

ATTACK OF SONDERKOMMANDO BLAICH

THIS LITTLE-KNOWN LUFTWAFFE UNIT — WITH ONE BOMBER, ONE LIGHT AIRCRAFT, A CONVERTIBLE CAR, AND A LOANED ITALIAN TRANSPORT — SET OUT TO MAKE BOMBING HISTORY WITH A LONG-DISTANCE RAID ON AN ALLIED AIRFIELD IN NORTH AFRICA
BY RENE BLAUENSTEIN

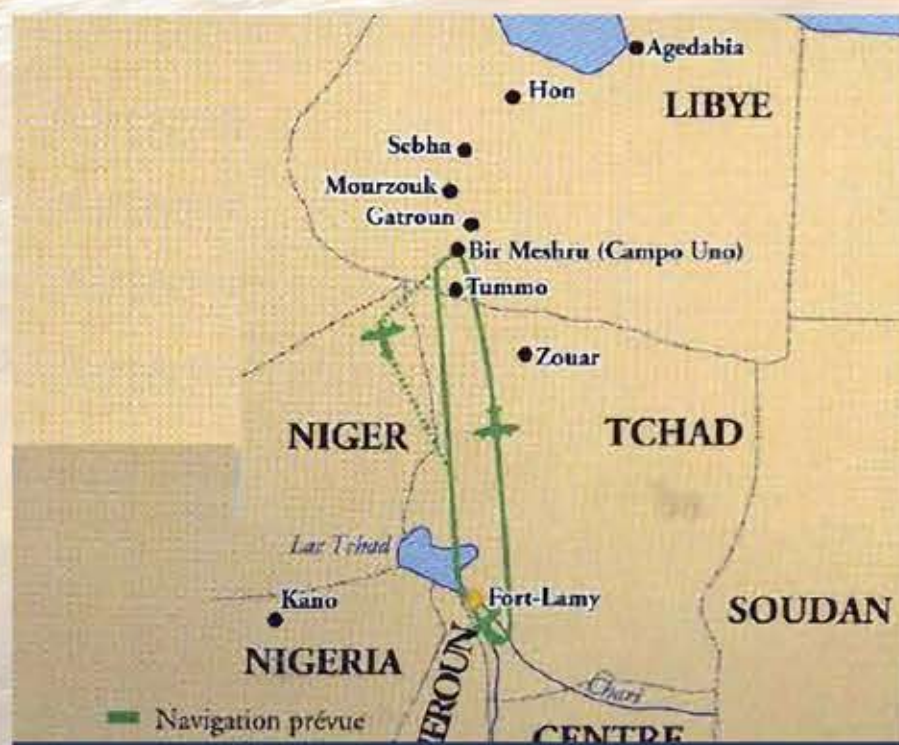
and the other Allied forces. Battle-hardened *Luftwaffe* pilots were careful when operating with the French since there was little trust on the part of the German aviators but if the French could be used to some effect against Britain, then the Germans would fully endorse that concept.

The British, for their part, quickly developed an equal dislike for the Vichy regime and would destroy French aircraft on the ground and in the air. A great deal of the airworthy Vichy air arm had departed to North Africa where they not only attacked the British but also their own countrymen that were operating as part of the Free French forces. To say the time period in France and its sprawling colonies was confusing would be an understatement.

The Germans decided to take advantage of the novel concept of French fighting French and if Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces could be destroyed in the process, then all the better. One of the sore points with the Germans was the



Blalch with his prized Fiat 1500 convertible. At this point, the auto had received standard *Luftwaffe* desert paint along with a large *Sonderkommando Blalch* insignia.



Map illustrating the He 111H-6's route from *Campo Uno* to Fort Lamy over one of the most inhospitable stretches of desert known to man. On 11 June 1937, Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan flew their Lockheed 10E Special NR16020 from Gao, French Sudan, to Fort Lamy, French Equatorial Africa, a distance of 910 nautical miles.

During the early days of the Second World War, the German military had little to no respect for their French "allies" that comprised the Vichy French government established in the uncontrolled area of southern France. Even the Germans were startled by just how quickly the Vichy turned on their own people — rounding up Jews and other "undesirables" at a pace faster than that of the Nazis. Even gathering French citizens by the tens of thousands to send off to very harsh working conditions at German factories was not beyond the Vichy government. The northern portion of the nation was firmly under German control while many of the French aircraft, pilots, and crews of the *Armée de l'Air* that survived the *Luftwaffe* onslaught of May 1940 quickly changed sides, painted yellow and red stripes on their aircraft to denote Vichy affiliation, and began fully cooperating with the Germans on plans to attack the British

A digital art representation of the Heinkel He 111H-6 being flown over the featureless desert on its way to attack the Free French/RAF installations at Fort Lamy. The mission was to destroy as much of the stored fuel supplies as possible in order to hamper Allied aircraft operations. This digital art fails to carry the aircraft's coding of VQ+BA.