



Forced down into the area of the Goodwin Sands on the evening of 9 July 1940 by Spitfires of 54 Squadron, Heinkel He 59 B-2, D-ASUO of SNFKdo 1 was subsequently towed into Ramsgate harbour by the Wealmer lifeboat and the crew taken prisoner.

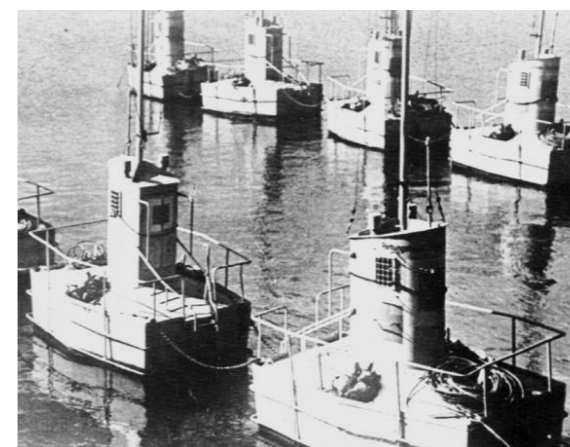


Heinkel He 59 C-2, D-ASUO of SNFKdo 1, July 1940

This aircraft was finished in overall white with Red Crosses applied in place of the usual Balkenkreuze national markings and repeated on each side of the forward fuselage beneath the cockpit. The only forms of national markings carried were its civilian registration carried across the upper and lower wings, each fuselage side, and the red, white, and black Reichsdienstflamme applied across the fin and rudder. Although of wooden construction, the propeller blades were coated and then painted in black-green 70. While not clear in extant photographs, the lower surfaces of the floats appear to be treated but unpainted metal.



Three white-painted He 59s moored at Cherbourg on the French Channel coast during the summer of 1940. Although little is known of D-ADAI, its companion, D-AHIK (DS+KA), W.Nr.1522, is known to have served with both SNFKdo 2 and 4. The identity of the third, moored behind D-AHIK, is unknown.



A group of *Rettingsbojen* (rescue buoys) at anchor in a French port prior to being anchored in the English Channel off the French coast. Constructed at the suggestion of Ernst Udet, the rescue buoys had a floor space of about 13.1 m² (43 ft²) with a 2.4 m (8 ft) cabin rising above a main float, while on the upper deck of the cabin was a mast to which a wireless antenna was connected. Although designed to accommodate four persons for several days, a significantly larger number of persons could be supported since the buoys were stocked with kerosene lamps, bedding, food and water, dry clothing and emergency medical equipment. To relieve boredom, cigarettes, brandy, and playing cards were also stowed in the cabin. When airmen – or, sometimes, sailors – were rescued, any supplies that had been used up would immediately be replaced. Finally, patch kits were stored in the buoys to guard against seepage or bullet holes. Although both the British and the Germans frequently checked the buoys, it is not known precisely how many men were actually saved by them.

¹². Detachment 2 of the General Staff of the Quartermaster General.

¹³. Rescue buoy detachment.

¹⁴. Air-Sea Rescue Central (Air).



Heinkel He 59 E, W.Nr.2596 coded TY+HD photographed on the Channel front on 7 August 1940 when with SNSt.3 following its transfer from Fliegerwaffenschule (See) 1 at Parow on 21 July 1940. It is seen here after earlier having broken loose from its mooring and drifted into a nearby breakwater, severely damaging both of its starboard wings and tail assembly. Although repaired, it was later scrapped after colliding with another aircraft.

Whatever the legal position, the point was academic; German air-sea rescue aircraft were still targets of the RAF.

After 20 July, British attacks on *Seenot* aircraft increased in frequency and ferocity. *Oberst* Otto Dreyer, commander of SNFKdo 2 at Cherbourg, reported that a British bomber had machine-gunned his white-painted and Red Cross-marked, unarmed Heinkel as it taxied toward a downed aircrew. Dreyer's Heinkel caught fire and sank, but the crew escaped on their life rafts and floated ashore on the Isle of Alderney the next day. In the light of such actions, the General Staff ordered all rescue aircraft armed and painted to match the camouflage schemes in use in their area of operations. Although they regained their armament, the slow and cumbersome Heinkel and Breguet-Bizerte aircraft were no match for Spitfires and Hurricanes. As a result, during August, fighters began escorting rescue aircraft whenever mission requirements entailed operations in proximity to the English coast. Adolf Galland and other *Luftwaffe* aircrew later spoke of the gallantry of *Seenot* crews that, with fighter escort, even flew into the Thames estuary to rescue German and even English flyers.

By the autumn of 1940, the primary focus of the air war had shifted to the interior of the British Isles as the *Luftwaffe* began bombing cities and centres of industry. Therefore, the German rescue forces varied their tactics according to the needs of the *Luftwaffe* and the policies of the British. Since fighter operations now centred less on massive sweeps at specific times and places to draw the RAF into combat, standing rescue patrols decreased in frequency. To offset this, on 24 September 1940, the *Generalstab General Quartiermeister 2.Abtteilung*¹² ordered the immediate formation of three *Seenotbojenkommando*¹³. These were *Seenotbojenkommando A* in Cherbourg under *Major* von Bredow, *Seenotbojenkommando B* in Boulogne under a *Major* Bruhn and *Seenotbojenkommando C* in Calais, with its commander to be appointed later. The strength of each *Kommando* was one officer, one *Feldwebel*, one *Unteroffizier* and 10 enlisted men. The A and B *Kommando* were formed in Wilhelmshaven and *Seenotbojenkommando C* in Stettin, with each transferring to its respective location in France immediately after formation: *Kommando A* being subordinated to *Seenotzentrale (Luft)*¹⁴ Cherbourg and *Kommando B* and C to *Seenotzentrale (Luft)* Boulogne. The purpose of these commands was to oversee a new series of sea rescue buoys, known to the British as 'Lobster Pots', which were deployed in the English Channel and lower reaches of the North Sea where their distinctive