

= Black Friday (1945) =

On 9 February 1945 , a force of Allied Bristol Beaufighter aircraft suffered heavy casualties during an unsuccessful attack on the German destroyer Z33 and its escorting vessels ; the operation was labelled " Black Friday " by the surviving Allied aircrew . The German ships were sheltering in a strong defensive position in Førde Fjord , Norway , forcing the Allied aircraft to attack through heavy anti @-@ aircraft fire . The Beaufighters and their escort of Mustang IIIs (North American P @-@ 51 Mustang) fighters from the RAF 's No. 65 Squadron were also intercepted by twelve German Focke @-@ Wulf Fw 190 fighters of the Luftwaffe fighter wing Jagdgeschwader 5 . In the resulting attack , the Allies damaged at least two of the German ships for the loss of seven Beaufighters shot down by flak guns . Another two Beaufighters and one Mustang were shot down by the Fw 190s . Four or five German fighters were shot down by the Allied aircraft , including one flown by German Ace Rudi Linz .

The decision to attack Z33 and her escorts rather than a nearby group of merchant ships was in accordance with RAF Coastal Command 's orders from the British Admiralty . The heavy casualties sustained in the raid led to merchant ships being prioritised over destroyers and small warships in subsequent operations . In addition , another squadron of P @-@ 51 Mustangs was assigned to protect Allied aircraft operating near Norway from German fighters .

= = Background = =

Due to Allied victories in France and Eastern Europe , Germany 's surface shipping was largely confined to the lower Baltic and Norwegian waters by late 1944 . This left ports in Norway as Germany 's last remaining bases to continue the Battle of the Atlantic and conduct trade with Sweden . When the Baltic iced over during the winter of 1944 ? 45 , Germany was forced to transport its vital imports of Swedish iron ore from the port of Narvik in northern Norway .

In response to the growing importance of German maritime transport routes through Norwegian waters , the Royal Air Force 's Coastal Command transferred seven squadrons of anti @-@ shipping aircraft from bases in eastern England to northern Scotland during September and October 1944 . Three squadrons equipped with Mosquito light bombers were stationed at RAF Banff while a wing made up of four squadrons operating Beaufighter heavy fighters was based at RAF Dallachy . The Dallachy Wing comprised the British No. 144 Squadron , Canadian No. 404 Squadron , Australian No. 455 Squadron and New Zealand No. 489 Squadron . These four squadrons were veterans of many anti @-@ shipping operations over the North Sea .

Attacks by the Banff Wing quickly forced German ships travelling along the Norwegian coast to sail at night and take shelter in deep fjords during the day where they were very difficult to attack . In order to locate German ships the two wings sent out aircraft on almost daily patrols along the Norwegian coastline from the Skagerrak to Trondheim . During this period the Allied squadrons developed a tactic of sending two ' outriders ' ahead of the main body of the patrol ; these aircraft were manned by experienced aircrew and penetrated into fjords in search of shipping which might not be spotted by the other aircraft . By December 1944 patrols were also routinely escorted by RAF Mustang Mk III fighters and accompanied by Vickers Warwick air @-@ sea rescue aircraft . Only a single squadron of Mustangs was available , however , as these long @-@ ranged fighters were needed to escort daylight raids by heavy bombers against Germany . German fighters began to be encountered off the Norwegian coast in December , and from the end of the month onwards it was common for Allied wing @-@ sized operations near Norway to be attacked by groups of up to 30 fighters . In March 1945 the Luftwaffe had 85 single @-@ engined and about 45 twin @-@ engined aircraft operating from ten or twelve airfields south of Trondheim .

During the first weeks of 1945 the Allied strike wings flew few operations due to severe weather . On 15 January , the Banff Wing was intercepted by 30 Fw 190 fighters from the III . Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 5 (III . / JG 5) during a raid on the town of Leirvik . In the resulting fighting five Mosquitos and five Fw 190s were shot down . By 9 February , the Ninth and Twelfth Squadrons of JG5 were based at Herdla near Bergen , about 65 miles (105 km) to the south of Førde Fjord .

These units were equipped with Fw 190s and the Twelfth Squadron was commanded by Leutnant Rudi Linz , a 28 @-@ year @-@ old flying ace with 69 ' kills ' to his credit .

The German Narvik @-@ class destroyer Z33 entered service in February 1943 . She served in Norwegian waters from July of that year and saw combat on several occasions . She was the last German destroyer to leave northern Norway , and sailed for Germany on 5 February 1945 . It was intended that Z31 , which had completed initial repairs at Bergen after being heavily damaged in the Action of 28 January 1945 , would join her to make a joint passage to the Baltic . However , Z33 ran aground in Brufjord on 7 February , damaging her port shaft and propeller and causing both engines to fail . She was subsequently taken under tow to be repaired in Trondheim . Z33 and the two tugboats that were towing her chose to shelter in Førde Fjord during the daylight hours of 9 February while en route to Trondheim .

