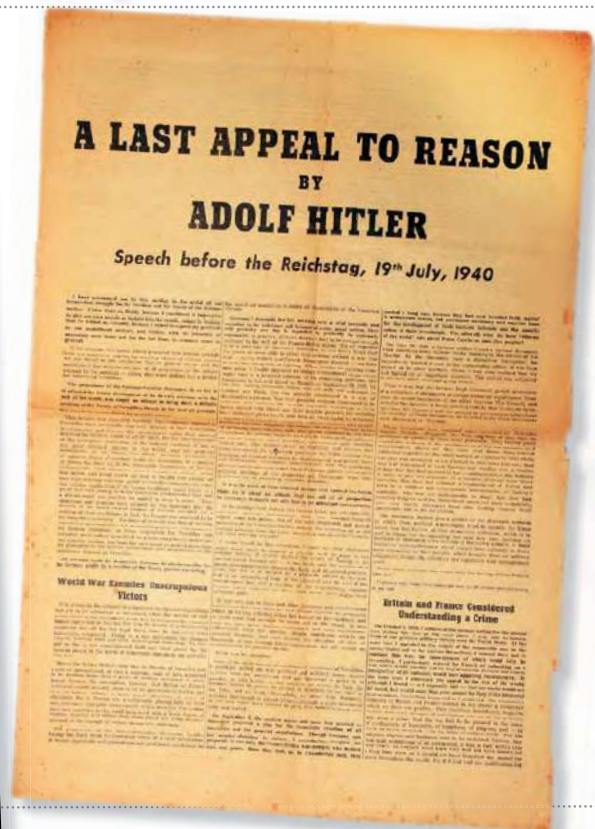




Collecting German Air-dropped Leaflets on Britain

Through a series of air-dropped pamphlets, the Nazis attempted to reason, threaten and even befriend their enemy across the Channel from 1940 until 1944. **Austin J Ruddy** looks at the variety of German air-dropped propaganda publications that chart the increasingly desperate nature of their message.



ABOVE The most commonly found leaflet, *A Last Appeal To Reason* by Adolf Hitler, was air-dropped by Luftwaffe aircraft in August 1940.

(ALL IMAGES VIA AUSTIN J RUDDY)

LEFT As this smiling civil defence worker shows, Hitler's attempts at air-dropped propaganda were unsuccessful, his leaflets being auctioned to raise money for war funds or simply used as scrap paper.

Although Germany used propaganda leaflets on other fronts in the Great War, surprisingly, they did not orchestrate any such campaign during the course of their 78 air raids over Britain. All this was to change with the more propaganda-focused Nazi regime during the Second World War. Though not widely known, some 25 different leaflets were disseminated over Britain from 1939 until 1944, proving collectable today.

A month before the start of the war, a limited number of propaganda postcards were scattered over East Anglia, possibly by Graf Zeppelin II. Then, during February/March 1940, a lone bomber

made a similar limited drop over Portsmouth of a fake edition of the *Evening Standard*, dated February 17, 1940, headlined 'The Massacre of the RAF'. Both are very rare and do not appear on the market often these days, if at all.

Following the fall of France, Hitler went on an uncharacteristic charm offensive; a negotiated ceasefire with his only remaining rival would be less costly than a full-blown invasion of Britain. So, on July 19, 1940, before the German Reichstag, Hitler gave a triumphant three-hour speech, directing "yet another appeal to reason in England... I see no compelling reason which could force the continuation ▶

of this war". However, the British people were only too aware of the Führer's previous guarantees; his word meant nothing. Hitler's bloodied hand of friendship would not be embraced.

Britain's lack of an official response to Hitler's apparent magnanimous offer seems to have side-stepped the dictator. So, over a ten-day period, starting on August 1, 1940, around five million, four-page tabloid transcriptions of his speech, *A Last Appeal to Reason by Adolf Hitler*, were air-dropped by German bombers across England and Wales, reaching as far as Swansea and Manchester, plus the Midlands and south. For supposed masters of propaganda, the leaflet was not reader-friendly; word-heavy, in small type, it was dry and unengaging.

Perhaps realising this, for three days of the campaign, a smaller, two-page abridged version, *From the Führer's Speech*, was dropped by long-range unmanned balloons across Yorkshire, the Midlands and Wales. The inflatables were about 16ft (5m) tall, resembling an upright can, with the leaflets suspended below in a box and released by a battery-powered timer.

