

THE "M" BALLOON UNIT

British Balloon Distribution of Aerial Propaganda During WWII

By Lee Richards



Of the various methods employed to distribute aerial propaganda leaflets during World War II, the most inexpensive with the least risk, but most inaccurate was the free-floating balloon.

The balloon was probably the first vehicle used to disseminate propaganda from the skies. Its origins go back to the Siege of Paris, in 1870, when piloted postal balloons leaving Paris dropped leaflets, (used as ballast), onto Prussian troops. <sup>1</sup>

The Great War saw Britain's first attempts at leaflet dropping, firstly using aeroplanes. Until when, in October 1917, two R.F.C. airmen were shot-down whilst scattering propaganda literature. The German Army High Command aware of its potentially subversive military implications, court-martialed and sentenced them to ten years penal servitude for treason! They considered the dropping of "inflammatory" pamphlets outside the scope of acts of war and contrary to International Law. <sup>2</sup> A series of telegrams followed between the British and German Governments arguing the legality of aerial propaganda distribution. While this was sorted out the use of aeroplanes to scatter pamphlets was discontinued by order of H. A. Lawrence, the Chief of General Staff in France. To remind pilots of the fact, small cards were put into aeroplanes stating that the dropping of leaflets was forbidden. <sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile experiments were being conducted by M.I.7.b4, the organisation responsible for propaganda to enemy countries, to find an alternative method of release. Tests were carried out with high altitude kites which proved ideal but were scrapped when G.H.Q. France complained that the long wires attached to them might interfere with their aircraft. Finally a balloon was developed and used successfully for many months. The balloons were over eight feet high and made of paper, varnished to prevent the hydrogen gas seeping through, and travelled between ten to fifty miles behind the front-line releasing its cargo on the way. It was not until May 1918 that the R.A.F. could resume leaflet dropping by aircraft, which was considered the most effective method. <sup>4</sup>

After the Munich crisis in September 1938, the Air Ministry began preparations in organising a balloon unit to deliver propaganda to Germany in event of war. The initial planning decided that fifteen men would be earmarked to make up the unit and would have four lorries and a car at its disposal. At the outbreak of hostilities, they would move to the neighbourhood of Nancy in France and be under the command of a R.A.F. Flight-Lieutenant with meteorological experience. Until then the unit would exist in "skeleton form" only. <sup>5</sup> There was also the question of obtaining an adequate balloon and apparatus for the actual leaflet distribution. A clockwork release mechanism had been tested and thought most satisfactory, so at the end of September the Air Ministry invested in two hundred alarm clocks to be converted into releases. <sup>6</sup>

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The main problem was obtaining a balloon capable of making the trip from France to Germany and which could carry a large enough load. The Balloon Development Establishment (B.D.E.) was asked to begin tests with two types of balloon to see if they were appropriate. They were required to stay at a constant altitude of 10,000 feet for twelve to sixteen hours before releasing their load and be filled with coal gas. Each balloon was to carry up to twelve pounds in weight. Experiments were conducted using a paper balloon based on the type used in the First World War and also using rubber meteorological, radio-sonde balloons. Neither type turned out to be any good. The paper one as used by M.I.7.b4 only had a range of ten to fifty miles and was very fragile. The varnish used to proof the paper had to be coated just before inflation making them inconvenient to use. The rubber radio-sonde balloons were designed to continue to rise until they burst. This was at some height between 20,000 to 40,000 feet depending on the thickness of the rubber they were constructed from. This only gave a range, on average, of fifty miles, so neither balloon could travel the distance required. <sup>7</sup>

Coal gas was also rejected as a lifting agent. Hydrogen was the most suitable, as half as much was needed to produce the same lift as coal gas. Also in Britain and on the Continent, domestic supplies of coal gas varied a great deal in density making it impossible to predict the course of the balloons. Water gas was turned down for the same reason. <sup>8</sup>

In the winter of 1939, the Air Ministry requested B.D.E. to attempt to improve the paper and rubber balloons to increase their range and if necessary develop a totally new type of balloon. An improved, lighter release mechanism was also wanted. At this time some doubt was cast on the balloon as an adequate method of dissemination of propaganda, if it was possible for them to scatter leaflets in a specified area. B.D.E., after preparing statistics on the accuracy of distribution, found it to be an acceptable method.

