

Zeppelins over Lancashire: The story of the air raids on the county of Lancashire in 1916 and 1918.

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At 9.45 on the evening of Monday 25<sup>th</sup> September, 1916, one of a raiding force of seven zeppelins, L21 (Luftschiffe 21 on the German naval airship strength), commanded by Oberleutnant Kurt Frankenburg, made landfall at Sutton on Sea. Passing just north of both Lincoln and Sheffield, the zeppelin swept in an arc over the moors to appear at Bacup at 11.55pm. Here it hovered with engines idling before setting a course which took it towards the Rossendale valley, where Frankenburg began to drop bombs.

L21 had been commissioned on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1916 and was a "Q" class zeppelin, 179 metres in length, 18.9 metres in diameter, with four 240 hp Maybach engines, which gave it a maximum speed of 58 mph. [This class was identical to the previous "P" class, of which L15 was an example, except for an extra 15 metres of length. Zeppelins of these two classes together carried out 59% of all the airship raids on Great Britain.] L21 was based at Nordholz, the Imperial German Naval airship Service headquarters, sited a few miles from Cuxhaven.

Frankenburg dropped his first bomb shortly after passing over Seat Naze at Newchurch. It was an incendiary and it fell in the grounds of Height Side House, then the home of Mr H.H. Bolton. The bomb did not ignite and a special constable carried it to Cloughfold, from where a tram carried it on to Rawtenstall for police safekeeping. This bomb can still be seen in the Museum at Whittaker Park, Rawtenstall, and is a singularly good example because it retains its white fabric streamer which was intended to keep the bomb in a nose-down position during descent. The bomb also retains the two instruction labels attached to its tarred rope body. The fuse mechanism remains in position, although presumably deactivated for safety reasons!

A second bomb, this time explosive, fell without detonating in a field behind Lea Bank House. The building is now a school, but it was then the home of Colonel Craven Hoyle. The bomb was dealt with by a party of soldiers from Bury Barracks on the following Saturday. A gun cotton charge was used to explode the bomb on site, after tons of soil had been heaped over it in order to absorb the concussion. Mr W. Waddington, who as a boy lived in Dobbin Square, Cloughfold, remembers that people in the district were required to remain indoors with their curtains closed whilst the detonation took place.

Frankenburg's next bomb, also an explosive, fell at a point near Hall Carr Road, some 30 yards from a farm on the hillside, and it made a sizeable crater into which, according to William Chapell of Cloughfold, "You could have put a horse and cart". Fortunately no casualties resulted.

Frankenburg was turning gradually on to a southerly course as he crossed Rawtenstall and what is now the approach to the M66 motorway. He released another explosive, which cratered a field beside Greens Lane, two or three hundred yards north west of the Rossendale golf clubhouse. Next, he released an incendiary which failed to ignite on the first tee of the course. It was seen by a local boy, who described a "small mechanical object about fifteen inches high with a pointed end."

Mrs. E. whittaker, who lived as a child at Hey Meadow Farm, off Gin Croft Lane, on a slope above Irwell Vale, remembers her brother getting a sharp reprimand for attempting to open the window blind as the sound of the zeppelin passed. From 5 Blackburn Road, Paddy Graham and his wife, both in night attire, were seen running out of their house and up the road to get away from the noise of the seppelin.