Despite his persistence, Hitler's publications were unpersuasive. They were treated with derision, auctioned for the Red Cross or even torn into squares and used as toilet paper! The greatest impact the

leaflets had was when an unopened bundle smashed through the roof of an office building. Perhaps the most famous German air-dropped leaflet, copies of *A Last Appeal To Reason...* fetch £20-£45, as does the smaller, abridged version.

TARGETING CHURCHILL

On July 31, 1940, Churchill was photographed by the press examining a Thompson submachine gun whilst inspecting anti-invasion defences near Hartlepool, County Durham. Two weeks later, the German propaganda machine regurgitated the image across East Anglia in the form of an aircraft-dropped leaflet, *Wanted For Incitement To Murder*, warning Britons not to join the Home Guard or resist invasion and comparing Churchill to an American gangster. It backfired: the British people wanted a war leader who would offer "blood, toil, tears and sweat" to take on the Nazi menace – and in Churchill, they had one. The leaflet was also balloon-dropped along East Anglia in the latter half of October. Rare and sought-after, it could cost you £100 for a copy today.

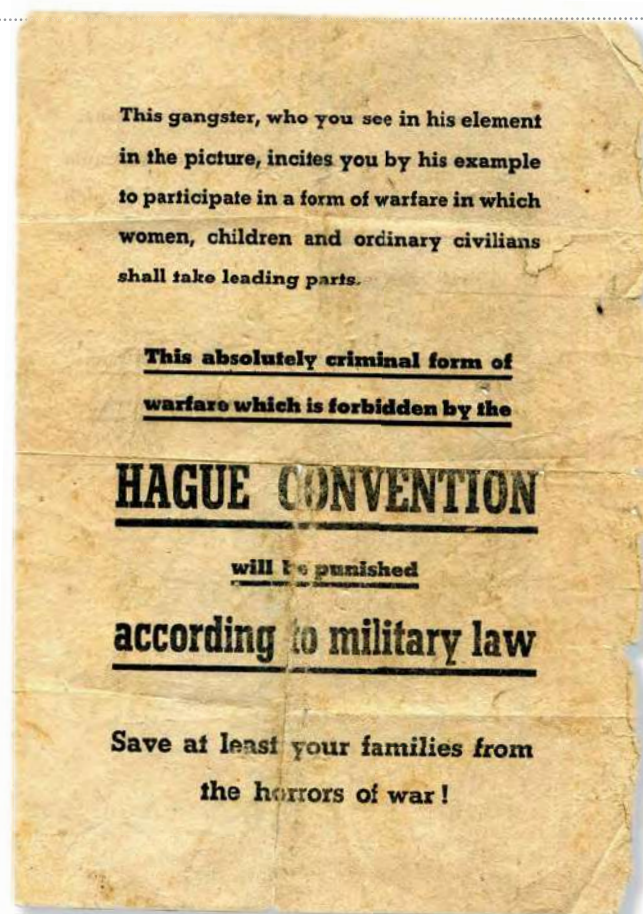
This was not the end of the campaign, but as Germany lost more and more aircraft over Britain, their leaflets were scattered in fewer numbers and as such, are less well known and rarer nowadays.

On July 9, 1941, A5-sized copies of a double-sided leaflet *The Battle of the Atlantic is Being Lost!* were found around Bristol and Wales. Others were released over Hull and Winchester, Hampshire a week later. The sheet noted British merchant shipping losses and warned the UK would soon starve. The campaign had clearly been planned for

