 40 times.  
**Raid by 3 giants, one attacked west London, 10 killed. On the return of one it was attacked by a fighter over Gravesend. It was probably just before this that the Crockenhill gun opened fire.**
- 13 February Arthur off to Carrick Bridge. Heavy explosion at Purfleet.
- 16 February Bernard missing. Also Beryl. Lex lost his season ticket. Will Croucher here with Basil at 7 o'clock. Stayed till 10.10 and hurried off as we could hear guns and there was an air raid on. Lex stayed up till 12.30 all clear.  
**4 giant R12s attacked London, Dover and Beckenham. Zepp Giant R39 dropped 1st 1000 Kg bomb, largest bomb of the war, on Royal Hospital, Chelsea. Bombs on Woolwich Arsenal killed 2.**
- 17 February Aleck's uncle Dick came in on way to station. About 11 o'clock we got up as our gun and others around were making a bit of fuss and noise.  
**Lone giant R25 raided London. Bomb hit St. Pancras Station, 21 killed**
- 18 February Guns started to bark again at 9 o'clock.  
**No German planes, but warning was issued after Calais was bombed. Our planes went up on patrol and were reported as German, 4000 rounds fired by the AA guns.**
- 19 February Mrs East doing washing 9.15 left 3 o'clock. Would not stop for any dinner. Guns firing during evening.



## **Elsie Clements' diary (7)**

**1918**

7 March

Air raid for an hour.

**Moonless night – Germans couldn't find their way, and defenders couldn't find the Germans! 3 giants reached London, one R39 dropped 2nd 1000 Kg bomb on Maida Vale, 12 killed, 400 houses damaged**

5,6 August

**Last air raid attack. Attacks ceased mainly due to German resources needed on Front though home defence more effective**

## **ZEPPELIN L32 ATTACK ON CROCKENHILL, 24 SEPTEMBER 1916**

### **Based on account in Elsie Clements' Diary**

Heard a funny noise at 1.45\* a.m. Asked Aleck (Alexander, her husband) what it was, but could tell it was a Zepp travelling near. It dropped 5 bombs and a torpedo. It appeared to be after the searchlight, which was near Highcroft Hall, where a quantity of glass was broken.

The torpedo fell in Lee's orchard at Deepshades, where about 200 fruit trees were destroyed. It made an immense hole, large enough to bury a horse and cart in. Soon after we heard clapping and cheering, and heard that the Zepp that had passed over had been brought down in flames at Billericay, the crew being dead.

One bomb dropped in Aleck's field just above Gosenhill", but he had no idea until he was told at 11 o'clock. Later he collected the fuse and pieces of bomb from the hole.

The whole family went at about 3.30 p.m. to visit the hole in Lee's field. Thousands went during the day and a collection was made for the Cray Valley Hospital and the Red Cross. Syd Everest found a propeller off the torpedo.

\* Discrepancy with time since L32 shot down over Essex at 1.10 a.m. Perhaps Elsie forgot new Summer time, making it 12.45 a.m. \*\* Official accounts of the raid mention time 12.50 pm and 7 bombs, but no torpedo (see separate sheet about this). "Cook's field towards Wested Cottage.

"

## ZEPPELIN L32 ATTACK ON CROCKENHILL, 24 SEPTEMBER 1916



Deepshades - the site of the Zeppelin bomb explosion. This photograph was taken from the edge of Harvestfield, where the searchlight was stationed, looking across Deepshades towards Wested, where the anti-aircraft gun was sited just beyond Cacket's Hill Wood on the skyline, 12 April 2012



