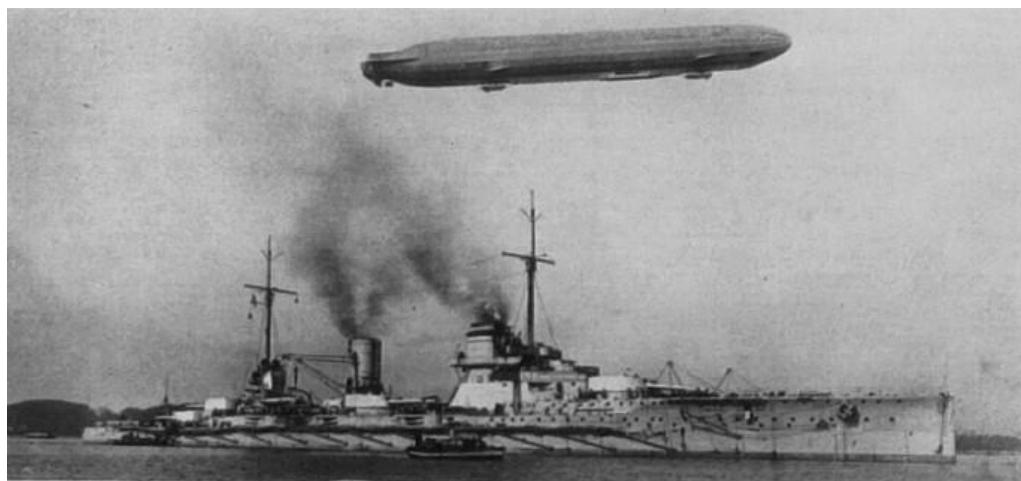


## GRWW1 5a – Background to air raids on Britain during WW1

- On November 1, 1911, during the Italian-Turkish War, the Italians ushered a new way of warfare when one of their aircraft dropped bombs on Turkish bases in Libya, carrying out the world's first air strike.
- The following year, 1912, the city of Adrianople (now Edirne) in Turkey became the first city ever to be bombed when a Bulgarian aircraft dropped bombs on the railway station during the First Balkan War.
- At the start of WW1 the German leader, the Kaiser, refused to allow aerial attacks on Britain but as the war dragged on he changed his mind and on 19 January 1915, two German airships of the Imperial German Navy bombed the towns of Great Yarmouth, Sheringham and King's Lynn; killing 4 people, injuring 16 and causing £8,000 worth of damage (£350,000 in today's money).
- Although German warships had previously bombarded the towns of Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby, a wave of panic and outrage swept the county following the Zeppelin raid, but the government played down the military significance.



*A Zeppelin flying over a German battlecruiser - using airships to search for enemy warships was one of their main uses.*