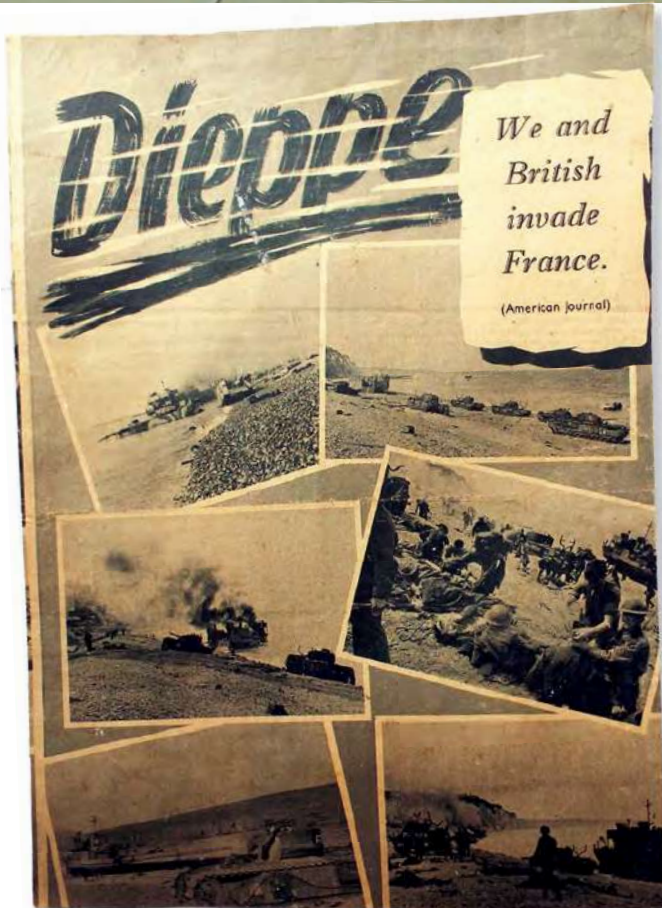


ABOVE An abridged version of the leaflet, 'From the Führer's Speech', dropped by balloon.

RIGHT The back of the famous Churchill tommy gun leaflet.



"HOWEVER, THE BRITISH PEOPLE WERE ONLY TOO AWARE OF THE FÜHRER'S PREVIOUS GUARANTEES: HIS WORD MEANT NOTHING. HITLER'S BLOODIED HAND OF FRIENDSHIP WOULD NOT BE EMBRACED"



LEFT A four-page pictorial pamphlet, *Dieppe – We and British invade France*, poured scorn on the disastrous allied landing at Dieppe in August 1942.

BELOW As Germany lost the war, its messages to the UK's people became less triumphant. This leaflet, from spring 1944, *Why Die For Stalin?* argued that Germany was fighting for 'European civilization'.

BOTTOM The special 3ft-long leaflet drop container, DPA 1006. Note the Dieppe leaflets protruding at the top.

some time, as just two days before the first leaflets were dropped, America entered the Battle of the Atlantic and the tide would slowly turn. This pamphlet can occasionally be found for £20-£40. A similar notelet, *The Lost War in the Air*, dropped the same time, is one of the rarest, with little being known about its background.

DIEPPE AFTERMATH

The disastrous allied landing at Dieppe on August 19, 1942 was too good a PR opportunity for the Germans to miss. A fortnight later, a pictorial four-page A4 booklet, *Dieppe – We and British Invade France*, was dropped over the south coast from Portsmouth to Eastbourne, where Canadian troops were based. It contained 29 photos of wrecked tanks, allied POWs and dead soldiers/casualties on the beach. The Germans took more gruesome photos but did not use them, perhaps to maintain the 'reasoned argument' propaganda theme. Incidentally, this leaflet was ejected from a special 3ft drop container, DPA 1006. Despite its limited area of distribution, this publication still surfaces at £25-£35.

The Germans returned to the Battle of the Atlantic theme the following year, dropping a four-page A5 sheet *Here is the Reason Why the British Government Says Nothing About the Shipping Losses* over Sunderland in May 1943. It listed 412 British ships they had sunk. Ironically, the drop coincided with 'Black May', now considered the turning point of the battle, when U-boats suffered high losses and fewer allied ships were sent to the bottom. This leaflet rarely surfaces and could cost £70.

In autumn that year, the Germans targeted American air bases in East Anglia with an eight-page fake version of US magazine *Life*, dated July 26, 1943. It contained ghoulish photos of dead US bomber crews shot down over Germany. Confiscated by airfield staff, it is one of the rarest leaflets to find today, no doubt costing more than £100.

Why die for Stalin?

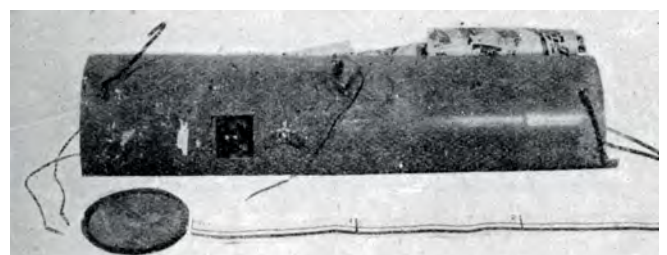
In dying for Stalin your soldiers are not dying for democracy or the preservation of the democratic form of government—they are dying for the establishment of Communism and a form of Stalinist tyranny throughout the world. Furthermore, they are not dying for the preservation of the integrity of small nations (England's old war-cry) but are dying so that Poland shall be a Soviet state; so that the Baltic States shall be incorporated in the Soviet Union and so that Soviet influence shall extend from the Baltic to the Balkans.

