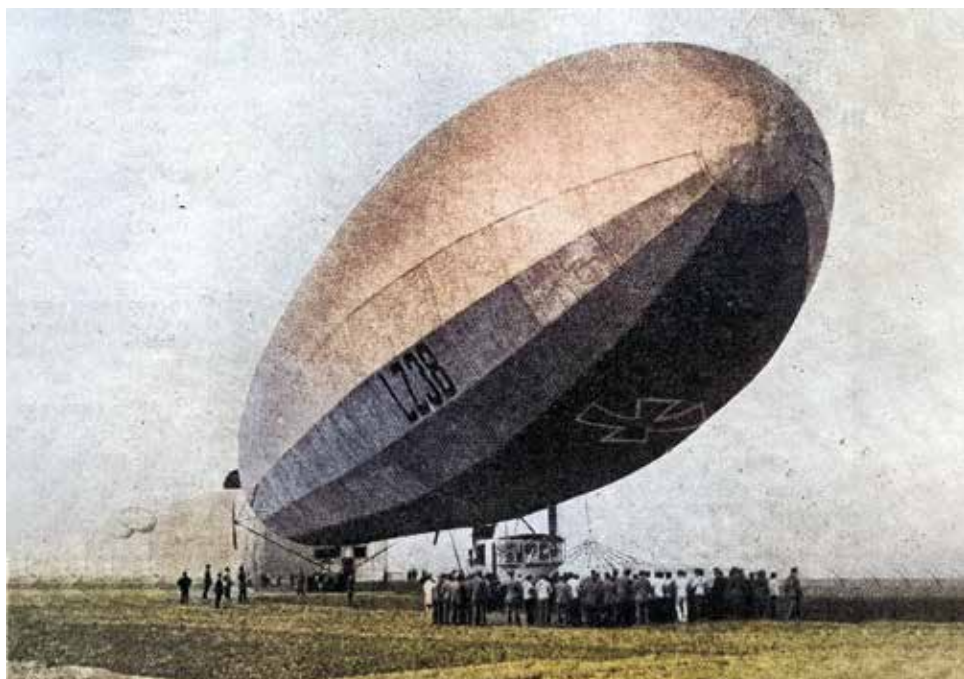


# AIREDALE JIM *v* THE ZEPPELIN



Jim the Airedale and the enemy invader

German airships brought a new and terrifying warfare to Kent. But a far-sighted officer had dreamt of a novel early-warning system, writes *Mike Gunnill*

**T**he remarkable story of an Airedale terrier called Jim who saved many lives during a First World War Zeppelin attack has been mainly forgotten. Until now.

Jim had been trained to listen for the high-pitched sound of incoming Zeppelin airship bombers, and when he alerted his owner, a coastguard at Epple Bay, Birchington,

aircraft from the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) were scrambled to chase off the German attacker.

More of his role later. First, who had the idea of training dogs for the military?

That honour falls to Lieutenant-Colonel Edwin Richardson, who, from 1910, urged a military dog programme and with the help with the help of his wife,

Blanche, set up a canine training centre on the east coast of Scotland near Barry Buddon army camp at Carnoustie.

“At first, the Richardsons specialised in collies and terriers, but in the Airedale they found what they considered be the ideal dog,” said Wendy Turner, secretary of the Airedale Terrier Club of Scotland.

Richardson received official approval after unofficial trials of using his dogs in the field. With the aid of his wife, he helped to set up a British War Dog School under the Royal Engineers at Shoeburyness, Essex. They used the gunnery ranges to get the dogs used to gunfire and to fine-tune their hearing.

Before the school was set up, several individually trained

dogs were placed into working environments with the army, the Royal Flying Corps, the Royal Navy and the Coastguard. One of the first of these deployments, from June, 1914, was to place an Airedale with the navy in Gibraltar. Jim is thought to have been placed at Epple Bay about the same time.