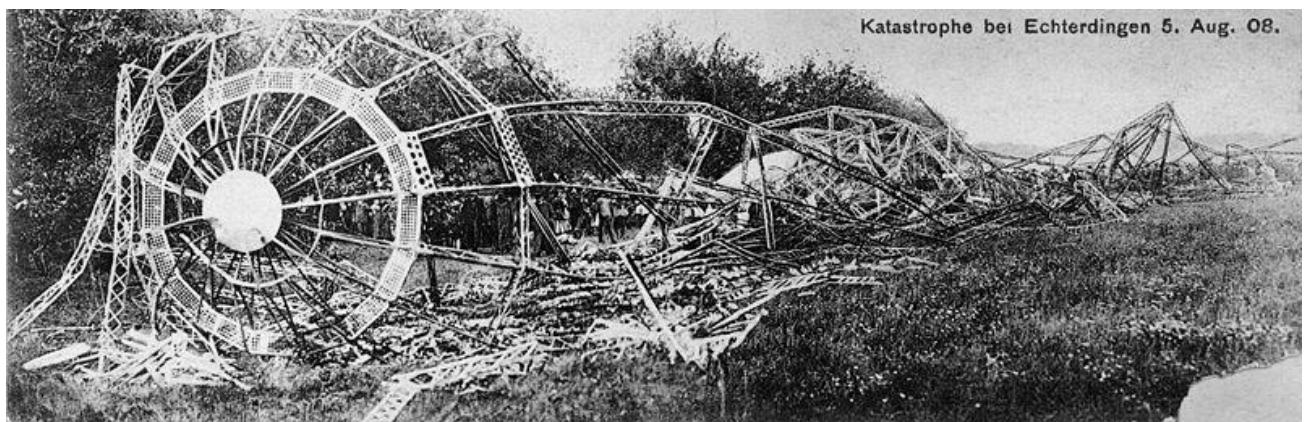
- On 31 May 1915, the Imperial German Army Zeppelin LZ38 made the first air raid on London, when at 10:55pm, it dropped 35 high-explosive bombs and 90 incendiary bombs over the East End of London. The raid killed 7 people (including 4 children) and wounded 35.
- Henceforth, dependent upon the weather and the phase of the moon (moonless nights were considered essential by the Germans), Zeppelins were used in a continuous bombing campaign (making an average of two air raids a month) and they quickly earned the name 'The Baby Killers' for their indiscriminate attacks. In addition to airships, the Germans soon began using heavy bomber aircraft as well, which could carry more bombs and were generally more effective.
- One of the aims of bombing campaign was to demoralise the British population; both the civilian population (particularly in London, which was the most heavily bombed city in the war) and those serving in the armed forces overseas (who became concerned for their relatives at home).
- The Government became worried by falling civilian morale and took urgent action to try and boost morale by visibly increasing air defences around the capital and other places.
- Searchlights, anti-aircraft guns and fighters were all employed, all of which could have otherwise been used in other theatres of war.
- One defensive measure was the 'black-out', where all outside lights were turned off and other lights masked to prevent them showing. This was undertaken to prevent crews of enemy aircraft from being able to navigate to their targets by sight but it was only partially successful and had a side effect in that it caused loss of production and added further tensions and frustrations to an increasingly stressful civilian life in wartime.

- The writer D. H. Lawrence described a Zeppelin raid in a letter to a friend: *"Then we saw the Zeppelin above us, just ahead, amid a gleaming of clouds: high up, like a bright golden finger, quite small (...). Then there was flashes near the ground – and the shaking noise. It was like Milton – then there was war in heaven. (...) I cannot get over it, that the moon is not Queen of the sky by night, and the stars the lesser lights. It seems the Zeppelin is in the zenith of the night, golden like a moon, having taken control of the sky; and the bursting shells are the lesser lights."*
- Initially the Zeppelins could fly over Britain without interference - they could not be hit by ground anti-aircraft guns (as the guns could not elevate to a high-enough angle to fire at them when they were within range) and they could fly higher than fighters could reach. The airships could also climb faster than fighters so even if they were attacked at low-level they could quickly climb and escape.
- However, things did start to change. On the night of 2-3 September, the Zeppelin SL 11 was picked up by searchlights as it approached London and at 02:15am it was intercepted by an BE2c night-fighter of 9 Squadron RFC flown by Lt. William Leefe Robinson. Robinson attacked the airship with his aircraft's machine-guns and managed to start a fire, whereupon the entire airship burst into flames. Burning furiously, it fell to the ground near Cuffley, witnessed by the crews of several other Zeppelins and millions of Londoners - many of whom applauded and cheered. There were no survivors. The victory earned Leefe Robinson a Victoria Cross and the pieces of SL 11 were gathered up and sold as souvenirs by the Red Cross to raise money for wounded soldiers.
- As time passed, British fighter pilots and anti-aircraft gunners became very good at shooting down Zeppelins and of a total of 115 used by the

German military, 77 were either destroyed or so damaged they could not be used again.



*A Zeppelin crashing in flames - millions of Londoners witnessed sights like this on several occasions.*



*The remains of a crashed Zeppelin - everything except metal would burn.*

- In June 1917 the German military decided that it was simply too dangerous to send Zeppelins on bombing raids over Britain and instead, started to use only their heavier-than-air fleet of aircraft.