

## ZEPPELIN RAIDS OVER SURREY, 1915 AND 1916

Researched and written by Graham WEBSTER

Inclement weather kept German Navy Zeppelins in their sheds in early October 1915 but on 13th it was considered that conditions were reasonable enough to risk another venture against London. Airships L11, L13, L14, L15, and L16 were assigned to this mission, three from Nordholz and two from Hage in Lower Saxony. They assembled in the afternoon and were soon above a solid overcast at 2600 feet. From Ameland they headed for the coast of Norfolk crossing the coast of at around 1830 hours and headed towards their destination. The first four came inland over Norfolk more or less together with L.11 some distance behind. Helmut MATHY, who was in command, spread his airships for safety and took the lead to London planning to attack from the North. Only one, L15, navigated its way to the target successfully and dropped bombs that caused casualties and panic in the Capital. The popular press of the time made much of the incident, and the attack was dubbed the "Theatreland Raid" due to the death and destruction that was wrought on The Lyceum and Gaiety theatres. The airships in this raid, which 71 killed and 128 injured causing £80,020 damage, with their commanders and their actions were(L11, L13, L15 AND L16; for L14 *see later*):

L11 (Oberleutnant-zur-See Horst, Freiherr Julius Ludwig Otto Treusch von BUTTLAR-BRANDENFELS): This Zeppelin was the last of the raiders to come inland, arriving over the coast near Bacton at about 8.25pm although it got lost.. She followed a south-west course and twenty minutes later arrived over Coltishall. There, L.11 dropped nine HE bombs, two of which failed to explode. The other seven detonated in open fields between Coltishall and Great Hautbois, not far from Coltishall station. The only recorded damage was 'a tin shed partly blown down and a few panes of glass broken'. L.11 also dropped seven incendiary bombs close by which landed near a group of three cottages, but buckets of water quickly applied served to extinguish them. Over Horstead, L.11 dropped four more HE and three incendiary bombs, which all fell in open fields resulting in just seven broken panes of glass. L.11 then continued towards Wroxham where she may have picked up the railway line to Norwich, because as she approached that city at about 9.00pm, a Royal Horse Artillery 15-pdr at Mousehold Heath fired two rounds, convincing her commander to turn east and head towards the coast. She went out to sea near Great Yarmouth at about 9.15pm. On his return to Nordholz von BUTTLAR reported that he had flown up the Thames and bombed West Ham and some docks at Woolwich. He returned to base safely.



Oberleutnant-zur-See Horst, Freiherr Julius Ludwig Otto Treusch von BUTTLAR-BRANDENFELS  
From: Zeppelin and Garrison Museum Tonder

