

JANUARY 1915 – Zeppelins over Norfolk....



It is 100 years ago this month that the first successful Zeppelin raid took place on the UK. It was almost the first time Britain had been attacked from the air. The Zeppelin bombing campaign was approved by the Kaiser on 7 January 1915, who at first forbade attacks on London, fearing that his relatives in the British royal family might be

injured. Following an attempt on 13 January 1915, which was abandoned because of the weather, the first successful raid took place on the night of 19–20 January 1915.

Three Zeppelins took off but one had to turn back due to engine problems. Two Zeppelins (L3 and L4) targeted Humberside but were diverted by strong winds, to Great Yarmouth, Sheringham and King's Lynn and the surrounding villages. The first bombs were dropped at 2025hrs on 19 January 2015. Complete panic was caused and four people were killed and 72 seriously injured. £7740 worth (£779,000 in today's money) of damage was done. There is an excellent article about this raid in the January 2015 issue of the 'Britain at War' magazine.

Understandably the article concentrates on the human aspect of the raid including the way the raid developed, people caught up in the raid, damage etc. Detection and interception are not mentioned apart from the fact that three fighters were sitting on the runway at RN Air Station Yarmouth and they were not even scrambled. The truth is that, at that time, Britain had no Air Defence system, no means of detecting the approach of enemy craft, no tracking and control system, no interception system and no real warning system. The Zeppelins were seen by a few people but almost no one knew whether they were friendly or hostile, they had no idea where they were going nor who to report them to even if they wanted to. Some thought the explosions were being caused by enemy battleships out of sight over the horizon. No warning was given and the population did not know where the Zeppelins were going next.

The was public and political outcry over this situation and there was the call for some sort of air defence system to be set up. This led to General Smuts being involved, he in turn appointed Major General Ashmore who developed the Metropolitan Observation Service and in 1917, the London Air Defence Area (LADA). This joined together a tracking system (a form of Observer Corps), a control system (Ops Rooms), searchlights, ack-ack guns, interception by the RFC and RNAS and the police to warn the public. **The world's first integrated air defence system had been formed.** This ultimately led to the formation of the Observer Corps in 1925 under the leadership of Ashmore and the rest, as they say, is history !

No wonder 19 January should be an important date to members of the ROC/ROCA!

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