There, he was looked after by one of the four resident officers

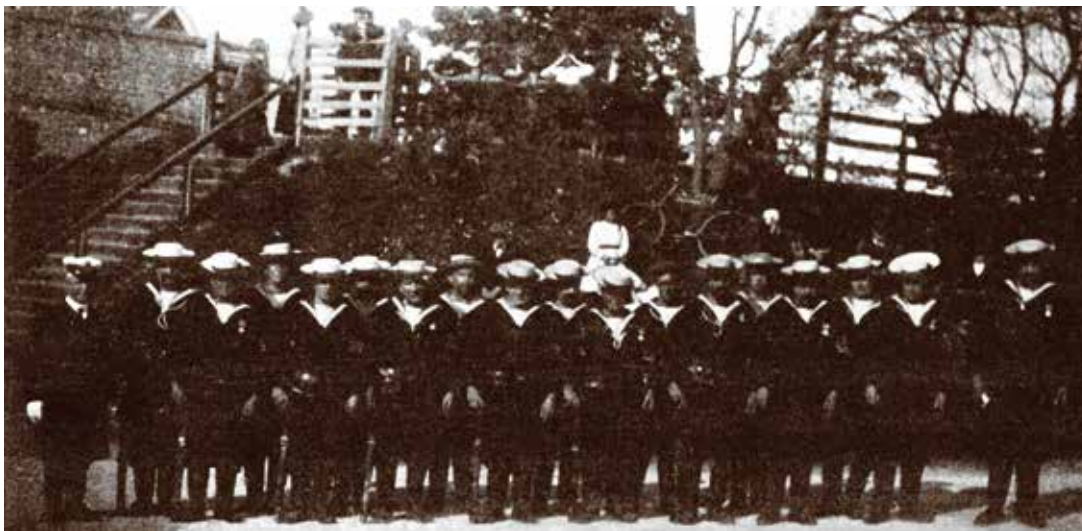
based at a coastguard station. It is still not clear whether Jim's deployment and continued training was officially sanctioned, but his role was simple: if he heard the high-pitched enemy engines, he was to bark.

Aerial bombing was a new type of warfare, and the east and southeast coast was particularly vulnerable to attack by Zeppelins, which could attain greater altitude than conventional aircraft and cut their engines to near-silence before bombardment.

So it was that on 10 May, 1915, Zeppelin LZ38 raided the Southend area of Essex, dropping hundreds of bombs. A timber yard was destroyed, several houses were gutted and a 60-year-old woman was killed.

Kent was better prepared. A series of coastguard stations had been spaced three miles apart, but still within sight of each other, and a more formal watch was created along the Thanet coast. But the raid on Ramsgate in the early hours of 17 May was still devastating.

One bomb hit the Bull and George Hotel in the High Street opposite Turner Street. The clock next door at Deveson's, coal suppliers to the government, stood at 1.48,



stopped by the blast shockwave.

Three people were pulled from the hotel wreckage: John Smith, 42, and his wife, 39, who were staying in Room 12, and Florence Lamont, 43, a

War Office clerk from Thornton Heath, Surrey. Mrs Smith survived but her husband and Mrs Lamont died from their injuries.

Barmaid Kate Moffat, 30, sleeping on the fourth floor,

was woken by assistant housekeeper Ellen Pilkington. Along with the hotel maid, Elizabeth Boles, they escaped the building just before the upper floors collapsed. Twelve people had been staying in the



**Top: Epple Bay coastguards on parade near Birchington station in 1913. One of these men would have trained Jim at the**

**coastguard station (left). Above: Lieutenant-Colonel Edwin Richardson and his wife, Blanche, with some of their Airedales**

hotel that night and most were taken to Ramsgate Hospital.

The hotel – promoted in the *Thanet Advertiser* as “first class” for families, and with a billiards room – was owned by sisters Jane and Minnie Hayward, and had been in their family for many years. It never reopened after the bombing.

At an inquest on Mrs Lamont, the jury returned a verdict that death was due to

injuries caused by “a dastardly and illegitimate act of war”, the *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald* reported. Bombs also fell in George Street, Queen Street, Chapel Place, the grounds of St Catherine’s Hospital, Ellington Park, St Lawrence, Nether Court and Chapel Road, and near the Bell Cottages.

Lilly’s Imperial Bazaar and Servants Free Registry Office, at 6 Albion Hill, was damaged and Frederic France, a retired auctioneer and estate agent who was lodging there, was lucky to survive the blast.

The bazaar owner, Mrs Agnes Lilly, lived at 22 Albion Hill and was unaffected by the damage but discovered an 8ft by 20ft bomb crater left at the back of the shop. Photographs of the bomb damage with Frederic France and policemen holding remains of the bombs were quickly turned into postcards and on sale at Lilly’s Bazaar.

In George Street, an incendiary bomb fell on the Star Cinema, formerly Shanly’s Electric Theatre, but bounced off its roof and set fire to a Mrs Haskins’s chicken house in an adjoining garden. She damped the fire and saved her fowl.