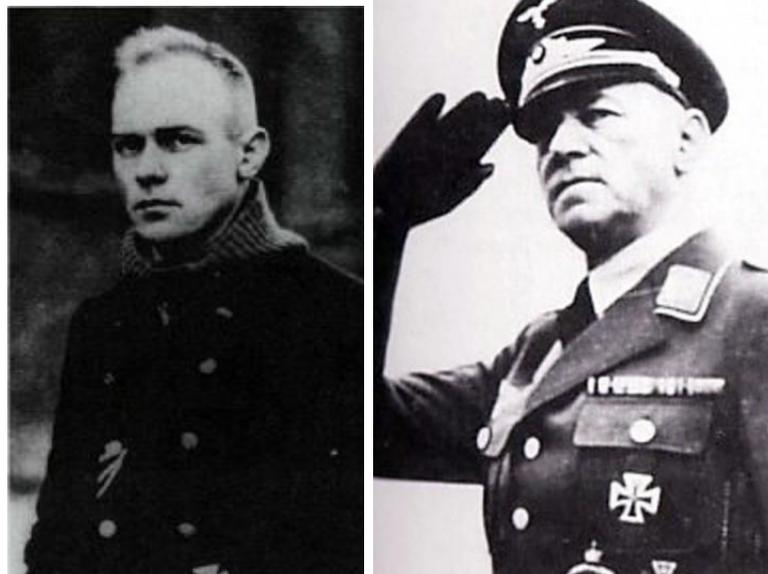
L13 (Kapitänleutnant Helmut MATHY): The Zeppelin came inland at about 6.15pm. She passed Dereham, Newmarket and Hertford then, just after 9.00pm, a 13-pdr gun at Birchwood Farm, a mile north-west of Hatfield opened fire. In reply, L.13 dropped four high explosive (HE) bombs. One landed 70 yards from the gun but only damaged windows in nearby cottages. She continued on her course, passing around the west of London on his way to his target, the waterworks at Hampton, but he missed a bend in the Thames, followed the River Wey, and crossing the Thames at Weybridge at 9.50pm. She passed Guildford at 10.10 heading east, but five minutes later, as she approached Chilworth, the site of a gunpowder factory, a 1-pdr pom-pom opened fire. L.13 turned back towards Guildford and dropped 12 HE bombs over the St. Catherine's area. These damaged railway tracks, caused damage to a number of properties - particularly in Guildown Road and Chestnut Avenue - killed a swan on the River Wey and 17 chickens. Mathy then followed an easterly course away from Guildford, again passing the Chilworth factory, and came perilously close to colliding with L.14 between Bromley and Bickley at about 11.30pm. At 11.45pm, guns at Blackheath and Honor Oak opened fire as L.13 approached Woolwich thinking he was over Victoria Docks. She dropped three HE and 14 incendiary bombs on the artillery barracks, injuring four men, killing a horse and injuring nine others in a stable. Another nine incendiaries landed in the town then, over the Arsenal, L.13 dropped one HE and five incendiary bombs, injuring nine men, one of whom later died. A final HE bomb fell harmlessly on Plumstead marshes. Anti-aircraft guns of various calibres engaged L.13 on a number of occasions before she passed out to sea near Dunwich, Suffolk, at about 2.00am. She got back to her base the next morning after a close call with Dutch guns on the island of Vlieland.



Kapitänleutnant Helmut MATHY  
From: Stories from the Great War

L15 (Kapitanleutnant Joachim BREITHAUPT): From the German point of view the most successful raider that night was this Zeppelin. Its commander was over Britain for the first time. She came inland near Bacton at about 6.25pm and passed Thetford, Bury St. Edmonds, Halstead and Braintree before heading west towards Harlow. At 8.40pm at Broxbourne, south of Hertford, a 13-pdr mobile anti-aircraft gun positioned in Church Fields opened fire with nine rounds. In response, L.15 dropped four high-explosive (HE) bombs, one failed to detonate but the other three landed in close proximity to the gun. The blast blew the gunners off their feet and wrecked a wooden shed as well as a lorry and a car belonging to the detachment. Mistaking Broxbourne for Tottenham, he jettisoned two tanks of fuel and rid himself of most of his water ballast, enabling him to rise to 8500 feet. He then ordered top speed and headed for the city. L15 was seen passing Edgware at 9.03pm but was not observed again until it appeared over Westminster and was engaged by the Green

