

CONDOR! – from Airliner to Missile Carrier

Story and photos by Günther Ott

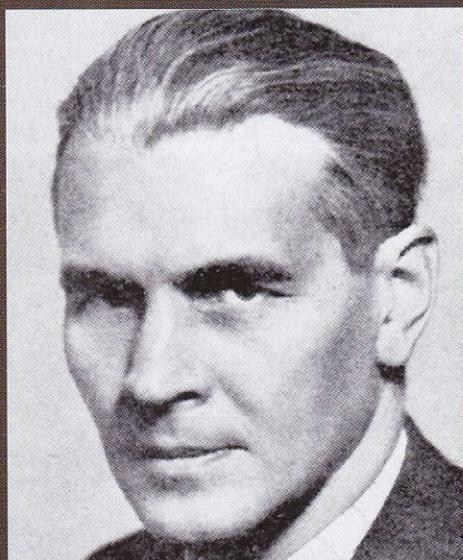
On 11th August 1938 sensational news spread around the world. For the first time a land-based airliner had flown non-stop across the North Atlantic from Berlin to New York. This aircraft, Focke Wulf Fw 200 V1, D-ACON, piloted by Lufthansa's Flugkapitän Alfred Henke, had flown the distance of 6,371 km (3,959 miles) between Berlin-Staaken and Floyd Bennett Field, New York, in 24 hours, 36 minutes and 12 seconds – a new world record.

Despite this success it should be noted that the Condor had not been designed from the outset as a long range aircraft to ply the transoceanic routes. After the necessary modifications for the record flight, this aircraft was hardly anything else but a flying fuel tank, without any payload carrying capability. In fact, for scheduled air traffic

to overseas destinations Lufthansa (DLH), along with other major airlines of the time, relied solely on Flying Boats. The reason for the development of the Fw 200 had primarily been through a concern that the German flag carrier with its fleet of Junkers Ju 52s would soon no be longer competitive on trunk routes within Europe with the arrival of the Douglas DC-2 and these soon to be followed by the more efficient and comfortable Douglas DC-3. The development of civil airliners had virtually been halted in Germany from 1933 with the military rearmament programmes given top priority. Only those projects with dual military and civil applications had any chance for further development and production. The Dornier Do 17, Heinkel He 111 and Junkers Ju 86, also designed and built in small numbers for airline use, were all aircraft with an acceptable performance but with only limited passenger comfort. However Lufthansa was supplied with an alternative option in October 1933. This was the development of a four-engined airliner prototype as the civil counterpart to the earlier 'Ural' heavy bomber prototypes Ju 89 V1 and V2 and consequently Junkers worked to transform the now designated Ju 89 V3 into the Ju 90 V1 airliner prototype. Such a design would be given more impetus when reports received from the USA suggested that the five largest airlines were about to participate in the development of the four-engined Douglas DC-4, which was expected to appear in 1938. Consequently the Reichsluftfahrtministerium (RLM / German Air Ministry) finally agreed to initiate the development of a pure airliner to counter the threat posed by Douglas and retain some semblance of prestige. During February 1936 the specifications were compiled by the development group of the RLM and in these they

had set out the Lufthansa requirements for the development of a fast, all metal, four-engined airliner able to carry 25 passengers and a crew of four, including one cabin attendant. BMW 132 G engines were specified and it was expected to attain a range of 1,200 km (746 miles) at a speed of 300 km/h (186 mph). With the other major aircraft companies already heavily involved with military projects the RLM decided to take advantage of the underutilized capacity at Focke Wulf Flugzeugbau GmbH in Bremen and tasked them with the development of the proposed airliner. Its technical director was Kurt Tank, who had been joined in May 1933 by Andreas von Faehlmann as head of the Focke Wulf Design Department. Tank could draw on his former experience when working with the Rohrbach Metall-Flugzeugbau GmbH, while Faehlmann had previously held a position as a project engineer with the Arado Flugzeugwerke GmbH. While Tank would go to receive fame as the 'father' of the famous Focke Wulf aircraft types, Faehlmann was in fact the one who had designed them. Upon his untimely death at the age of 45 on 10th April 1943, the company released an obituary, giving credit to him for designing, among others, the Fw 56, Fw 58, Fw 187, Fw 189, Fw 190 and the Fw 200 Condor. Even the British 'Flight' magazine, despite the war situation, paid tribute in an article devoted to Faehlmann in September 1943.