Ramsgate was also raided by Gotha aircraft and shelled



**Police and sightseers (above and left) gather around the badly damaged Bull and George after the raid on 17 May, 1915. Note the clock on**

**Deveson’s coal office next door – stopped at 1.48, when the bombs hit. Inset above: the raid made front-page news in the London press**



several times from the sea. Many fishing boat owners, finding the English Channel too dangerous, moved to Brixham, Devon, and Ramsgate harbour instead became a base for armed fishing boats, drifters and tugs forming part of the Dover Patrol.

The 17 May raid was one of the first sustained strategic aerial bombings in history, but is now largely forgotten. It was described graphically in a letter by Mary Pointer, of Cannon Road, Ramsgate, to her son Ernest, 39, of Andrews Place, Margate.

“We were nearly frightened to death by a Zeppelin raid which took place here in the early hours on Monday morning,” she wrote. “Two

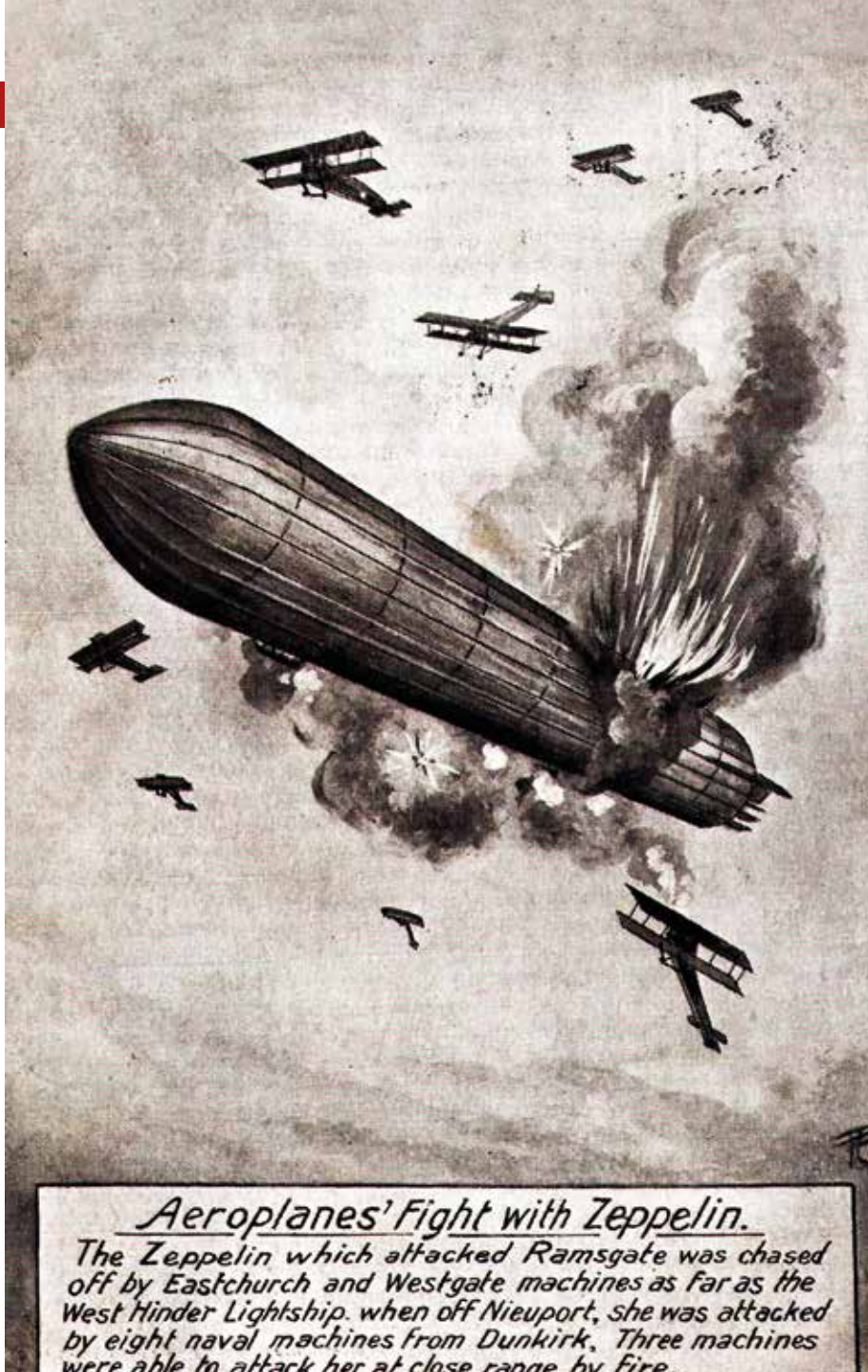
bombs were dropped in front of our house and two at the back, and about 30 altogether, but mercifully little damage was done. If we do not have another visit, we will be fortunate.