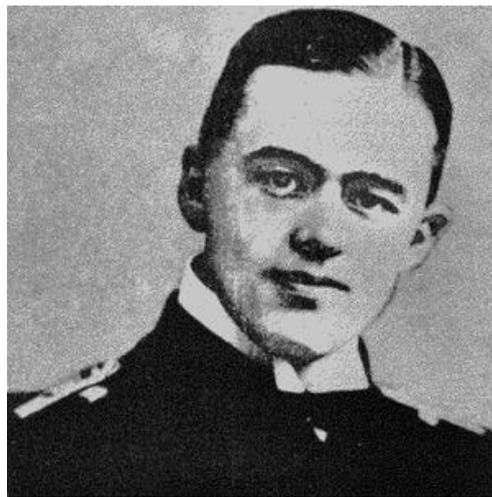
Park anti-aircraft gun moments before 9.30pm. Then, five minutes later, Breithaupt began dropping bombs in Covent Garden, in the heart of London's theatre district. The second HE bomb landed in the road at the corner of Wellington and Exeter Streets, between the Lyceum theatre and the offices of the *Morning Post* newspaper; it killed 17 and injured 21. Other bombs killed three people in Aldwych and injured 15. Turning north, bombs dropped on Gray's Inn and Lincoln's Inn, two of London's four Inns of Court. One bomb smashed the 17th century stained-glass window of Lincoln's Inn Chapel. Another bomb exploded in Chancery Lane, damaging the roadway, while incendiary bombs caused damage around Hatton Garden and Farringdon Road. No more bombs dropped until L.15 was over Finsbury Pavement, where she came under fire from a new 75mm auto-cannon recently arrived from France. Two bombs in Finsbury Pavement killed four and injured ten. In Aldgate, a bomb hit a hotel in the Minories and damaged nearby buildings, killing one and injuring eight. Ten minutes after the first bomb, L.15 released her final four London bombs; two fell close to the Royal Mint and two just north of the Western Docks, but damage was limited to a number of tenement houses, while six people were injured. Then L.15 climbed higher to avoid the increasing gunfire she encountered and took a northerly course out of London. A number of guns fired at L.15 as she headed back to the coast including a RNAS 1-pdr pom-pom at Rushmere Heath, near Ipswich. In reply, L.15 dropped four HE bombs but these caused no damage: one landed on a golf course, one in a potato field and two in a turnip field. L.15 crossed the coast near Aldeburgh at about 11.55pm. Fog and shortage of fuel stopped him from landing at Nordholz and he eventually had to ditch in moorland about 3 miles away.



Kapitanleutnant Joachim BREITHAUPT  
From: Guns, gas and trenches

L16 (Oberleutnant-zur-See Werner PETERSON): brought L.16 inland near Bacton at about 6.40pm, ten minutes behind L.14 and L.15; she was the Navy's latest Zeppelin, commissioned only 19 days earlier. Ten minutes later, Peterson dropped a high explosive (HE) bomb at Banningham, which caused no damage. L.16 then followed a slightly erratic course southwards. Near Chelmsford, she came under fire from a maxim gun and at Kelvedon Hatch, at about 9.30pm, a 1-pdr pom-pom convinced Peterson to turn away from London. Steering north, he appeared near Sawbridgeworth at about 9.45pm from where he saw lights about 10 miles off. These were reputedly showing from the hospital and the factory of G. Garratt and Sons in Hertford. He mistook the River Lea for the Thames and turned the wrong way. He reported that he dropped his bombs on factories and railyards in

