

COST OF WAR

WITH THIS INSTALLMENT WE EXAMINE A VARIETY OF ALLIED AND AXIS AIRCRAFT THAT "CHANGED HANDS" ALONG WITH OTHERS THAT HAD FALLEN PREY TO THE RAVAGES OF WAR

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



The Vickers Wellington was widely used by the Royal Air Force as a medium bomber and the type made some of the first bombing attacks on Germany. Losses were high and the twin-engine Wellingtons were brought down by *Luftwaffe* fighters, anti-aircraft defenses, and sometimes just plain mechanical problems. A number of these aircraft arrived on German-occupied soil in relatively good condition and some were returned to flight conditions wearing German markings. Wellington Mk. IV Z1277 was serving with No. 301 (Polish) Squadron when it force-landed on 8 November 1941. The bomber had taken off from RAF Hemswell for a raid on Mannheim, Germany, on the night of 7/8 November and it was flown by an all-Polish crew of six. Apparently damaged by *flak*, the bomber ran low on fuel and the pilot made the decision to land at Maldegem Airfield in East Flanders, Belgium. The arrival of the RAF bomber took the Germans who controlled the field completely by surprise and most of the troops were asleep. However, the alarm was sounded and the crew was quickly taken prisoner. The next morning, many locals came out to examine the bomber.



A German applies final touches to the *Luftwaffe* markings on Wellington Mk. IC L7788 that had flown with No. 311 (Czechoslovak) Squadron with the coding KX'E. After being hit by anti-aircraft fire, the pilot made the decision to land gear down near Lelischendam, The Netherlands, on the night of 24 September 1940 following a raid on Berlin. Just after dropping its bombs, the aircraft was hit by *flak*. After landing, the crew decided to go on the run but were soon rounded up by the Germans and made POWs. After repairs in the field, this aircraft was also flown to the German test facility at Rechlin. At that location, its undersurfaces were sprayed yellow to aid in identification. The bomber was virtually new, having been completed on 24 April 1940 and then delivered to No. 9 Squadron on the 28th of that month before being transferred to No. 311 Squadron.

Detail view of the nose of Wellington Z1277 showing the Polish national insignia. For the raid, the bomber joined a force of 53 other Wellingtons and two Short Stirlings. Some 43 of these aircraft made it to the target but Z1277 was one of seven Wellingtons that did not return. Germans and Belgium civilians examine the aircraft. Because it was such a curiosity, the Wellington was extensively photographed by its captors. It appears that on the next day, the Wellington was flown to Rechlin where it was painted in German markings and test flown. The Germans had no love for the Polish crew and they were soon shuttled off to various POW camps. Captain Adam Kolanowski would later take part in the breakout from *Stalag Luft III* that became known as the "Great Escape." He was recaptured and became one of the 50 prisoners murdered by the *Gestapo*.