The problem of producing a long distance balloon is that a balloon ascends until the gas has expanded to the full capacity of the envelope and then bursts if the envelope cannot withstand the pressure. To produce a balloon which floats at a constant height, a valving system is required to expel gas to stop its upward rise. Finally a balloon was manufactured from cotton fabric and proofed with rubber. It had an open neck acting as a valve, this seemed the easiest and cheapest way of producing one. As this was not precise, too much gas escaped and the balloon began to descend. To counter it some of the load was released as ballast, which could be either sandbags or bundles of leaflets. A balloon could keep aloft in excess of twelve hours using this system.

Three different types of release mechanism were tried out - clockwork, aneroid and fuse. The clockwork one held the main and ballast loads on a series of horizontal levers, the clockwork mechanism tripping each lever in turn. The

weight of the load would pivot the lever letting the load fall away. The aneroid type worked on a similar principle with the levers vertically mounted. A device affected by the increase of atmospheric pressure controlled the triggering of them.

Both these releases were abandoned. The aneroid one was heavy and expensive to produce. The clockwork mechanism was cheaper and lighter but the third type experimented with was only one and a quarter pounds and very much cheaper to produce. The fuse release was finally selected for use with the propaganda balloon. It was used throughout the war in several different variations. <sup>9</sup>

The Mark I fuse release was constructed from a rectangular wooden frame, mounted on which was a length of fuse contained in a wire sleeve. The main load and ballast loads were suspended beneath the wooden frame by strings passing through the fuse. Just before liberating a balloon this fuse was lit. The length of it depended on the distance the balloon was required to travel, the type used with the first release burned at the rate of nine inches (about 225 mm) per hour. As the fuse burnt, it cut through the strings holding the various loads. A bundle of leaflets, or a bag of sand, was released approximately every sixty minutes, acting as ballast and returning the balloon to its equilibrium height, until the main load was finally released - hopefully, over the intended target. <sup>10</sup>

Shortly after the Mk I release went into manufacture an improved release was designed but it was some time before it replaced the first. On the Mk II the wooden frame was changed to a piece of corrugated cardboard, with the fuse attached diagonally across it, being easier and cheaper to manufacture. <sup>11</sup>

At the end of 1944 a modification of the Mk II was designed. It was designated the Mk III but was not intended to replace the Mk II but to be used as an alternative in winter. The fuse was shortened, giving only five hours flying time and the length of the load carrying strings were increased to hold the main load more securely. Because of stronger winds in winter, a balloon would reach its intended target quicker, therefore less fuse was needed. When the Mk II release was used in these weather conditions the usual length of fuse had to be cut shorter. Also, its string cage was not adequate to carry a full main load in such weather. Obviously the shorter the time the balloon was required to stay aloft the less ballast was needed, so a larger main load could be packed using the Mk III <sup>12</sup>

Returning to 1939, now that an adequate balloon and release mechanism had been designed, the Air Ministry proposed, in June, that 1,000 balloons should be manufactured. They were made of typewriter ribbon cotton but this was thought to be too expensive. Just one of these balloons was estimated to cost

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seven pounds and ten shillings. Later they were produced from cheaper and easier to obtain cotton fabric, which the Admiralty had been using for meteorological balloons.

Another modification to the balloon was now made so that it would self-destruct after it had dropped its entire load. The end of the release fuse was attached to another rapid burning one that ignited a "flash", exploding the balloon so the enemy could not salvage it. <sup>13</sup>

Prior to the beginning of the war there was some liaison between the two British and French propaganda departments to discuss the use of balloons. As France was to be used as the base for launching it was decided to deposit three weeks supply of British balloons there in readiness for the outbreak of hostilities. But time was not on their side. Just over a week later, war was declared before the plan could be implemented. It was also proposed to give the French one hundred balloons to experiment with for distributing over Italy, which was a valuable target. It was thought difficult, though, to achieve this because of the typographical and meteorological conditions. If these experiments ever took place is unknown but no leaflets were ever dropped over Italy by balloon intentionally. <sup>14</sup>

The Allies declared war on Germany on 3rd September, after the invasion of Poland. The No.1 "M" Balloon Unit was immediately formed from personnel already trained in the use of, what were now called, "M" Balloons. The Unit was under the operational control of Bomber Command. Just after its formation, it was decided to increase its possible output from 200 to 500 balloon distributions per week. This required the increase of the establishment by ten aircraftmen. There was not time to give them full instruction in the use of the "M" Balloon but they were given preliminary training at the Balloon Development Establishment at Cardington. Four releasing sections were formed out of the Unit and it was estimated that each section was capable of releasing three balloons per hour, meaning the Unit as a whole could let off up to twelve every hour. <sup>15</sup>