= = Battle = =

= = = Preliminaries = = =

On the morning of 9 February , two New Zealand @-@ crewed Beaufighters from No. 489 Squadron conducted a patrol of the Norwegian coast . These aircraft first sighted a 1 @,@ 500 @-@ ton merchant ship in Stong Fjord . Continuing north , they were surprised to find a Narvik @-@ class destroyer accompanied by a minesweeper and two flak ships in Førde Fjord . The aircraft continued their patrol and spotted five large merchant ships in the Nord Gulen and two minesweepers and a flak ship near Bremanger . Despite the pilots ' surprise , the Allied command was aware that Z33 was in the area from Ultra signals intelligence .

The Dallachy Wing was on alert to attack any ships found by the reconnaissance patrol . Although the group of five merchant ships were highly vulnerable to attack and a worthwhile target , Coastal Command came under the operational command of the Admiralty and was bound by its decision to give higher priority to attacking warships than merchant vessels . As a result , the wing was dispatched against Z33 even though the destroyer and its escorts were well protected and in a difficult position for aircraft to attack .

Wing Commander Jack Davenport , who had commanded No. 455 Squadron until October 1944 and was now on the staff of No. 18 Group RAF , planned the attack on Z33 . The plan called for two ' outriders ' to precede the main force and confirm the location of the German ships . The Beaufighters would then arrive to the east of the German anchorage , turn to the west and attack the ships before escaping over the sea . Davenport sought to minimise Allied casualties , but the location of the German ships in a narrow and protected fjord meant that the operation was inherently risky . The strike leader was Wing Commander Colin Milson , the 25 @-@ year @-@ old commanding officer of No. 455 Squadron , and a veteran of anti @-@ shipping operations against Italian and German ships in the Mediterranean and North Seas . Milson had reservations about making what was likely to be a costly raid , particularly given that the war was clearly coming to an end , but carried out the order to attack Z33 to the best of his ability .

After being spotted , the German ships in Førde Fjord sailed further up the fjord and prepared for an Allied attack . Z33 and several of her escorts anchored close to the steep southern slopes of the fjord near the village of Bjørkedal . Meanwhile , other ships moored near the northern shore after breaking up pack ice with gunfire . (I) This anchorage was also protected by flak batteries on the shore of the fjord .

= = = Attack = = =

At 1 : 30 pm on 9 February , Milson led 31 or 32 Beaufighters into the air from Dallachy . The strike force was joined by either ten or twelve P @-@ 51 Mustang fighters from No. 65 Squadron RAF and two Warwick air @-@ sea rescue aircraft from No. 279 Squadron RAF carrying life rafts to help any aircrew forced to ditch . (II) All four of the Dallachy Wing 's squadrons contributed aircraft to the

force . The No. 404 and No. 455 Squadron Beaufighters were armed with " 60lb " rockets while the aircraft from No. 144 Squadron and the single No. 489 Squadron Beaufighter dispatched were armed only with their four 20 mm cannon and six machine guns .

After the attackers crossed the Norwegian coastline at 3 : 40 pm , two Beaufighters from No. 144 and No. 489 Squadrons detached themselves from the main force and pressed ahead as outriders . The two ' outriders ' crossed Førde Fjord near where the German ships had been sighted that morning . At 3 : 50 pm they sent Milson a radio message stating that they could not see the ships . The ' outriders ' then turned to the east and overflew the town of Førde before searching the next fjord to the north ; during their flight near Førde Fjord they did not spot the German warships in their new position . Meanwhile , the Ninth and Twelfth Squadrons of JG5 were scrambled from Herdla at 3 : 50 pm and ordered to attack the Dallachy Wing and its escorts .

Several minutes later , the main body of the raid reached the southern shore of Førde Fjord travelling north . To their surprise , the Allied planes passed directly over the German ships and came under intense attack from anti @-@ aircraft guns , though no aircraft were hit . In response , Milson wheeled his force to the right in an attempt to attack the ships from east to west as planned . The steep walls of the fjord protected Z33 from attack from this direction , however . As a result , Milson led the force west to near the mouth of the fjord and ordered the Beaufighters to attack in relays from west to east . This required the aircraft to fly into the face of alerted German defences and then escape over steep mountains . The narrow confines of the fjord also meant that the Beaufighters had to attack individually from a single direction and would not be able to swamp the German defences as they normally sought to do .

