

COST OF WAR

OUR NEW SERIES ILLUSTRATING SECOND WORLD WAR ALLIED AND AXIS AIRCRAFT THAT HAVE BEEN PUT OUT OF ACTION FROM BEING SHOT DOWN, WRECKED, CAPTURED, OR SCRAPPED
BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

EDITOR'S NOTE: Going through the Challenge photographic library to select images for the next few installments of "Colors of War," I began coming across images of World War Two aircraft that had been shot down, wrecked, captured, and scrapped. It was not dozens of photographs, but hundreds if not thousands depicting these aircraft in distressed situations. Looking at them makes one realize the huge cost of war — and this is just from the aviation aspect. The fact that only a few of these warriors survive today should make us all realize their importance as living memorials of the world's most costly war. We will be running "Cost of War" in conjunction with "Colors of War" in upcoming issues. Please let me know if you like this new feature by dropping an email to moleary2challenge@gmail.com.

Unless they were escorted by Messerschmitt Bf 109Es, Heinkel He 111s were easy prey for Royal Air Force Spitfires and Hurricanes during the early *Luftwaffe* attacks on Great Britain. These English schoolgirls pose with an He 111 that was shot down after bombing RAF Sealand on 14 August 1940. The attacking aircraft were three Spitfires from nearby RAF Hawarden. The British pilots had just landed from a mission when they saw the raiding Heinkels and jumped back into their planes to do a full-power climb to meet the enemy. Pete Ayerst engaged this Heinkel at 2000-ft and several bursts hit the engines causing the Heinkel to rapidly lose altitude. Flying at no more than 20-feet above the ground, the He 111 pilot passed under powerlines and executed a gear-up landing, stopping 150-feet short of a farmhouse. The Spitfire circled the bomber as the crew scrambled out. Before British troops could arrive, the Germans set off an explosive charge, which destroyed just about everything except the tail section. Wing Commander Pete Ayerst died in 2014 but in 1988 he had the chance to meet four of the German crew and exchange versions of the dramatic attack. Note the damage from the .303-caliber bullets.



American airmen and soldiers inspect a *Luftwaffe* He 111 at Le Bourget Airport in France (where Charles Lindbergh landed the *Spirit of St. Louis*) shortly after Allied forces poured into Paris. It is interesting to note that the twin-engine bomber is in a camouflage scheme more suggestive of the Eastern Front than to western Europe so could a *Luftwaffe* crew have flown into the American/British sector to make sure they would not be made prisoners of the Russians? The fabric on the ailerons has been punched in, perhaps a way of guaranteeing the plane would not be flown without a lot of work. As can be seen, the wooden propellers have been turned into splinters so that would indicate the plane was belly-landed by the *Luftwaffe* pilot. Even though the Heinkel was basically complete, there were many, many flyable examples that had been captured so it is presumed the bomber was scrapped when the field became under complete Allied control.

The Second World War was only days old in this 8 September 1939 photograph showing young German soldiers peering into the wreckage of a shot-down Polish Air Force bomber, its crew still inside the destroyed airframe. By the looks on their faces, one can see that the full horror of war was just hitting home with the Germans. The Poles would lose 398 aircraft by the time the nation surrendered on 28 September to overwhelming attacks from the Germans.