“The Bull and George Hotel ... bomb struck the roof and went right through to the basement, taking the ceiling, floors and furniture. There was a lady and gentleman staying in the house. The bed they were in was doubled up with them in it ... Great holes in different parts of the town were large enough for a horse and cart to get into.

“Last night it was reported that two more Zeppelins were sighted in the Channel, but I never, never want to hear that awful noise again.”

It might, however, have been much worse.

Jim the Airedale had been patrolling the cliffs near Birchington, nine miles from Ramsgate – where he was a regular sight for walkers – and his prompt reaction to the approach of the Zeppelin meant that nine RNAS aircraft were scrambled from Eastchurch, Sheppey, and attacked the airship as it attempted to gain height and flee across the English Channel.



**Left: a 1915 postcard glorifying the Zeppelin chase.**

**Above: Erich Linnarz (holding the speaking tube) inside the gondola of LZ38.**

**Right: Linnarz in later life**

Jennie Burgess, an archivist with Birchington Heritage Trust, is certain that Jim’s vigilance saved many lives.

“There is no record of Jim getting any honour for his actions, but many feel locally that it is time to remember what a great job he did with a canine posthumous award,” she said.

“We are proud of him in our community and he does deserve to be recognised at last. His wonderful story has been lost over the years, but we hope to change that.”

The German Zeppelin LZ38, commanded by Hauptmann Erich Linnarz, dropped more than 20 bombs



on Ramsgate, four high explosive and the rest incendiaries, before turning towards Dover. The searchlights from the Langdon Battery at Dover locked on to the airship, joined by searchlights from the Drop

Redoubt Battery. This caused LZ38 to head back towards the Channel and to France and it was attacked over France and Ostend by pursuing British fighters.

One crewman was killed but the damaged airship dropped ballast and climbed above the reach of the chasing aircraft and managed to limp back to its base at Evre in Belgium.

LZ38, a Zeppelin P Class of the German Imperial Army, had a crew of 19 and a top speed of 57mph, and was fitted with eight machineguns. The painting on page 29 by Felix Schwormstädt shows a few members of the crew inside the Zeppelin gondola's control room.

Among those involved in the RNAS chase over France was Flight Commander Arthur Bigsworth, who managed to drop – from his flimsy biplane – four 20lb bombs on to the airship structure. Bigsworth was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership in battle, the first night attack on a Zeppelin.

The author W.E. Johns, who worked alongside Arthur Bigsworth at the Air Ministry, based aspects of his fictional hero Bigglesworth, better known as Biggles, on his colleague.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



**Flight Commander Arthur Bigsworth (above and inset) standing by his Avro 504B. This image is believed to be at Westgate,**

**shortly after he attacked the Zeppelin. Right: Flight-Lieutenant Redford (right) with his observer at Eastchurch airfield**

Other pilots involved in the chase included Flight Sub-Lieutenant Redford “Red” Mulock, who is acknowledged as the first Canadian flying ace of the First World War.

The RNAS got its revenge on 7 June. LZ38 was tracked



down to its base at Evre, and destroyed in its hangar in an attack by Flight-Lieutenant John Wilson and Flight Lieutenant John Mills, both of No1 Naval Squadron of the RNAS. Both were awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

Erich Linnarz went on to command LZ97 until Germany abandoned Zeppelin attacks and he became a soldier on the Eastern Front. He later contributed to a Great War history with an essay entitled *I Was London's First Zepp*

*Raider*. He died in Berlin in 1945, not long after the end of the Second World War.

Zeppelins made a total of 51 bombing raids over Britain, killing 557 people and injuring 1,358.

A photograph of Jim patrolling the Kent cliffs hangs in the Imperial War Museum in London.

The Epple Bay Coastguard Station shut in 1923 and there are few records remaining and no details of who owned Jim or, indeed, what happened to the canine hero.

Julie Brown, secretary of the National Airedale Terrier Association, told me: “The Airedale terrier is well known for its sterling work during war time. I’m not surprised Colonel Richardson made them his dog

of choice. Jim showed how clever they are and how acute their hearing is. Their determination to complete a task knows no bounds. It is lovely to read about Jim and to think of the lives he helped save.”

Jennie Burgess, the archivist, said: “A lot of research has led to the point where we know what Jim did and how crucial his job was. It is important that even the dogs who served should not be forgotten. Jim did his canine duty.”

The Bull and George Hotel site was later occupied by a Woolworths store. Poundland is there now. The raid damaged several shops, including a David Greig grocery opposite the hotel. The shop site is now Holland & Barrett.