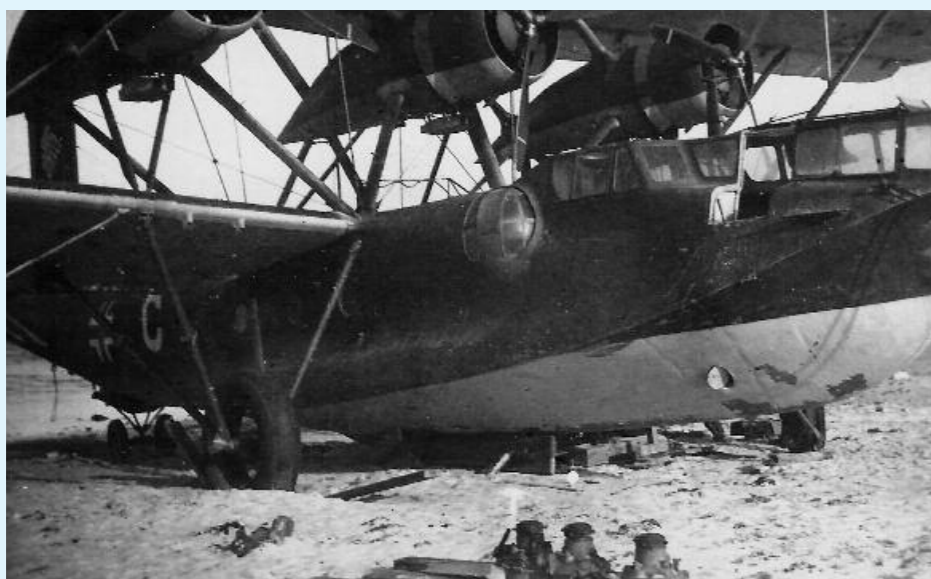


## Breguet Bizerte 521 in German Service

In Wiesbaden on 26 July 1940, the German armistice commission asked the French delegation if they had any French aircraft for sale for non-military use. The French Admiralty responded on 27 July that they did and in a letter dated 30 July, it was noted that eight 'Bizerte' seaplanes were available with four in France and four in Karouba, Tunisia. On the same day, a German float-equipped Ju 52 landed with two complete crews (headed by Lt. Klingspohr and Lt. Unterhorst) in Hourtin, where they captured the Bizerte W.Nr. 11 and 34. The French had left these aircraft as they were unserviceable due to technical failures and a lack of spare parts. However, French mechanics soon repaired the aircraft, whereupon



A poor quality partial view of one of the French Breguet Bizerte 521 flying boats pressed into Seenot service following the fall of France. Developed from the British Short Calcutta flying boat, the prototype flew for the first time on 11 September 1933 with series production aircraft mainly differing from the prototype by having a long narrow glasshouse extension from the pilot's cockpit to the bow. Powered by three 671kW (900 hp) Gnome-Rhône 14 KRS radial engines it had a top speed of 243 km/h (151 mph), a maximum range, depending on payload, of between 2000 and 3000 km (1243 to 1864 miles) and a service ceiling of 6600 m (21650 ft).

they received German markings and on 7 August were flown to Brest-Poulmic. These were the only captured Bizerte aircraft that had seen service with the French prior to the aircraft's introduction into German service. W.Nr. 35, 36 and 37, found at Le Havre, were similarly captured and put into service by the Germans, but the French forces had never used them officially.

On 9 August 1940 four 'Bizerte' arrived in Berre having flown from Karouba. On 12 August 1940 German engineers inspected the 'Bizerte' W.Nr. 4, 6, 7, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 29 and together with French pilots they air-tested four machines – the aircraft still retaining their French markings. This was due primarily to the fact

that the French insisted that the aircraft were not to operate until the Germans paid for them. Although the aircraft were worth only 25 million Francs, the Germans ended up paying almost double that for the aircraft – 43,240,000 Francs. The transaction was finally completed on 15 August 1940 and two days later, on 17 August, W.Nr. 6, 7, 26 and 27 were flown to Brest-Poulmic. They were followed on the nineteenth by W.Nr. 4, 24 and 29. On 21 August, a further aircraft, W.Nr.23, was flown in. Although the French had a total of 19 Bizerte, the Germans never insisted on acquiring all of them. Instead, only eight were originally gained. The aircraft were predominantly operated by the 1. and 3. Seenotflugkommando.