The original planning decided to send the Unit to Nancy, in France but this was changed and ended up in Toul. Not until the night of the 1st October did it begin its first operation. The weather that night was not good, being very stormy and overcast, but the wind was favourable for a successful launch. The bad weather made it very difficult for the men and was so cold the hydrogen used to inflate the balloons froze up, delaying their release. Afterwards it was recorded that it was essential hot food and drinks should be supplied to the men through out the night of an operation and perhaps for them to be given a small rum ration. <sup>16</sup>

Sixty balloons in total were released, two different types of leaflets contained in their load. One leaflet entitled "Das sind Eure Führer!" (EH.158) listed the amount of personal wealth hoarded by the Nazi "top brass", including Goering, Goebbels, Himmler and others, in foreign banks. The leaflet was entirely based on American newspaper articles. The other leaflet, "Achtung!", (EH.280) was the transcript of the speech made by the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain over the radio to the German people, on the 3rd September. The speech gave Britain's point of view over why they declared war on Germany but stressed the point that they were fighting Hitler and Nazism and not the German people as such. The final paragraph summed this up:

"In this war we are fighting not against you, not against the German people, against whom we cherish no bitter feelings; we are fighting against a tyrannical and perjured regime that has betrayed not only its own people but the whole Western culture and everything that is dear to you and us... God defend the right!"

The Unit calculated that the balloons probably sowed their cargoes over Trier in S.W. Germany. But a Gestapo file indicates that a balloon dropped the leaflet 280 "Achtung!" over Katzenengrun, near Nuremberg, on 2nd October, approximately two hundred miles (about 300 km.) away from the intended target! For a balloon this could be considered a fairly accurate dissemination, as will be seen later. <sup>17</sup>

A couple of defects discovered on the balloons hampered the operation. The ring on the balloon which held the load were considered "totally inefficient, being a very poor quality and not nearly strong enough for the load they had to bear." Also a tag on the envelope designed to hold the flash, to destroy the balloon, was missing on several of them. String had to be inserted into the flash to attach it securely. <sup>18</sup>

No more operations took place in October but during November over a million leaflets were disseminated. Sir Campbell Stuart, who was head of the Department of Publicity in Enemy Countries, (often known as Department E.H.) assured the Cabinet Office, at the end of November, of the value of balloons to distribute propaganda but conceded that they did have some limitations.

"There is not, of course, the same control of direction; but even though numbers of the leaflets may be scattered over country areas, there is satisfaction in knowing that, in this event, they present a particularly embarrassing problem to the Gestapo. Moreover, there may be strokes of luck. On the 8th November, for instance, a number of balloon-borne leaflets fell over the towns of Chemnitz and Freiberg at a time when the inhabitants were on their way to work." <sup>19</sup>

**Die amerikanische Presse**  
 veröffentlicht folgende Einzelheiten:

**Göring,** des Führers vorbestimmter Nachfolger, verfügt im Ausland über nicht weniger als **RM 30 030 000.-**

**Göbbels** hat in Buenos Aires, Luxemburg und Osaka (Japan) die Kleinigkeit von **RM 35 960 000.-**

**Ribbentrop** ist der Reichste von allen. In Holland und der Schweiz liegen für ihn **RM 38 960 000.-**

**Heß,** des Führers Stellvertreter, versteckte in Sao Paolo und Basel **RM 16 430 000.-**

**Leh** hat sich bei seinem „S.d.F.“-Geschäft gesund gemacht. Er hat **RM 7 564 000.-**

**Himmler,** der wie ein Lur aufpaßt, daß kein Deutscher mehr als 10 Mark über die Grenze nimmt, verschob selber **RM 10 550 000.-**

**Streicher,** ist bekannlich der „Wächter der deutschen Ehre“. Er hat im Ausland einen Sparfennig von **RM 3 000 000.-**

**Die Neuhortler Zeitung „Journal-American“ bemerkt hierzu:**  
 „Man hört mit Genugtuung, daß so viele Nazi-Bonzen ganz selbstverständlich damit rechnen, daß der Tag kommt an dem sie Deutschland verlassen müssen.“

**Das sind Eure Führer!**  
 158

Leaflet EH.158 Das sind Eure Führer!