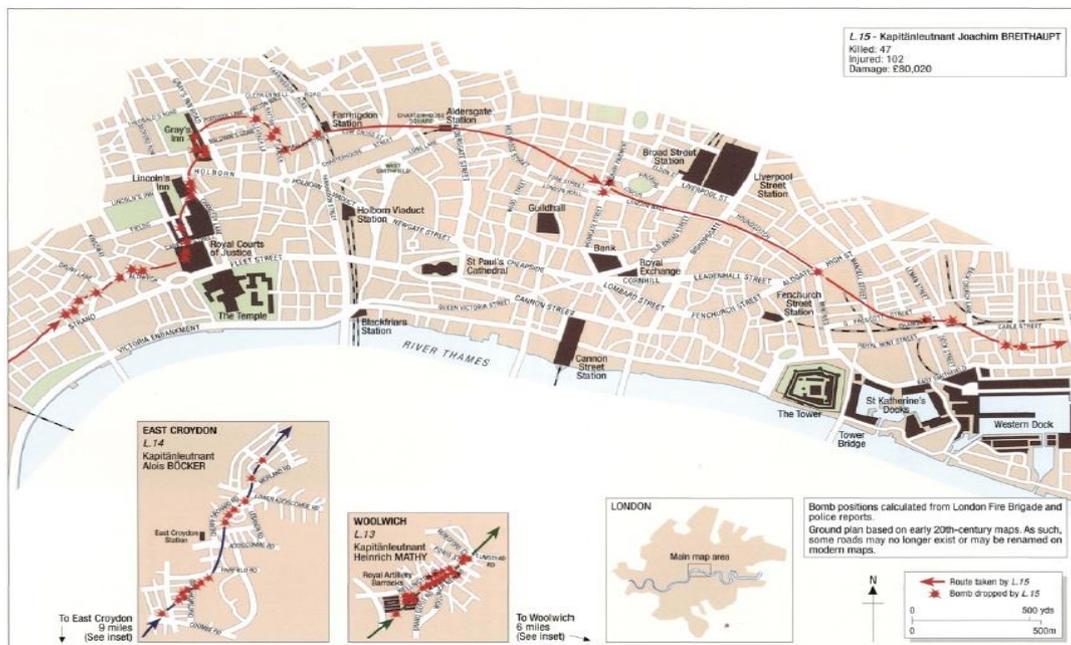
Stratford, East Ham and West Ham. Unfortunately for the people of Hertford he'd got it wrong. Arriving over that town at about 10.00pm, L.16 dropped 14 HE and 30 incendiaries. The incendiaries landed in four clusters: seven in or near Hartham recreation ground, 12 around the Old Cross area, six in a garden on North Road and the last four in other gardens on North Road. The first nine HE bombs landed, well spread, between the Folly and North Road. One, which landed outside the Conservative Club in Bull Plain, killed five and wounded four, and at no. 37 killed a child. Bombs in North Road killed two men, both labourers, outside Garratt's Mill, and also Bombardier Arthur Cox, 2/1st Norfolk Battery, Royal Field Artillery, not far from St. Andrew's church. The last five HE bombs landed in a group, on Welch's Meadow and close to the hospital. Total casualties in the town amounted to nine killed and 15 injured. In addition, ten buildings suffered considerable damage and 141 lesser damage. Peterson then set course for home, crossing the coast near Mundesley at about 12.05am. They also got back to base safely.



Oberleutnant-zur-See Werner PETERSON

From: The 'Tring' Zeppelin

<http://www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/documents/tring-zeppelin/tring-zeppelin.htm>



Track of Zeppelins L13, L14, and L15 on the night 13/13 October 1915

From: Great War London: A Zepp raid and a suicide

Zeppelin L14 (commanded by Kapitänleutnant Alois BÖCKER) came inland near Bacton, Norfolk, around 6.30pm and eventually crossed the Thames estuary near the Isle of Sheppey and reached the sea at Hythe, which he mistook for the mouth of the Thames.



Kapitänleutnant Alois BÖCKER

From: Caught on Camera: the historic photo archive for Sudbury: Zeppelin raid 1916

Thinking he was over Woolwich Dockyard the airship crew spotted Otterpool and Westenhanger Camps near Lymington, which at that time were occupied mainly by three Brigades of the Canadian 2nd Division. "Lights Out" had only just been sounded when L14 appeared over Otterpool Camp at 9.05pm hours and began to release her payload. Five bombs were dropped in quick succession, the first exploding harmlessly in a hedge, but three of the others did what was intended - one struck the guard tent and killed the occupants instantly, another fell among the tents of the men's lines, and another struck the stables. Five more bombs were dropped as the Zeppelin moved off towards Westenhanger Camp, but fortunately for the Canadians at this site the bombs all fell within the nearby race-track enclosure. Thirteen Canadian soldiers were killed in the attack or died immediately after, with two of the most seriously wounded dying in the following days, raising the total number of dead to fifteen. In addition to the deaths, according to some sources there were twelve injured at Otterpool Camp, but the records of the 2nd Division give the figure as twenty-one.

Having realised he was near the south coast, BÖCKER turned north, dropping seven incendiary bombs at Frant at 10.30pm, without damage. Ten minutes later, over Tunbridge Wells, BÖCKER released three HE bombs, smashing a number of windows. A little before 11pm F W OLIVER, at Limsfield, hearing an aero engine saw approaching from the south saw a Zeppelin heading west of Oxted from Tunbridge Wells/Edenbridge direction. At 11.15 pm, Francis WOOD, a resident in Plough Lane, Purley, watched the dim shape of L14 moving slowly overhead. After four or five minutes, L.14 approaching East Croydon, at 11.20pm, commenced dropping 17 HE bombs causing a fair amount of damage to Edridge Road, Beech House Road, Oval Road (where the school was hit), Chatsworth Road, Morland Road and Stretton Road. Nine people were killed and 15 injured; other accounts record 59 fatalities. "After releasing his final bomb Böcker stopped over South Norwood for time. 'Many big fires and good explosive effects were observed,' he later wrote, though no fires were recorded by the fire brigade". The injured suffered largely from shrapnel, having been caught out in the street during the barrage were treated at Croydon Hospital.

