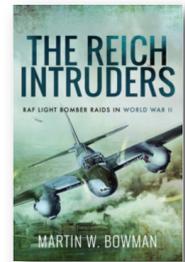


## BOOK REVIEW:

# *The Reich intruders: RAF light bomber raids in World War II*

by Martin M. Bowman

*Pen and Sword Aviation: Barnsley, South Yorkshire; 2019; 256 pp; ISBN 9781526760838 (softcover); RRP \$34.99; Ursula Davidson Library call number 950 BOWM 2019*



This is the story of No. 2 Group, Royal Air Force (RAF), which flew Blenheim, Boston, Mitchell and Mosquito bombers on raids over Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II.

While the RAF and the United States 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force conducted a strategic bombing campaign using heavy bomber aircraft against Germany, the RAF employed its light bomber force against shipping along the European coastline from France to Norway and against tactical targets in the occupied countries. The objective of the strategic bombing campaign against Germany was to cripple the enemy's capability to wage war, while the campaign waged by the light bombers was to hinder the movement of troops and *matériel* along the European coast. It was a relentless intense and costly campaign which began with the Battle for France in 1940 and continued unabated until VE (Victory in Europe) Day.

*The Reich Intruders* is exceptionally well researched and is easy to read, despite the inclusion of a plethora of detail. The author, Martin Bowman, is one of Britain's leading aviation authors, with over 100 published books on the Second World War and post-war aviation history. He has established an international reputation for his superb imagery and aerial photography.

The extensive research, pictorial coverage and detailed reporting of operations conducted by No. 2 Group RAF, populated with numerous first-hand accounts by aircrew describing the air war from a personal point of view will, I believe, place *The Reich Intruders* on the path towards seminal acclaim.

Bowman's skills are well demonstrated in this book with a wealth of photographs used to good effect and excellent detailed descriptions of the event portrayed and people involved. Photographs are used to illustrate aircraft types and operations and to focus on the people involved and their exploits.

In the six weeks of the Battle for France in May-June 1940, No. 2 Group's Blenheim bombers attacked the invading forces, road and rail bridges, and airfields. The Blenheims were no match for the Luftwaffe's aircraft and they lost 150 aircraft, the equivalent of nine squadrons, and over 400 aircrew.

Following the fall of France, operations were switched to attacking coastal convoys and ports. Again, the Blenheim proved its unsuitability for the task. After seven months, a further 160 Blenheim aircraft and 480 airmen had been lost on operations – figures which do not include those aircraft that crashed on return to base, or losses sustained in the Malta campaign.

The author traces the evolving campaign and the introduction of more modern and capable aircraft, such as

the Boston and Mosquito. However, these aircraft were not invulnerable to enemy flak or fighters. For example, 108 aircraft were lost supporting the infamous Dieppe raid in August 1942.

A very detailed account of almost daily operations, capturing names, ranks, deeds and the demise of aircrew is presented to the reader. It would serve as an excellent reference work for students of air campaigns. However, the detail does not stop the reader from understanding and following the development of the campaign as the war progresses.

There is a grippingly detailed account of the daylight raid on the Phillips electrochemical factories at Eindhoven, 60 miles from the Dutch coast, on 6 December 1942. The attacking force comprised Mitchell, Boston and Mosquito aircraft. The first-hand accounts include many by Australian and New Zealand aircrew who took part. The excitement, danger and tension experienced by the aircrews during the raid are vividly reported, capturing the reader's attention.

Other raids described include: the bombing of Amiens gaol to free members of the French Underground on 18 February 1944; the September 1944 attack on Arnhem in support of the attempt to capture the bridges over the Rhine on Operation *Market Garden*, the biggest and most ambitious airborne operation ever carried out by any nation or nations; and the Mosquito bomber attacks on the Gestapo headquarters in Oslo, Norway, on 25 September 1942, and at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, on 31 October 1944. These operations were extremely hazardous, but then so too were the day-to-day operations that these men flew.

The approach of the end of the war brought little relief for the RAF's light bomber force. It was tasked with disrupting the German transport system and squadrons continued to suffer heavy losses.

With the large amount of detailed information concerning identification of aircrews, their deeds and fate, *The Reich Intruders* could well have been presented as a text book on the conduct of operations. Martin Bowman's skills, however, have ensured that it is an absorbing and informative account of the campaign and the airmen, a large number of whom had little prospect of completing their assigned tour of duty.

This book is well suited to the student of air power. It is also recommended for readers who just want to learn of the operational feats of everyday men recruited into the Air Force for the duration of the war and who participated in a much lesser-known campaign against the Axis Powers. Indeed, it is an excellent read.

**Bob Treloar**