On 9th July 1936, Focke Wulf supplied the RLM with its tender No. 760 and on 13th August 1936 the Ministry issued a preliminary order for the development and construction of two aircraft. The new type was to carry the name 'Condor' and the RLM issued the out of sequence type designation of Fw 200. With the aim of introducing the new type to fly on the European



Oberingenieur Andreas von Faehlmann (1898-1943), the designer of the Fw 200 Condor.

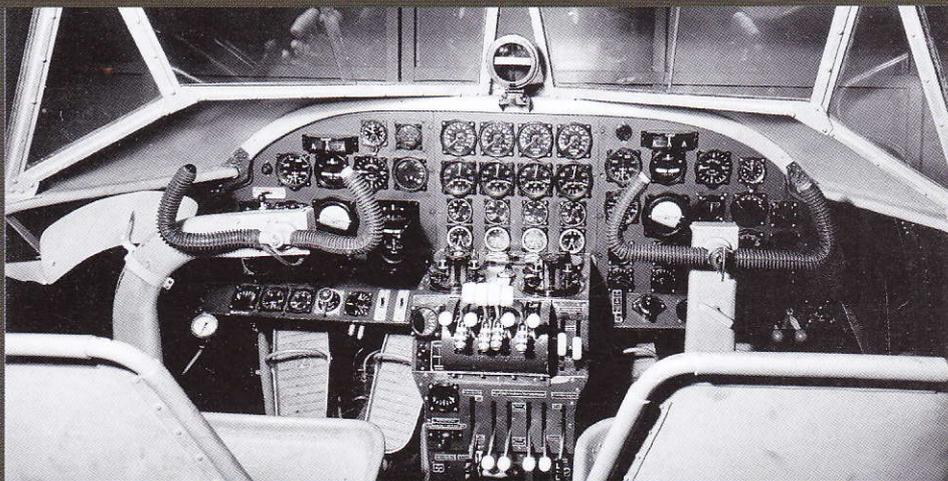
Focke Wulf Fw 200 C-1, F8+CH, of 1./KG 40 on patrol over the Bay of Biscay.

route network by the summer of 1938, Lufthansa had instructed Focke Wulf on 5th April 1937 to procure the material for three additional Fw 200s. However the airline was only obliged to purchase these additional aircraft if the two state-owned prototypes actually achieved the promised performance. The construction team, led by Wilhelm Bansemir, made good progress and on 6th September 1937 the prototype Fw 200 V1, Werknummer (construction number) 2000, took-off on its maiden flight at Bremen-Neuenlanderfeld, with Kurt Tank and Focke Wulf's chief test pilot Hans Sander at the controls. Work on the second prototype, W.Nr. 2484, progressed rapidly and by 27th November 1937 it was structurally complete and a month later both prototypes were revealed publicly at Lufthansa's Berlin-Tempelhof Central Airport. By the year's end, Fw 200 V1, now registered D-AERE, and named Brandenburg, had made about 90 flights, while Fw 200 V2, D-AETA, Westfalen, had reached 60. Lufthansa thereafter authorised the completion of the three pre-ordered aircraft and on 9th December 1937 ordered three more.

The overlapping of the flight tests of the two prototypes with the construction of the six pre-series aircraft led to an ideal situation, in that the results of evaluation could be incorporated into assembly. The first series aircraft (S1), W.Nr 2893, D-ADHR, Saarland, was also the first aircraft completed as the definitive Fw 200 A-0 version. The proof of the effectiveness of the design changes, for instance the modified sweep of the outer wings and the redesign of the vertical tail surfaces, could only be demonstrated in the first instance on this A-0 aircraft, as the V1 and V2 were only modified later. The V1, D-AERE, Brandenburg,



The first prototype Fw 200 V1, D-AERE, performed its maiden flight on 6th September 1937 and is displaying here its original wing and tail configuration.