One account of the attack in Croydon's *Official History* stated:

The first bomb fell in Edridge Road, where two houses were wrecked, and a mother and daughter who were in bed in one of them were thrown, bedstead and all, into the street. A baby boy in the other was pinned down by a falling roof but wonderfully escaped injury. The second bomb was far more disastrous in its effects. It fell on a house in Beech House Road, where the household consisted of a father and three sons, 10, 14 and 15 years of age, and a house-keeper. The bomb went through the house, completely wrecking the building and hurling debris long distances around. "I was fast asleep," said the house-keeper, "when I heard an awful explosion which awoke me. I seemed to spring from the top of the bed to the bottom. Then I groped my way to the door, which I found was on the floor. I stayed there because the side wall had fallen in on the stairs and landing. I called out to the father, asking if he was all right. He replied 'I'm all right, but I can't move.' The next thing I called for the boys. Only the elder one answered." The fire brigade arrived, and the unfortunate people were extricated. The youngest boy was dead when they reached him, the second was dead when he reached hospital, and the eldest died a little later from shock, while the father was injured and in mental collapse from his terrible loss.

The three brothers mentioned were Roy, Brien and Gordon Currie 10, 14, 15 years old age respectively. The Inquest report recorded in the *Croydon Advertiser and Surrey County Reporter*, 23rd October 1915 stated:

The three boys killed in one house were in bed asleep when a bomb fell upon the building [Beech House] and the housekeeper, brought straight from hospital to give evidence had to stop more than once in the course of the harrowing tale overcome with the thoughts of the tragedy..... She told the jury "I was fast asleep when I heard an awful explosion which awoke me. I seemed to spring from the top of the bed to the bottom. Then I groped my way to the door which I found was on the floor. I stayed there because the side wall had fallen in on the stairs and landing. I called out to the father asking if he was all right. He replied 'I'm all right but I can't move.' Then next I called for the boys, only the elder one answered, he said 'Do get help'. I shouted to the lady next door.....the wall was out and I could see into her house....I said 'Our staircase is cut off, will you get help'.....

A captain of the RAMC said he left home after the bombs had exploded. He heard a woman's voice coming from this house. She told him she was not hurt and he advised her to stop where she was. The father was first got out and carried to a neighbour's house, and the fire brigade was called.....The fire brigade men rescued the boys and the housekeeper.

Medical evidence showed that the second boy was dead when he reached the hospital. He had a very severe scalp wound, his right foot was torn half away and he had a large wound on his left foot. The eldest boy was suffering from many wounds on the back and left hip, and on the right thigh were two large wounds. A piece of blanket or mattress had been driven through one wound and a piece of shrapnel was found in the body. He had wounds on both arms and his chest and was suffering from shock and collapse. The youngest boy, who was dead when the rescuers reached him, had the back of his head smashed, the bones being in small pieces. On the right side of the body was a wound over a foot long through which the ribs protruded. Another large wound was on the right thigh which was fractured. The right leg below the knee was smashed and the left foot was fractured. There were numerous wounds and cuts all over the body and face.

Another account of the raid follows:

In 1914 Cecily and Mary moved in again with Annie Fairman [Grandmother], and stayed there until October 1915. She remembers clearly that it was in 1915 that a Zeppelin dropped a bomb in a manure pile in the yard of Lyon's bakery opposite. [Cherry Tree Road, Croydon]. The bomb exploded and damaged all the surrounding houses, mainly blowing their windows out. At the time Annie was brushing her hair at the dressing table set between the two front windows. (Cecily remembers that Annie had really long hair, which she kept up in a bun). The bomb blew out both windows causing cuts to Annie's arms. Standing between the windows no doubt saved her from much more serious injuries. Cyril [my Dad], was in the room with her but escaped unhurt. Cecily and Mary bound her wounds. Basil, Charles Dean's son, was asleep in the back room and slept through the whole incident.