Milson led the first group of Beaufighters into Førde Fjord at about 4 : 10 pm . His aircraft escaped undamaged after attacking a flak ship and other Beaufighters followed him into the fjord . At about this time 12 Fw 190s arrived at Førde Fjord and flew through German flak to intercept the Beaufighters that were waiting their turn to attack . The British Mustangs were taken by surprise , but dived to intercept the German fighters . This led to an intense air battle , with over 50 aircraft either engaged in dogfights or diving to attack the German ships ; it was the largest aerial conflict ever fought over Norway .

The fighting continued until 4 : 25 pm . By that time the German ships had shot down seven Beaufighters . Fw 190As had claimed another two Beaufighters and a Mustang III . The Allied losses included six of the eleven No. 404 Squadron aircraft involved in the attack . Overall , the Germans killed 14 Allied airmen and took four prisoner of war . The Allies damaged Z33 and several of the other German ships and shot down either four or five Fw 190s . (III) Linz and another German pilot were killed . Kriegsmarine fatalities included four sailors on Z33 and three on the converted trawler VP6808 ; both of these ships were damaged during the attack . There may also have been fatalities on the other German ships .

= = Aftermath = =

After departing the Førde Fjord area , the surviving Beaufighters , many of which were damaged , returned to RAF Dallachy . Several had difficulty making safe landings , and two were forced to land on their bellies due to undercarriage damage , but no further aircraft were lost . The air and ground crew were shocked by the scale of the losses , and the battle became known as " Black Friday " . The losses suffered by the Dallachy Wing on 9 February were the highest any of Coastal Command 's strike wings sustained in a single operation during the war .

The German fighters , many of which were short of fuel and ammunition , also broke off at about 4 : 25 pm and returned to base . On the night of 9 / 10 February , the German ships left Førde Fjord and continued their journey to Trondheim . A subsequent Allied attack on the ships by a different strike wing was also unsuccessful . Z33 arrived in Trondheim on 11 February and was repaired . She subsequently departed for Germany on 26 March and safely arrived in Swinemünde on 2 April . She did not see any further combat , and was decommissioned at Brunsbüttel in late April as the Navy lacked the fuel needed to operate her .

The losses incurred during the raid on Førde Fjord led to changes in the tactics used by RAF

Coastal Command 's anti @-@ shipping squadrons . Following the attack , the Admiralty agreed to a proposal by Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas , the commander of Coastal Command , to assign a higher priority to attacking merchant vessels than to destroyers and small warships . A second squadron of Mustangs was also assigned to protect Coastal Command aircraft operating near Norway from early March . Milson was awarded a bar to his Distinguished Service Order on 13 July 1945 for his leadership and personal courage during the raid on Førde Fjord , which was described in the citation as a " brilliantly executed operation " .

The raid was commemorated in Norway after the war . A monument to the aircrew killed in the battle was dedicated in the town of Førde on 8 May 1985 , the 40th anniversary of Norway 's liberation . This monument was later moved to Bergen Airport . The Air Combat Museum in the town of Naustdal also houses photos , maps , aircraft parts and other artifacts relating to the battle .

Two of the Focke @-@ Wulf Fw 190 fighters of JG 5 that flew against the RAF Beaufighters and Mustangs survive to this day ? one , an F @-@ model airframe with factory serial number , or Werknummer of 931 862 , that crashed as a result of the " Black Friday " aerial engagements was found and recovered as a salvageable aircraft wreck in September 1983 . It currently resides in Stow , Massachusetts , and had been under restoration by the " White 1 Foundation " of Kissimmee , Florida towards a resumption of full flightworthy status , until its 2012 transfer to the Collings Foundation 's facilities in the Bay State to complete the work towards full flightworthy status . While still in Florida , in 2005 its last pilot , the former Luftwaffe Unteroffizier Heinz Orlowski visited it and sat one final time in the cockpit of his " under @-@ restoration " Fw 190F @-@ 8 , some sixty years after he last flew it and five years before his death in 2010 . The other example , an Fw 190A @-@ 8 bearing the Werknummer 732 183 was flown by Luftwaffe 70 @-@ victory ace Rudi Linz in the engagement . His Fw 190A @-@ 8 is displayed in the Cottbus Hangar of the Military Aviation Museum in Pungo , Virginia , USA as of 2014 .

The locations of several of the Beaufighter planes ? gravesites ? were found by marine archeologist Rob Rondeau and diving crew 60 years later . One site was given a commemorative plaque , in the presence of one surviving Canadian airman , Herbert (Bert) Ramsden , who participated in the action and a sister of an airman who died there .