

Junkers Ju 88D-1 F6+DN of 5.(F)/122 has its engines run up on a cold day at Gosstkino in 1943 in readiness for another long-range reconnaissance mission over the Eastern Front. The Ju 88D-1 was also operated by 3./Aufkl.Gr. Ob.d.L., as commanded by Hauptmann Karl Friedrich Bergen in Russia from March 1942.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS VIA AUTHORS



EYES OF THE LUFTWAFFE

THE FLYING CAREER OF KARL FRIEDRICH BERGEN

PART ONE: TRAINING & THE EASTERN FRONT 1932–43



While the fighter *Experten* often take centre-stage in the history of the wartime Luftwaffe, the less glamorous but equally vital work of the air arm's reconnaissance aircrews rarely gets a mention. In a new two-part series, **ROBERT FORSYTH & ANDREAS DILLMANN** detail the typical flying career of one such *Aufklärer*

Karl Friedrich Bergen was the cousin of author Andreas Dillmann's mother, and several of the photographs illustrating this series are from the family's own collection and previously unpublished. Bergen was 27 years old when the war started in 1939, but was already a highly qualified aviator.

IN POST-WAR HISTORIOGRAPHY, the common perception of the Luftwaffe in its first five years of war is primarily one of offence. The successes of the *Blitzkrieg* campaigns have been symbolised thousands of times in printed and visual media by images of the Junkers Ju 87 Stuka, Ju 88 *Schnellbomber* and Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighter and *Jagdbomber*; modern types which were at the forefront of German strike capability in Spain, the West, the Balkans, in the Soviet Union and over North Africa. So too, the leading German fighter aces — the *Experten* — have engendered a permanent reputation of unrivalled tactical skill and airmanship, but in doing so they became poster boys for the Nazi propaganda machine.

Behind this popular view was a sophisticated air arm, well equipped, well trained and with effective and impressive multi-role capability. One of the most unsung and frequently overlooked aspects of the Luftwaffe's lightning victories was the contribution made by aerial reconnaissance; it would not be an overstatement to assert that without reconnaissance many of these successful early campaigns would have achieved far less or possibly even have failed.

Understandably, and sensibly, as result of lessons learned in the First World War, from the outset of its first combat operations in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 (as the *Legion Condor*), the Luftwaffe placed considerable value and emphasis on both short- (tactical) and long-range (strategic) reconnaissance. Such pilots and observers were required to be just as skilled and proficient as their comrades in the fighter, ground-attack and bomber units. On September 12, 1936, the Panzer specialist, *Generaloberst* Oswald Lutz, in a paper entitled "Co-operation between armoured troops and the Luftwaffe", wrote: "The reconnaissance observer (long-range) needs to be primarily trained in navigation, instrument flying, high-altitude flying and in aerial photography. His employment is essential in aerial warfare . . ."

This two-part article recounts the life of one Luftwaffe *Aufklärer* (reconnaissance pilot) who flew long-range operational missions from the beginning of the war and later over the Eastern Front, as well as the Bay of Biscay.

EARLY DAYS

Karl Friedrich Bergen was born on April 24, 1912, in Durlach, near Karlsruhe, the eldest son of Georg Heinrich Karl Bergen (known as Karl) and Anna Ernestina (Reichenbacher). After leaving school, Karl senior had joined the Army and was posted to serve with the *Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Kamerun*, a local protection and defence force for the German colony of Cameroon in central Africa. Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, he returned to Germany where, as a non-commissioned officer (NCO), he was posted as an instructor to the NCO school in Durlach.

Karl and Anna had two more sons before Anna's death in 1922, after which Karl remarried. The family's financial situation allowed a higher education for their children, and so Karl Friedrich attended the Markgrafen-Gymnasium at Durlach, where he passed his *Abitur* (A-Level) examination in March 1931. As a schoolboy, he was a passionate track-and-field athlete and swimmer, and in later medical reports he appears as a sturdy young man of 1.82m (6ft), whose mental state is described with attributes such as calm, alert, quick-witted and robust.

Given his father's career as a soldier, it is



Karl Friedrich Bergen's father had served with the German Army in Cameroon, and it was natural that the young man would follow in his father's footsteps. Karl Friedrich is seen ABOVE at the age of 20 in the summer of 1932, wearing the uniform of his *Reichswehr* infantry regiment. He had already started to learn to fly, despite the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles.

perhaps unsurprising that the young Karl Friedrich also joined the Army as a *Schütze* (Private) in the *Infanterie-Regiment Nr.8* at Frankfurt (Oder) shortly before his 19th birthday on April 6, 1931. Since this unit continued the traditions of the *Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Kamerun*, his father probably played a role in the decision. However, it seems the prospect of life as a soldier in Germany's restricted inter-war *Reichswehr* held scant appeal for Karl Friedrich, who had developed, like so many boys in 1930s Germany, a desire to fly.

Despite the punishing, if not particularly well-monitored, restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, and before the Nazi Party came to power, the *Reichswehr*, under *Generalleutnant* Hans von Seeckt, already had secret plans for an air force of 1,000 aircraft. By exploiting every treaty loophole to the full, Germany created aerial police units, airlines and a secret reserve air arm, expanded its civil aviation industry and established gliding clubs and flying schools. All these initiatives allowed the military to train covertly while also creating a nationwide sense of "air-mindedness" permeating the nation's youth,