Annie decided not to tell Mary and Cecily's father for fear of worrying him. However he came home to see them and was disgusted at the state the house was in. He then took Cecily and Mary away and packed them off to Alice Vickers's house at 11 Cuthbert Road, Croydon.

Vera BRITAIN in her *Letters from a Lost Generation* writing on 16 October 1915 refers to a Zeppelin raid that demolishes a lot of East Croydon.

L.14 almost collided with L.13 between Bromley and Bickley at about 11.30pm before crossing the Thames between Erith and Purfleet where she was engaged by anti-aircraft fire. Other guns also fired parting shots before she finally went out to sea north of Aldeburgh at about 1.45am. Her landing at Nordholz was delayed for 5 hours because of fog.

The German Navy remained aggressive and a 12-Zeppelin raid was launched on 23–24 September 1916. Eight older airships, including Zeppelin L22, bombed targets in the Midlands and Northeast, while four M-class Zeppelins (L30, L312, L32 and L33) attacked London. At 00.07pm Oxted police reported a Zeppelin; a London, Brighton and South Coast Railway District Superintendent reported "Zep over Oxted at 00.10pm going due north". Commander MATHY's L31 was heard by Caterham police at 00.16am and approaching London from the south dropped four 128lbs test HE bombs at 12.25am at Kenley. St Barnabas Church's Register of Services merely recorded "Zeppelin Raid. 3 bombs dropped at the top of Downcourt Road at about 12.15am (summer time)". In fact three fell in the gardens of private houses, "...their blast removing roof tiles, breaking chimney pots and blowing in windows and doors..."; the fourth bomb exploded "...on the hard chalk road, fracturing the gas main, uprooting a lamp post, damaging a pillar box and bringing down telephone wires". Structural damage was therefore relatively slight but one eighteen-year old woman was injured and an elderly lady was treated for shock. At 12.25am a signalman on the railway at South Croydon reported "Zep passed over and going in direction of Wimbledon"; East Croydon station reported 10 minutes later "one Zep passed over here evidently making its way to London". At 12.30am the Zeppelin was picked up by the Purley searchlight, then by the Croydon light at 12.36am, when it dropped magnesium flares, obliterating the searchlight beams. It rose to a height of 12,500 feet dropping two HE and two incendiary bombs at Mitcham, the concussion damaged a few houses slightly. Forty-one bombs were then dropped in rapid succession over Streatham, killing seven and wounding 27 (six were killed in a tramcar which was hit by the fragments of a 300kg HE bomb on Streatham Hill). Six HE and seventeen incendiary bombs were dropped on Brixton wrecking a house,

and seriously damaging a garage, 21 houses and 21 shops, and slightly affecting 40 more houses. Seven people were killed and seventeen injured. A single HE bomb was dropped at Kennington caused extensive damage to windows.

L31 then flew over the Thames east of London Bridge, being clearly seen from the Embankment at about 12.40am. Six minutes later 10 more HE bombs were dropped on Leyton, killing another eight people and injuring 30. L31 eventually, after navigating over Waltham Abbey, Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds, and Diss moved out to sea south of Great Yarmouth at about 2.15am. At 2.20am it passed over the *Cross Sand* lightship towards its base at Ahlhorn.

As a postscript to this raid companion Zeppelins to the L31 did not fare too well. L32 fell in flames at Great Burstead near Billericay, Essex; L33 sank into a field between Little Wigborough and Peldon, Essex. On 1 October 1916, at 11.30pm there was a sound of guns in north of London and watchers at Croydon saw L31 ablaze plunging down on Potters Bar. Bullets from Second Lieutenant W J TEMPEST aeroplane at burst in MATHY's Zeppelin at 15,000ft over Hertfordshire.

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