The spacious and well arranged cockpit of the Condor, pilot position to the left.

commenced its 200 hours of flight evaluation with the DLH Technical Centre at Staaken near Berlin on 6th February 1938, but by the end of the month it was returned to the manufacturer for modifications. The V2, D-AETA, Westfalen, started route-proving flights with Lufthansa on 6th May 1938 and visited major European capi-

tals for demonstration purposes. On 5th March 1938 the Danish airline DDL had placed an order of two Fw 200s, to be delivered in July and November 1938. To meet these delivery deadlines two Fw 200 A-0s were diverted from the Lufthansa order, receiving then the export type designation Fw 200 KA-1 and becoming OY-DAM, Dania (W.Nr. 2894) and OY-DEM, Jutlandia (W.Nr. 2993).

Prior to its delivery to DLH, D-ADHR, Saarland, had performed a special passenger flight on 27th June 1938 with Kurt Tank at the controls. It was intended as a world distance record attempt flying the route Berlin-Cairo-Berlin within 24 hours. The outbound flight was a complete success, however on the return flight the Condor was stranded during a stop at Salonica, Greece, due to a damaged tail wheel. Next to come would have been a round-the-world flight, also intended to be registered as a world record flight. For this attempt the Fw 200 V1 had to be specially modified. Instead of the standard cabin interior, additional fuel tanks were installed in the fuselage and to increase range weight was saved wherever possible, even the interior paneling was removed. Trials for this flight were carried out between 4th and 18th July 1938 with Lufthansa at Staaken,



Re-registered as D-ACON and modified for this record flight, the Fw 200 V1 flew nonstop from Berlin to New York on 10th/11th August 1938.

the aircraft now re-registered D-ACON. The circumnavigation of the globe was scheduled to be in an east-west direction. After the first leg from Berlin to New York the route would lead to the US West Coast and on to Honolulu and Tokyo. The return to Berlin was planned across South-east Asia. But the plan was thwarted as the US Government, with its protectionist attitude, denied the necessary over flight and landing rights. When D-ACON flew from Berlin-Staaken for New York on 10th/11th August 1938, earning its place in aviation history, this was not because the US authorities had changed their mind, but because of a little subterfuge. Lufthansa was authorized by the United States to operate 28 North Atlantic crossings in 1938, all as non-commercial evaluation flights. Usually Blohm & Voss Ha 139 float planes were employed for this purpose, but there was no limitation in using any other type of aircraft. The airline therefore declared the Condor flight to New York and the return flight to Berlin-Tempelhof as flights No. 8 and 9 of the current evaluation programme for 1938. Directly after the New York flight D-ACON should have gone to Tokyo, but the projected flight was cancelled due to the Sudetenland crisis in the late summer of 1938 and the aircraft returned directly to Germany. By the order of the RLM, which still owned the aircraft, Focke Wulf had to remove the additional fuel tanks and during September 1938 it was handed over to the Luftwaffe Lehrgeschwader at Jüterbog as a transport. It was only on 28th November 1938 that D-ACON was able to resume its Tokyo flight and it took-off from Tempelhof manned by the same crew as on the New York flight, with Alfred Henke as pilot in command. It had been planned to reach Tachikawa airport within 54 hours however even with fuel stops at Basra, Karachi and Hanoi, the 13,844 km (8,602 miles) were flown in 48 hours, 18 minutes and 19 seconds, qualifying for another FAI long distance speed record with an average speed of 192.308 km/h (119.495 mph).

The accompanying head of the Focke Wulf



Condors of the Danish airline DDL and Luftbansa at Hamburg-Fuhlsbüttel Airport during summer 1939. Both airlines were jointly serving the route Oslo-Gothenburg-Copenhagen-Hamburg-Amsterdam-London.



Hitler's personal aircraft Fw 200 V3, Immelmann III, was equipped with numerous modifications, including a special parachute seat.



Two Fw 200 A-Os were operated in South America by Luftbansa's Brazilian affiliate Sindicato Condor. Here PP-CBJ, Arumani, is being serviced. Note the Junkers Ju 52/3mce in the background.