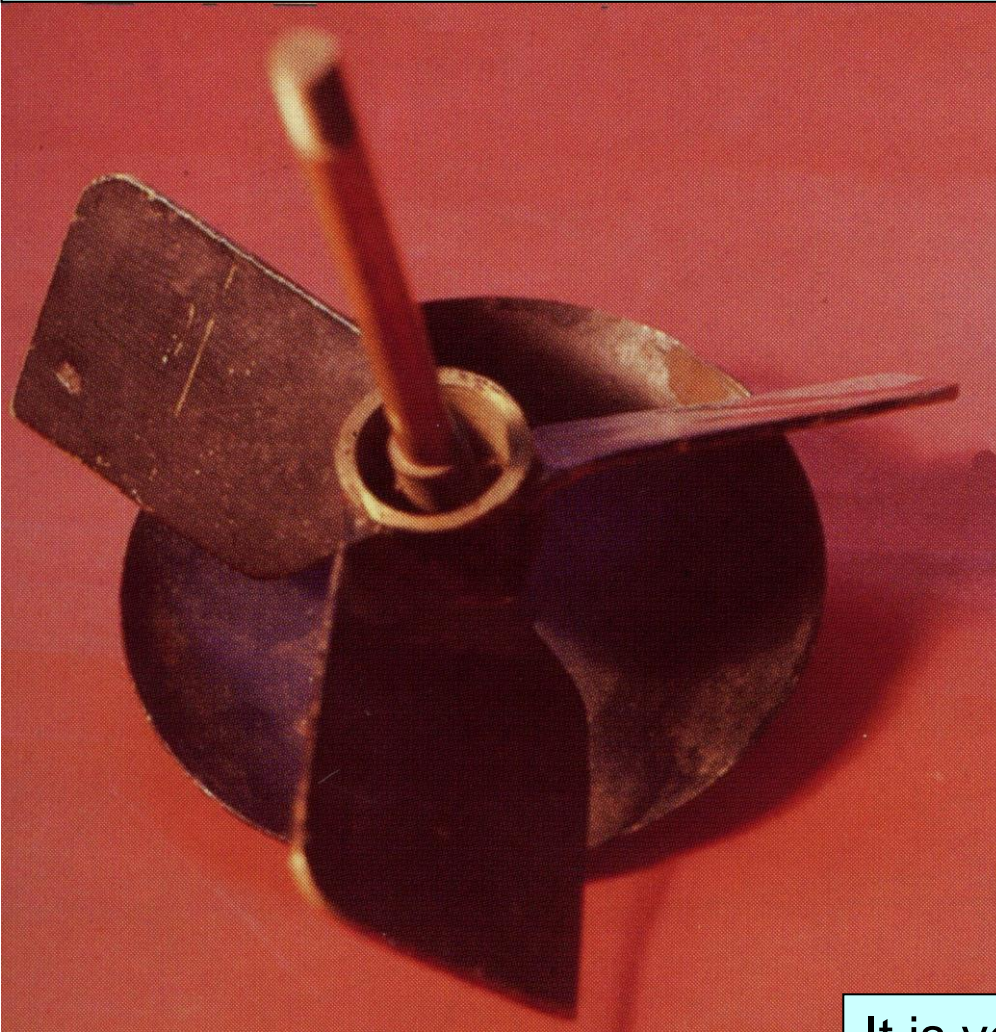
## **PROPELLER found after L32 Zeppelin raid on Crockenhill**

Syd Everest found a 'propeller', thought to be from a torpedo, after the air raid of 24 September 1916.

However, it was impossible for a Zeppelin to release a torpedo when under attack.

Brian Hussey believes that the 'propeller', formed a tail fuse at the end of a 'carbonit' or carbonite bomb. As the bomb fell, the spinning vanes effectively prevented the bomb from exploding before it reached the ground.

In 1916 a new type of high explosive carbonite 'torpedo bomb', designated PuW, was introduced. It was larger, long, and cylindrical, and with the propeller-like tail, looked like naval torpedo.



It is very likely that it was a bomb of this type, which L 32 dropped on Crockenhill.

## ZEPPELIN L32 ATTACK ON CROCKENHILL, 24 SEPTEMBER 1916



Watch bought by Roy Turnage – commemorates the Zepp raid, but why this watch for G. Brooks unknown



## **ZEPPELIN L32**

In August 1916, three 'super Zeppelins' – L30, L31, L32 – were ready. They were more streamlined than earlier airships and were nearly 650 foot long and 78 feet in diameter. Driven by six 240hp engines they were capable of 60 mph and could reach 17,400 feet when unloaded. The Germans were confident that these Zeppelins would win the war for Germany. They were unaware that British airmen had a newly developed secret weapon, the incendiary bullet, which they were keen to try out.



The first raid against London using the 'super Zeppelin' was by L32 on 2/3 September 1916, when it was joined by 15 other airships, which were to attack separately at the same time.



## THE END OF ZEPPELIN L32

On 23/24 September 1916 Zeppelin L32, under the command of Werner Peterson, undertook its second raid, with 11 other airships.