The first instance of an air-sea rescue He 59 coming under attack occurred during the early morning of 1 July 1940 when three Spitfires of 72 Sqn forced down D-ASAM of SNFIKdo 3 eight miles off Sunderland. Airborne to investigate reports of an enemy aircraft operating suspiciously in the vicinity of a convoy, the fighters identified it as an enemy floatplane which they subsequently attacked, despite it being clearly marked as an air ambulance and thus likely marking the first British attack on an aircraft clearly marked with the Red Cross<sup>11</sup>. With its crew taken into captivity by the Royal Navy, the aircraft was subsequently towed ashore for examination.

Just over one week later on the evening of 9 July, a second Heinkel He 59 B-2, D-ASUO, this time from SNFIKdo 1, was forced down on to the Goodwin Sands by Spitfires of 54 Squadron. Apart from a broken feeder pipe, the Heinkel was undamaged and, after the capture of the aircraft and its crew, it was towed into Ramsgate by the Walmer lifeboat. Subsequent examination of the documents carried by this aircraft found that entries in the pilot's log noted positions and movements of British convoys and other shipping. With reconnaissance clearly being a military and not a humanitarian function, the British decided to take action against such activities and accordingly, on 29 July, the Air Ministry released Order No. 1254, which stated that:

*'It has come to the notice of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom that enemy aircraft*

<sup>11</sup>. Although intercepted near a British convoy, this particular aircraft had been involved in a genuine rescue mission and was searching for the crew of He 115, M2+CL of the 3./KFlGr.106 which had force-landed in the North Sea due to engine failure during a mine-laying sortie.



These two views of He 59 C-2 D-ARYX, W.Nr.1314 clearly show the overall white finish and the replacement of the Balkenkreuze with Red Crosses of approximately the same proportions, which are also repeated on either side of the forward fuselage beneath the open cockpit. Unlike that on the well-known He 59, D-ASUO, the Reichsdienstflagge marking on the fin and rudder with its stylised and centrally applied Hakenkreuz is devoid of the smaller eagle and wreathed Hakenkreuz normally found on the top, left-hand corner of this marking. This aircraft was amongst the first of the type to serve with the Seenotdienst but, at present, its service history is unknown.



bearing civil markings and marked with the Red Cross have recently flown over British ships at sea and in the vicinity of the British coast, and that they are being employed for purposes which H.M. Government cannot regard as being consistent with the privilege generally accorded to the Red Cross.

H.M. Government desires to accord to ambulance aircraft reasonable facilities for the transportation of the sick and wounded, in accordance with the Red Cross Convention, and aircraft engaged in the direct evacuation of sick and wounded will be respected, provided that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Convention.

H.M. Government is unable, however, to grant immunity to such aircraft flying over areas in which operations are in progress on land or at sea, or approaching British or Allied territory, or territory in British occupation, or British or Allied ships.

Ambulance aircraft which do not comply with the above requirements will do so at their own risk and peril.'

British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, would present a somewhat less legalistic and more sanguine interpretation of the issue when he wrote; 'We did not recognize this means of rescuing enemy pilots so they could come and bomb our civil population again... all German air ambulances were forced down or shot down by our fighters on definite orders approved by the War Cabinet.' He further contended that since the 1929 Geneva Convention made no specific mention of rescue aircraft they were not entitled to its protection. Conversely, the Germans claimed that Articles 3, 6, and 17 of the Convention protected their rescue aircraft. According to Article 3, '... the belligerent who remains in possession of the field of battle shall take measures to search for the wounded.' Meanwhile, Article 6 provided that, 'Mobile sanitary formations, i.e. those which are intended to accompany armies in the field, and the fixed establishments belonging to the sanitary service shall be protected and respected by the belligerents.' Furthermore, Article 17 claimed that, 'Vehicles equipped for sanitary evacuation, travelling singly or in convoy, shall be treated as mobile sanitary formations...'