**ACHTUNG !**

**Der englische Premierminister Chamberlain richtete am 3. September über den Rundfunk (Rilohertz 1149 = 6050 = 9690 = 7230 = 11860) folgende Worte an das deutsche Volk :**

Deutsche !

Euer Land und Unseres befinden sich jetzt im Krieg. Eure Regierung hat den freien und unabhängigen Staat Polen mit Bomben belegt und ist dort eingefallen ; Polen, das zu verteidigen Großbritannien sich mit seiner Ehre verpflichtet hat. Weil auf die Note hin, die die britische Regierung an die deutsche Regierung gerichtet hat, Eure Truppen nicht zurückgezogen wurden, ist Krieg die Folge.

Wir alle kennen die Schrecken des Krieges. Gott weiß, Großbritannien hat alles nur Mögliche getan um diese Katastrophe zu verhüten. Aber jetzt, da die Deutschen in Polen eingedrungen sind, ist sie unvermeidlich geworden.

Eure Regierung erzählt Euch, daß Ihr kämpft, weil Polen das Angebot Eures Führers abgelehnt und zur Gewalt gegriffen hat. Was sind die Tatsachen? Das sogenannte "Angebot" wurde dem polnischen Botschafter in Berlin Donnerstag Abend gemacht, zwei Stunden bevor Eure Regierung verkündet hat, daß es "abgelehnt" worden sei. Von Ablehnung kann schon deshalb keine Rede sein, weil man ja gar keine Zeit hatte es zu prüfen. Eure Regierung hatte vorher gefordert, daß ein Vertreter Polens binnen 24 Stunden nach Berlin gesandt werden solle, um ein Abkommen abzuschließen. Zu diesem Zeitpunkt waren die später vorgebrachten 16 Punkte der polnischen Regierung nicht einmal mitgeteilt worden. Man erwartete von dem Vertreter Polens, daß er binnen einer festgesetzten Frist erscheinen solle, um ein Abkommen zu unterzeichnen, das er nicht einmal gesehen hatte. Das ist kein Verhandeln. Das ist ein Diktat. Solchen Methoden konnte kein sich selbstachtender, mächtiger Staat zustimmen. Freie Verhandlungen auf der Grundlage der Gleichberechtigung hätten sehr wohl zu einer Beilegung der Streitfragen führen können.

Leaflet EH.280 Achtung!



"M" Balloons being filled with Hydrogen in Belgium, 1945. (Crown Copyright)

The Unit continued operating in France whenever the right meteorological conditions prevailed. Sometimes only a few releases a month could be made because the wind was blowing in the wrong direction or not at a constant speed. For instance, in January 1940 on only two occasions was the wind favourable for sending off balloons and was intensely cold, the temperature falling to -8° F. When the Unit could not operate, the men were given other duties, like digging A.R.P. trenches and checking the seams of balloons and other equipment.

With the rapid advance of Wehrmacht forces across Europe and into France, the Unit began to retreat, moving to Nantes in mid-May 1940. By the 1st June, they escaped from the Continent and returned to Cardington in England, where they reformed under the command of Flight-Lieutenant H.S. Elton, M.C. <sup>20</sup>

Because most of Western Europe had been occupied, the Department of Publicity in Enemy Countries workload greatly increased, as they now had to sustain the morale of the populations in the various occupied countries. This was mainly achieved by sending them fast, reliable news through the European Service of the B.B.C. and was supplemented by newspapers, and other leaflets, distributed by aircraft and balloon. The leaflets were often used for the production of underground newspapers by resistance movements within the occupied territories. Each country had their own editions of newspapers, air-dropped from Britain; the main one for France was titled "Le Courier de l'air" and was regularly issued from December 1940 until the Liberation.

Holland received its first leaflets dropped by propaganda balloons in October 1940, Belgium in November and France in December.

When the Luftwaffe turned their attentions towards Britain, the Unit did not escape its bombing. In August they were briefly stationed at Manston, in Kent and whilst there were attacked by German dive-bombers. The incident was candidly recorded in their Operations Record Book:

"...Some Jerry heavy bombers scored direct hits on the hangar and storage hut causing two fires to break out at once. Balloons were scattered in all directions but were of no salvage value, many being badly burnt and others torn to shreds. All stocks of 'Nickels' [the R.A.F. codename for propaganda leaflets] were completely destroyed together with all equipment - except one pair of scissors which were found amidst the ruins, undamaged."