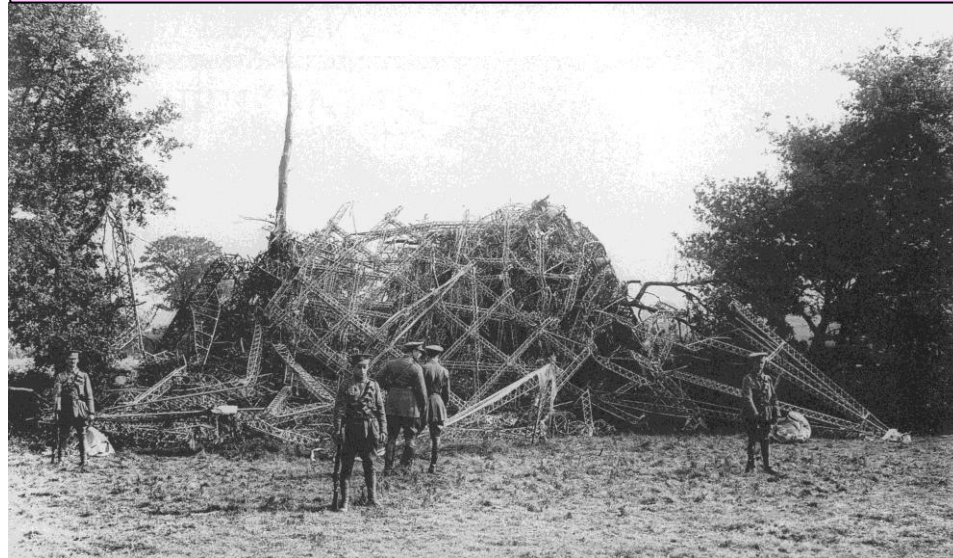
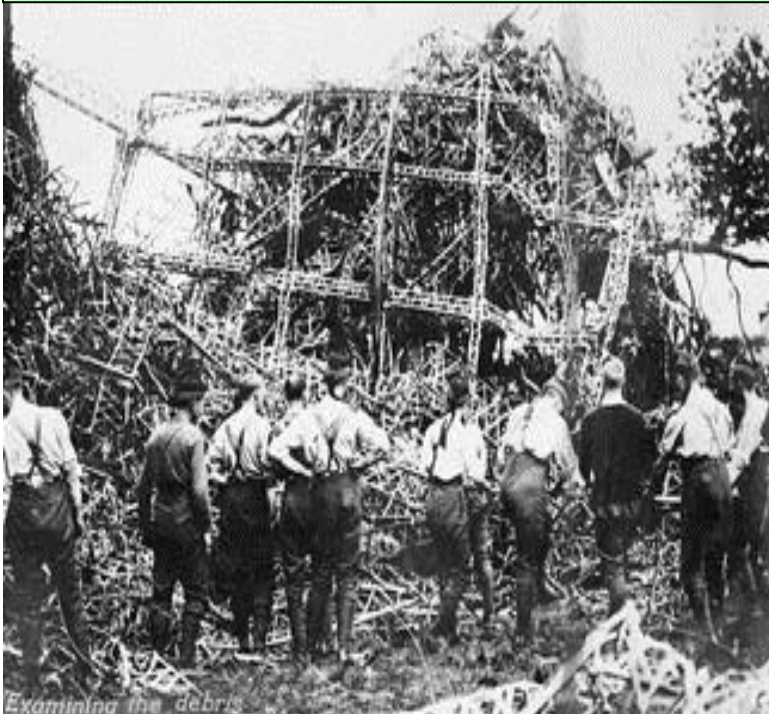
It developed engine problems, so was running late.

It dropped bombs in Sevenoaks and Crockenhill before crossing Purfleet at 1.00 a.m. It was caught in a searchlight at 12.45 a.m. and was hit by incendiary bullets from a British aeroplane.

It was seen from over than 100 miles away.

The airship caught fire and descended to earth, all aboard perishing in the inferno.

The wreckage of L32 lay at Snails Hall Farm, Great Burstead, near Billericay, Essex, and attracted huge crowds the following morning.





## THE END OF ZEPPELIN L32



The pilot of the plane which shot down Zeppelin L32, Second Lieutenant Frederick Sowrey, received the Distinguished Service Order. The German airmen were buried with full military honours at Great Burstead, and later reburied in Cannock Chase German War Cemetery.

*Second Lieutenant Sowrey seated in the BE2c which condemned L32 to death. Imperial War Museum*