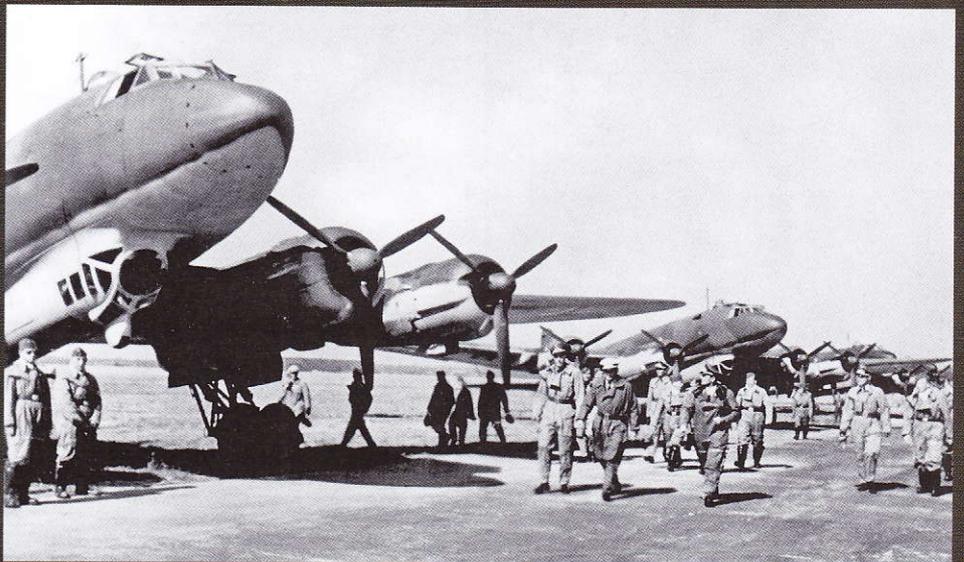


Five additional fuel tanks carrying 1,100 litres (242 Imp Gal.) each were installed allowing up to 14 hours flight time for a range of about 3,860 km (2,398 miles) subject to bomb load. Two additional 625 litre (137 Imp Gal.) tanks could also be carried in place of the bomb load in the ventral gondola.

sales department, Heinz Junge, was also successful and as a result the Japanese ordered five Fw 200 aircraft on 17th December 1938 to be operated by the Manchurian Air Transport Company MKKK in the puppet state of Manchukuo as of the spring of 1940. This order was placed despite the mishap during the return flight which had commenced on 6th December 1938. After a stop in Manila D-ACON was scheduled to fly to Batavia (today's Jakarta) to return to Germany on KLM's East Indies route, as Focke Wulf had identified the Dutch airline as a prospective buyer of the Condor. Events were to turn out differently. After almost eleven hours of flight, D-ACON reached Cavite Bay, near Manila but on final approach the

two starboard engines failed in quick succession. Flugkapitän Henke had no other option but to ditch the aircraft near Rosario Point, rather than continuing across some high ground to reach the airfield. The aircraft had suffered only slight damage but during its recovery sustained further damage due to improper handling by the local salvage team. It was thereafter shipped to Hamburg where it arrived on 1st February 1939 and following the accident investigation by the RLM, the Fw 200 prototype was consigned to the scrap heap with the 10th Fw 200 A-0, W.Nr. 3324, D-ABOD, Kurmark, to be produced for DLH as a replacement.

In January 1939 and a long time before their completion, the 8th and 9th of the A-0 pre series aircraft originally scheduled for Lufthansa as D-ACVH, Grenzmark and D-ARVU, Ostmark, were reassigned to the *Regierungsstaffel* (Government flight), with W.Nr 3099 assigned to be Adolf Hitler's personal aircraft. It was subsequently registered as D-2600 and named *Immelmann III*. For this purpose special modifications were made, among which was the installation of a parachute seat for the Führer situated above a hatch which could be opened when the tabletop in front of the seat was unlocked and folded up. In case of a threat Hitler could have left the aircraft through this hatch, with the parachute in the seat opening automatically via a ripcord. These modifications were evaluated in a specially assembled fuselage mock-up in the first instance. The completed aircraft was ordered by the RLM into the type approval process at the Rechlin Test Centre as the Fw 200 V3. All other V-numbers (V = Versuch or Test) up to the V10 were test aircraft for the improved version, the Fw 200 B. Among these was the V9, which was the planned test aircraft for the series production of 181 Fw 200 transport aircraft scheduled for the Luftwaffe in the RLM produc-



Fw 200 C-3s and their crews of Kampfgeschwader 40 prepare for a mission. Winston Churchill called them the "Scourge of the Atlantic."

tion and delivery program early in 1939.