Shortly afterwards, the Unit moved a few miles up the road making a new home for itself in Birchington, where it remained for nearly two years. <sup>21</sup>

Throughout 1941 they continued successfully to distribute leaflets but did have a few problems with faulty and wayward balloons. On several occasions,

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balloons with their leaflet cargo still attached were washed ashore along the east coast of England, after crashing into the North Sea. The suggested reason for these accidents was the string suspending a ballast load only being charred and not totally burnt through by the fuse. As the ballast had not been dropped, the balloon descended into the sea. On the whole, it was considered, by Flight Lieutenant J.M. Woodcock, who took command of the Unit in July, that the "M" balloon equipment gave about 80% effective functioning, which was thought to be satisfactory. <sup>22</sup>

Using balloons as a means of delivering propaganda was always an inaccurate, unpredictable method. On occasions, the extent to which they missed their intended targets was unacceptable. For instance, in March 1941, several balloons were released, their target being Belfort in eastern France. Some actually dropped their leaflets in Switzerland, Italy and Navarre in Spain, about 650 miles away! An independent report commissioned highlighted their inaccuracy; only 60% of the balloons released reached Germany, 65% reaching France, 25% Belgium and none making it to Holland. This poor accuracy was blamed on inadequate meteorological reports. As a result, a new type of weather forecast, called a "Papyrus" report, was issued which helped to improve the predication of a balloons flight. <sup>23</sup>

During 1941 a record number of leaflets were disseminated by the Unit, approximately 4,449,000 being released in December, up until then the most ever in one month. <sup>24</sup>

There was a drop in output in 1942 due to restrictions placed on how many balloons could be released per operation. In mid-1942, because of a shortage of cotton fabric and rubber, the Ministry of Aircraft Production reconsidered its allocation of these materials. The "M" Balloon Units use of rubber and cotton was high and considered unnecessary. As a result, they were not allocated any more material for balloon production from the 1st April. At this time there was enough rubber-proofed fabric already available to produce a further 21,200 balloons. The Units future existence was now under debate. They were restricted to releasing only 200 balloons per opportunity until all remaining supplies of balloons were exhausted - their targets being France and Germany only. <sup>25</sup>

Development was undertaken to find a new cheaper balloon which used less of these materials in its production. If this could be done, the Unit would continue to operate with the new balloons, which was what the Political Warfare Executive (the new British propaganda department) wanted considering the possibility of a second front in Europe beginning shortly. A balloon was finally manufactured using Nitro-cellulose material, but it was not until January 1944

that the Unit received its first supply. In the meantime, the existing stocks of rubber-proofed balloons were used. <sup>26</sup>

In June 1942, the Unit had changed its Headquarters again; they now operated from Walmer, still in Kent but several miles south-east from their previous base in Birchington.

The type of propaganda distributed altered considerably in August 1943. Up until then they had dropped what was called "White" propaganda. This consisted of news, messages from the Allied Governments and the like; its origins and motives were obvious to the finder. The new type of propaganda to be disseminated was classed as "Black". This was highly secret and subversive material produced by a small section of the Political Warfare Executive (P.W.E.). Its target was German troops and civilians in Germany and France; its object "to assist military operations by softening the spirit of resistance, by encouraging motives of local and individual self-interest at the expense of national and Party loyalties, and by stimulating action in conflict with German military interests." <sup>27</sup> The propaganda appeared to be of German origin, including counterfeit documents, bogus newspapers, subtly altered Nazi posters, etc., or it appeared to be the work of an anti-Nazi resistance organisation, producing stickers with agitational slogans, leaflets on how to desert and other anti-Nazi, anti-war messages. A particularly effective "Black" item, produced by P.W.E., and distributed by the "M" Balloon Unit was a miniature booklet printed on Bible paper. The cover had the title, "Krankheit Rettet," ("Illness Saves"), and the contents showed various ways of faking different diseases and illness to escape military service. The German authorities must have thought this a dangerous piece of propaganda as it was translated into English and used in leaflets dropped on Allied troops in Italy.

The majority of "Black" was distributed through secret channels, by agents of the Special Operations Executive and other Allied secret services. The "M" Balloon Unit was also considered an adequate vehicle for dissemination but the leaflets they were to drop were more of a grey nature rather than absolute "Black".

