

The following is the text of a broadcast in English in the European Service this afternoon by Mr. William Bayles, an American Journalist, on the German report in September, 1939, that the Ark Royal had been sunk in the North Sea:-

THE STORY OF HERR FRANCK

On Friday, the British Admiralty announced the loss of the Aircraft Carrier ARK ROYAL.

For nearly 24 hours the German Authorities hesitated to claim the sinking of the Ark Royal as a new German success. They hesitated because more than two years ago, in September, 1939, they had already claimed to have sunk her in a dive-bombing attack in the North Sea.

The man who was said to be responsible for this success, OBERLEUTNANT FRANCK, was specially decorated by Goering for his exploit.

Today, the well-known American journalist MR. WILLIAM BAYLES, who has spent the last eight years in Germany, broadcast from London the true story of Oberleutnant Franck, and the attack on the Ark Royal.

Here it is in his own words -

I spent the first year of the war in Germany and one of my German acquaintances was Oberleutnant Franck, the Luftwaffe Pilot who sank the ARK ROYAL way back in September, 1939. As a matter of fact, Franck never claimed to have sunk the ARK ROYAL. That was done by Goebbels. But Franck got all the credit - so much of it in fact that one of my last evenings in Germany was spent trying to dissuade him from committing suicide. I learned the truth of the whole affair from Franck himself

Franck's original report to the Berlin Air Ministry simply stated that he had spotted an aircraft carrier in the North Sea and had dive-bombed it. Visibility was poor but he believed that a thousand pound bomb had scored a direct hit. He was not certain. That report was never released. Instead, Dr. Goebbels' Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda got busy and sank the ARK ROYAL. The German press splashed the news all over the Reich next morning with the biggest headlines I'd ever seen in German newspapers. Some of them even ran special editions and printed the headlines in red. Lacking photographs of the sinking Ark, Dr. Goebbels put his artists to work, and a long series of pictures depicting every phase of the sinking appeared in the German illustrated magazines. As Franck was flying a one-man dive-bomber, he was the only eye witness, and his account became longer and more dramatic in each new edition. Franck later told me that he had never made any of the statements attributed to him, but then he wasn't asked to. The boys at the Propaganda Ministry were better at the kind of thing. The grand climax came when Goering sent Franck an elaborate telegram of congratulation and conferred on him the Iron Cross First Class. Franck was photographed hundreds of times wearing his Iron Cross and became public hero number one.

About this time news began to seep into the Reich that the Ark Royal was still very much afloat. The Air Ministry tried to protect itself by announcing that it had never actually said it was the Ark Royal, and that if the Ark was still afloat, it must have been one of the other aircraft carriers. But Dr. Goebbels was not to be deprived of his sinking and continued to brag about it for weeks. His Ministry even prepared an illustrated children's booklet entitled "How I sank the Ark Royal" and signed Franck's name to it.

Meanwhile, Franck's position in the Luftwaffe had become quite intolerable. He was wearing a decoration for something he had not done and jokes were beginning to circulate about him. One of the secret broadcasting stations in Germany called him Baron Franckhausen, an obvious allusion to Baron Munchausen, and the name struck. He became morose and nervous, and was finally removed from operational flying. I saw him for the last time in March last year, about six months after he had become an ersatz hero. Four of us, two Americans, and two Germans, had dinner together in

/a Berlin

a Berlin restaurant and then went to a flat where we could talk privately. Franck was in a bad way and felt that the only thing for him to do was to save the honour of his family by committing suicide.

He said that if he could only get up in a plane again he would dive it into the first ship he could find. I suggested that the Propaganda Ministry might be a better target and he immediately agreed. The other German present also thought that the only thing left for Franck to do was to commit suicide, and we two Americans found ourselves in the odd situation of trying to persuade him to go on living. We suggested that if he was really intent on dying, the best thing would be to denounce the whole story and put the blame where it belonged - on Dr. Goebbels and his unscrupulous organisation. If he did that, he wouldn't have to worry about the suicide. Dr. Goebbels would attend to that.

I left Germany shortly thereafter and have not heard since of Oberleutnant Franck. The actual sinking of the Ark Royal brought him again to mind. I wonder if he is still alive. If he is, he will appreciate the irony of Dr. Goebbels being scooped by the British Admiralty on the news that he once tried to make the biggest propaganda of the War.

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