For export Focke Wulf chose designations composed as follows: the RLM type number was followed by the letter "K", a letter designating the individual customer commencing with "A" and a number to differentiate the actual version delivered to the export customer. As already mentioned, the two Fw 200 A-0s sold to the Danish DDL were designated Fw 200 KA-1, while the two Fw 200 Bs ordered by the Finnish Aero O/Y on 27th January 1939, were designated Fw 200 KB-1. The five Fw 200 Bs ordered by Japan were to be named Fw 200 KC-1, but two Fw 200 A-0s diverted by Lufthansa to their affiliate *Syndicato Condor* in Brazil in summer 1939 did retain their original type designation.

By August 1939 Focke Wulf had 46 Fw 200 Bs on order, the majority for Lufthansa and its Brazilian and Chinese affiliates *Syndicato Condor* and Eurasia. The Dutch KLM had withdrawn its

option to order nine Fw 200 B aircraft as a result of the D-ACON accident and had been taking greater interest in the four-engine Boeing 307 Stratoliner, mainly for its pressurized cabin. However, when the Stratoliner suffered a fatal crash, killing all aboard including KLM's technical director, negotiations were resumed with Focke-Wulf, then for the development of a pressurized Fw 200 version.

At the outbreak of World War II the first Fw 200 B-1 (W.Nr. 0001) for DLH had already entered the test flight programme as the Fw 200 V4, while others were nearing completion. With a lack of suitable aircraft for long-range sea reconnaissance, the Luftwaffe had the aircraft converted for use by *Aufklärungsgruppe des Oberbefehlshabers der Luftwaffe* (Reconnaissance Group of the Luftwaffe Supreme Command) as an armed photo reconnaissance aircraft. Designated Fw 200 V10 it was to receive two RB 50/30 precision cameras as well as a defensive armament consisting of a dorsally mounted MG 15, a ventral position with two MG 15s and two window mounted MG 15s. The range was increased to 5,000 km (3,107 miles) courtesy of auxiliary fuel tanks mounted inside the fuselage. Painted in a standard Luftwaffe camouflage scheme and coded BS+AF, the V10's career was a short one. On 23rd November 1939 the aircraft was taking off at Jever Airfield for its first operational mission to Iceland and the Faroe Islands, when suddenly both starboard engines failed. It was subsequently written-off. As with the V1 accident at Manila, an electrical fault in the fuel tank system seems to have been the cause of the engine failure. All other Fw 200 Bs already under construction as civil airliners were also diverted for military use, being regarded as ideally suited for the role of supporting the U-boats in harassing Allied shipping. This conversion and the technical requirements



For early Fw 200 C models taxiing fully loaded or with an overload meant there was a high risk of the weak fuselage structure failing just aft of the wing, resulting in a broken back. Surprisingly all aircraft were repaired and restored to full airworthiness by field repair shops.

were discussed in a meeting held with Kurt Tank and his team at Bremen on 5th September 1939 and initiated by Hauptmann Edgar Petersen. According to Focke Wulf it would take about eight weeks before the first converted aircraft would be ready to fly, with more to follow every two weeks. Petersen submitted this proposal to his superiors on 10th September and by the 18th September 1939 the Luftwaffe General Staff ordered Focke Wulf to have 20 aircraft converted as Fw 200 Cs. The second Fw 200 B-1 was designated V11 as the prototype for the military version Fw 200 C-1, with the maximum take-off weight increased from 17,500 kg (38,500 lbs) to 22,700 kg (50,045 lbs). Its first flight took place at Bremen-Neuenlanderfeld on 13th January 1940. The fuel capacity was increased to 8,060 liters (2,130 gallons) with an option of further increasing it to 9,310 liters (2,460 gallons). As with the civil versions Fw 200 B-1 and B-2, the BMW 132 H engines, with a constant performance of 690 PS (680 hp) using 87 octane fuel, were also retained for the military conversions – the Fw 200 C-1 and C-2. The more powerful Bramo 323 R engines, which were already intended to be used for the airliner version Fw 200 B-3, were fitted to all Fw 200 Cs starting with W.Nr. 0025 (designated as the Fw 200 V13). These aircraft were initially the basic Fw 200 C-3 (with up to 9 sub-versions Fw 200 C-3/U1 to Fw 200 C-3/U9), followed on the production line by the strengthened Fw 200 C-4 with increased armament in January 1942 and the Fw 200 C-5 with further increased armament in April 1943. The later versions C-6, C-7 and C-8 differed from the C-5 only by modified gun positions or fuel tank systems.