The first distribution by the Unit of this new subversive material took place on the 20th September 1943. 144,000 leaflets, of two different types, were dropped. One item, given the code Q.1, was a fake newspaper entitled "Nachrichten für die Truppe," dated August 1943. It was a double sided sheet, about 215mm x 265mm, with the headline, "Freiden in Sicht!" ("Peace in Sight!"). The head of the "Black" Section of P.W.E., Mr. Sefton Delmer, described it as follows:

"The whole leaflet, which is got up in the style of a soldiers' news sheet, is intended to give a 1918 atmosphere to the Germans reading it and the general line is: 'The war is lost: better chuck out Hitler now rather than later.'

It stresses the hollowness of the Hitler regime. It stresses the successful opposition to Hitler over the closing down of the shops and gives what I think is a very telling analysis of the German armaments position, showing that Germany is at the end of her tether.

Another main theme is that Italy has got out of the war because Germany has lost the war."<sup>28</sup>

The second leaflet, code Q.3, was printed in the style of a police wanted poster. It was about 135mm x 220mm in size, with a red background and typeset with a fraktur font. At the top it reads "100,000 Marks Belohnung!," beneath which are full face and profile photographs of Fritz Sauckel, Gauleiter & Reichstatthalter of Thuringia and Commissioner General in charge of the Arbeitseinsatz, (Civilian War Effort). He is accused of murdering 456 women and girls every night by compelling them to work so hard they fall victim to accidents in the work place.

This type of propaganda was considered extremely effective but its origins did not fool the German authorities. In October 1943, Wehrmacht troops were informed about a particular British "Black" leaflet entitled, "Soldatenfrauen und Ehefrauen! Witwitten und Mutter!" through the O.K.W. newsheet "Communications for the Troops" This leaflet had been dropped by balloon in two different formats, as Q.0 and Q.5. It reprinted an article from the "Frankfurter Zeitung," of 8th April 1943, about the change of law regarding the divorce of an adulterous marriage partner. The law had been altered so that a persons' marriage could be annulled by the State, after their death, providing that a court could prove the partner had been adulterous. The leaflets implied the law had been changed so that the State could cheat widows out of their inheritance by annulling fallen soldiers marriages. The "Communications for the Troops" brought these leaflets to the attention of German soldiers so "...that they may find still further confirmation of what a shameless rabble is at work on the other side." But also mentioned, in an attempt to discredit the leaflet, that this new law only applied if a person had started divorce proceedings before they had died. When P.W.E. became aware of the German reaction to these leaflets they decided to increase their dissemination.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas in 1940 the attacking Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe had hampered the Units' operations, in 1944 they were only hindered by the British Admiralty. In June, Royal Navy ships anchored at Littlestone shot down several balloons launched from Walmer, thinking they were a new German parachute mine.

BRITISH BALLOON DISTRIBUTION OF AERIAL PROPAGANDA DURING WWII



The Mk III release being loaded with various propaganda leaflets. The Safe Conduct Passes shown in the photograph are probably being used to conceal the real nature of the propaganda being distributed at this time. There is no record of the Unit distributing these Passes. Belgium, 1945. (Crown Copyright)



Flight Lieutenant J.M. Woodcock checks a balloon before liberation, Belgium, 1945. (Crown Copyright)



Leaflet Q.1 Nachrichten für die Truppe. Frieden in Sicht! August 1943.



Leaflet Q.3 100,000 Mark Belohnung!



Corporal J. Brace lets off a balloon by hand for its flight to Germany. Note the leaflet held in the string cage Q.61 Skorpion Nr. 9. Belgium, 1945. (Crown Copyright)

## Soldatenfrauen und Ehefrauen! Witwen und Mütter! **DER BOLSCHEWISMUS DROHT**

Der Parteibolschewismus hat seinen ersten offenen Schlag gegen eine der wichtigsten Grundfesten unserer deutschen Lebensordnung geführt: Die Unantastbarkeit Eurer Ehe.

Durch die „Durchführungsverordnung zum Ehegesetz“, die am 1. April 1943 in Kraft getreten ist, hat sich der Parteistaat das Recht angeeignet, willkürlich nach dem Tode eines Soldaten zu entscheiden, ob seine Ehe nachträglich geschieden werden soll, und seiner Witwe ihr gesetzliches Erbe, ihr Name, ihre Kinder und ihre Hinterbliebenenbezüge durch staatsanwaltliches Verfahren wegzunehmen sind.