Every British soldier who lays down his life in this war is not only a loss to his own country; he is a loss to the common cause of European civilization. Germany's and England's quarrel is a form of traditional rivalry. It is more in the nature of a private quarrel which Germany did not seek. The Soviet Union's quarrel, however, is a quarrel with the WORLD. It is a quarrel with our common heritage and with all those values—moral, spiritual, cultural and material which we have, all of us—Englishman and German

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

The Germans printed a series of six small anti-Bolshevik leaflets in March 1944, ready to be dropped on allied troops following D-Day. It is believed one of them, *Why Die For Stalin?*, was released over south coast D-Day assembly ports. Arguing Russia was Britain's real enemy, it claimed Germany was fighting for 'European civilization'. Again, you don't see many around these days, so they sell for around £75.

As the Luftwaffe lost free range over Britain, Germany's solution was unmanned science. Over the latter half of 1944, V1 flying bombs distributed 14 different types of leaflet across England. ▶



"IT DECRIED RAF BOMBER COMMAND'S ATTACKS ON GERMAN CITIES, PROVIDING A HISTORY OF RAIDS IN THE WAR, BUT WAS ELUSIVE ABOUT THE LUFTWAFFE'S TARGETING OF BRITAIN"

RIGHT V1-dropped leaflets are very rare, with numerous fakes produced over the years. Dispatched in the summer of 1944, this is believed to be a rare example of the first pamphlet, *This is an Experiment – let's try it – W Churchill*, which decried RAF Bomber Command's attacks on German cities. Its value is estimated today as being in the high hundreds, perhaps more.

BELOW The back of the Dieppe leaflet.



The first, released over Kent a fortnight after the start of the 'Doodlebug' campaign and later in August, was a four-page photo booklet *This is an Experiment – let's try it – W Churchill*. It decried RAF Bomber Command's attacks on German cities, providing a history of raids in the war, but was elusive about the Luftwaffe's targeting of Britain.

Continuing the theme, at the end of August, a series of three small leaflets, *Do You Like That? You Do?* featuring photos of bombing victims in Berlin, Cologne and Hamburg, were ejected over the southeast. They warned more V-weapons were coming.

In November and December 1944, the Germans returned to the news-sheet style of propaganda, with two editions of a four-page booklet, *The Other Side*, released over Sussex, Suffolk, Essex and Hertfordshire. Also in November, a further series of three anti-RAF leaflets, *Sir Phosphor Harris RAF Chalks Up Another Victory*, *A Splendid Decision* and *the Aftermath*, were found in Essex and Suffolk.

INCREASINGLY DESPERATE MEASURES

On December 23/24, 1944, the Nazis air-launched V1s at Manchester carrying what has been suggested as their first 'smart' leaflets. Four versions of V1 POW Post attempted to trick recipients into helping Hitler's henchmen discover where their missiles landed,



by asking the finder to forward the leaflet to a named relative of a British POW – 'phishing', 1940s-style! It is suggested 'agents' would call on the relatives and ask where the leaflets had been posted from, thus identifying where the V1 landed. With hindsight, the theory is not very practical or plausible. Most fell in Lancashire and Yorkshire, with a few strays elsewhere.

Also dropped on Christmas Eve 1944, and again similarly spread, was a miniature 40-page English edition of the German military magazine, *Signal*. Its contents were pretty pointless as propaganda to British civilians and this was the last of the German publications known to have been dropped on the UK. These V1 leaflets are extremely rare, with only a handful of examples found and known today. Thus, their market cost is hard to fathom, although it must be in the hundreds of pounds.

In overview, compared to the rather basic nature of unsubtle cartoons and intimidation against allied troops on other fronts, initially at least, these German propaganda leaflets attempted to use facts, figures and arguments to persuade Britons their war effort was pointless. However, the Nazi's output against the UK paled into insignificance compared to the millions of pamphlets dropped over 'the Fatherland' by the RAF and USAAF. Indeed, Germany's effort in the war of the printed word was ultimately futile; it only resulted in the diversion and destruction of increasingly valuable resources, manpower and aircraft. For the British, it provided a source of derision, fundraising – and free toilet paper.

The main references work on the subject, published by the *Psywar Society*, are *Messages From The Sky Over Britain* by R G Auckland and Keith B Moore (1998), and *V1 Rocket Propaganda Leaflets 1944-1945* by R G Auckland (1990). 