In der Durchführungsverordnung heißt es eindeutig:

„Eine gerichtliche Feststellung über das Scheidungsrecht des Verstorbenen kann auch geboten sein, wenn der Verstorbene eine Scheidungsgläubiger noch nicht erhoben hatte, etwa weil er noch für keine Kenntnis von den schweren Verfehlungen des anderen besitzt. In solchen Fällen darf der Staatsanwalt von seiner Antragsbefugnis Gebrauch machen, wenn erwiesen oder als sicher angenommen ist, daß der Verstorbene bei Kenntnis der Tatsache die Scheidung begehrt haben würde, hieran aber durch seinen Tod gehindert wurde.“

Deutsche Soldatenfrau!  
Das ist der Todesstoß gegen dein Familienleben.

Der Parteistaat maß sich an, im Namen und angeblich im Sinne unserer

Toten, ihren letzten Willen durch spitzfindige, korrupte Staatsanwälte nach den ehefremden, familienfeindlichen, materialistischen Grundsätzen des Nationalsozialismus analysieren und umfälschen zu lassen.

Fällt Dein Mann, oder ist er schon gefallen, so werden nach der neuen Durchführungsverordnung Deine Eherechte zur Zielscheibe amtlicher Erpressung und privater Verleumdung.

Mit der Androhung eines nachträglichen post mortem Ehescheidungsverfahrens kann Dich der Partiegewaltige Deines Bezirks in jeder Beziehung seinem Willen gefügig machen. Tratschende Nachbarn, bestechliche und servile Block- und Zellenwarte werden ihm das Material für sein Verfahren liefern. Erbschleicher und mißgünstige Verwandte können Dich von jetzt ab mit einer verleumdnerischen Anzeige aus Hof und Erbe treiben, Dein Familienglück zerschlagen und Dir Deine Ehre, Deine Kinder und Deine Hinterbliebenenversorgung nehmen.

Du bist ihnen ausgeliefert, wenn Du Dich nicht wehrst.

Aber Du kannst Dich wehren!

Du kannst verhindern, daß das Andenken Deines Mannes, seine

Kamerad!

Du brauchst keine Angst zu haben, dass die Schweizer dich zurückschicken! Die Schweiz liefert keine deutschen Deserteure aus, ob sie Uniform tragen oder nicht.

Wenn du, wie viele andere, keine Lust hast, als Leichenanwärter in Frankreich zu bleiben, dann hast du nur eine Sorge: Wie du dich über die Grenze verdrückst. Dann ist alles in Ordnung, und du kannst das Ende ruhig und gemütlich in einem anständigen schweizer Internierungslager abwarten.

Halte folgende Regeln ein, um ganz sicher zu gehen:

1. Stelle dich umgehend nach Überschreiten der Grenze dem nächsten schweizer Polizei- oder Wehrmachtsposten. Drück dich nicht erst lange im Lande herum.
2. Gib klar und deutlich an, warum du gekommen bist: weil du keine Lust hast, dein Leben für Hitlers letzte, nutzlose Anstrengung zu opfern.
3. Zeige deine Wehrmachtspapiere vor, zum Beweis, dass du wirklich ein deutscher Soldat bist. Nimm auf keinen Fall Waffen mit.

Du brauchst keine Angst zu haben, dass sich die Gestapo an deiner Familie in der Heimat rächt. Die Feldgendarmarie hat keine Ahnung, wer von den Vermissten von den Franzosen umgebracht worden ist, und wer einfach abgehauen ist. Wenn du zu uns kommst, wirst du dich wundern, wieviele "lebende Leichen" vergnügt und munter in schweizer Internierungslagern sitzen. Die schweizer Behörden halten auf Wunsch deinen Namen geheim.

Die Kameraden, die schon früher Schluss gemacht haben, warten schon auf dich in der schönen Schweiz und heissen dich willkommen.



Leaflet Q.5 Soldatenfrauen und Ehefrauen! Witwitten und Mutter!

Leaflet Q.21 Kamerad! Du Brauchst Keine... Schweizer.

When the Navy realised their mistake, the Admiralty complained to the Air Ministry about not being informed about their activities. The Air Ministry pointed out that the "M" Balloon Unit had been launching balloons from Kent for at least the last three years.<sup>30</sup> The Admiralty never seemed to show much enthusiasm for the use of the propaganda balloon. When they were approached by Sir Stephen Tallents, who was organising the proposed Ministry of Information prior to the start of the war, and asked if Naval ships could be utilised as a base to launch balloons, the Admiralty declined on the grounds that it was not worth the risk to their ships considering the likely results to be obtained. They suggested, as an alternative carrier, the releasing of bottles containing leaflets.<sup>31</sup>

The Foreign Office also received a half-hearted complaint about P.W.E.'s "Black" work. The Swiss Minister in London objected to a series of leaflets distributed by aircraft and balloon that advised German soldiers on how to desert into Switzerland. The Swiss Government did not want large numbers of deserting troops trying to enter their country. The leaflet they were objecting to was Q.21, 852,000 of these had been distributed by balloon since November 1943 up to September 1944. The main concern of the Foreign Office was to find out how the Swiss Minister knew that the leaflets were produced by Britain considering their secret nature. P.W.E. replied that because so many had been released it was difficult to keep their origin hidden, especially when faulty balloons had in the past inadvertently scattered them in England. They quoted the unfortunate incident when a balloon malfunctioned and dropped similar leaflets, encouraging enemy soldiers to desert to Spain, in the grounds of the Spanish Ambassadors' House in London! In these circumstances it was not difficult to discover the sources of such leaflets.<sup>32</sup>

After D-Day, in June 1944, preparations were made for the Unit to return to the Continent. This would hopefully increase their distribution accuracy and help to keep its' activities more secret. The organisation of this took some time, so they were ordered to suspend operations on the 29th September in readiness for the move. The personnel embarked for the Continent at the end of December taking with them their equipment and supplies of leaflets, with several packages getting water damaged in transit. The Unit was now stationed at Bunsbeek, near Tiremont in Belgium. They were not able to resume operations until the 1st February 1945.<sup>33</sup>

With the rapid advance of Allied troops through Western Europe, the Unit had difficulties in keeping up with the front-line and as the certain defeat of Germany approached the need for their type of work dwindled. On the contrary, it now seemed that they could start doing more harm than good, as the policy now was to restore internal order in Germany rather than to create further confusion. So, at the end of April, the Unit received orders from the Air

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Ministry to wind-up operations as the war was as good as won. The Unit was officially disbanded in July 1945. <sup>34</sup>

It is almost impossible to quantify what effect the "M" Balloon Units' "Black" propaganda contributed to the defeat of Germany but their distribution of news and other leaflets to the populations of occupied countries was a definite boost to morale and was necessary to counter the Nazi's own propaganda. The main drawback to using a free-floating balloon as a vehicle is obviously its inaccuracy and unreliability but on the plus side it is the cheapest method and very much the safest form of leaflet distribution.

SOURCES

This thesis is based almost entirely on surviving British Government records held, for public viewing, at the Public Record Office, Ruskin Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, England, TW9 4DU. The following notes list the archive document references from the P.R.O. that the main text was based on, e.g. AIR 29/22 is the P.R.O. reference for the document, "M" Balloon Unit, Operations Record Book. Other source material is listed in full.

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2. "Distribution of Propaganda by Air, 1914-18" by Captain Morris, undated. AIR 1/678/21/13/2006.
3. AIR 1/1588/204/82/68.
4. AIR 1/678/21/13/2006, AIR 2/48/203/346, and "Secrets of Crewe House," by Sir Campbell Stuart K.B.E. 1920, pp 54-59.
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6. FO898/1.
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8. See note 7.
9. AIR 13/131 - Design & trial flights of "M" balloons, undated.
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13. AIR 2/2897 - Air Ministry Minutes of Meeting, 19/06/39.
14. AIR 2/2877 - Anglo-French Propaganda Council, Minutes of Meeting, 24/08/39.
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18. See note 16.
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20. AIR 29/22 - "M" Balloon Units' Operations Record Book.
21. See note 20.
22. AIR 2/4189 - Letter to A.M. from C.O. "M" Balloon Unit, 13/08/41 and AIR 2/2998 - Minutes of Meeting held at the Ministry of Aircraft Production, 26/09/41.
23. See note 20 and AIR 2/4190.
24. See note 20.
25. AIR 2/4190 and FO 898/458 - Letter to P.I.D. [Covername of P.W.E.] from A.M., 26/07/42.
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30. AIR 2/4190.
31. FO 898/1 - Correspondence with the Admiralty, 11/10/38.
32. FO 898/537.
33. AIR 29/22 and AIR 2/8407.
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Imperial War Museum, (Departments of Printed Books, and Photographs),  
London, England.