Production ceased with W.Nr. 0263 in February 1944, with a total of 275 Fw 200s built. Aside from the two prototypes, this consisted of the 10 pre-series Fw 200 A-0s and 263 Fw 200 B and C aircraft and also includes the two former Finnish airliners as long-range transports (Fw 200 D-1s) and three of the former Japanese aircraft also taken over as long-range transports (Fw 200 D-2s).



In December 1942, Hitler received armed Fw 200 C-4/U1, 0137, CE+IB, as his new personal aircraft. It had a shorter ventral gondola than the standard Fw 200 Cs in order to leave space for the special parachute seat. Later Dönitz, Himmler, Keitel and Speer also used Fw 200 Cs as their personal transports.

Combat Operations:

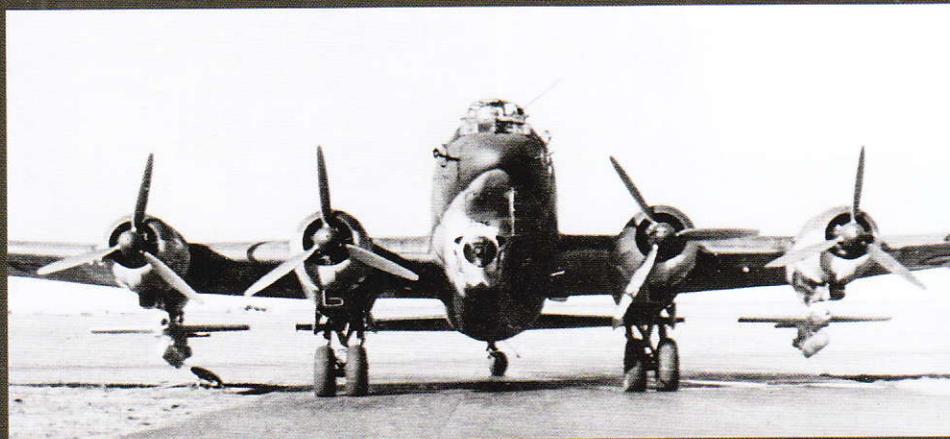
Hauptmann (Captain) Edgar Petersen was assigned as Commanding Officer of I./KG 40, the first element of Kampfgeschwader 40, which first appeared on Luftwaffe quartermaster's strength returns as of 30th September 1939, with the Fw 200 V2 and a Fw 200 A-0 used for conversion training and courier flights. The latter spawned the name Fw 200 'Kurier' which was an effort to disguise the true purpose of the Condor's military aspirations, with photos released for publication having all gun positions censored.

With the civil Condors impressed by the Luftwaffe and employed for troop transports and supply dropping missions over Narvik in Norway, the Fw 200 C-1s of I./KG 40 went to war by bombing targets in Norway from April 1940. In July and August mine-laying of British ports, for instance Belfast during night missions, were high on the agenda, prior to the unit moving to Bordeaux-Mérignac for anti-shipping missions. Here the successful bombing attack on the 42,348 tonne liner 'Empress of Britain' by Oberleutnant Bern-

hard Jope's Fw 200 on 26th October 1940 was a highlight, and it was soon that Winston Churchill called the Fw 200 the "Scourge of the Atlantic" due to its contribution to the heavy Allied shipping losses. Official British Admiralty figures for the complete period August 1940 through February 1941 show 52 merchant ships of 222,223 tonnes lost and 35 merchant ships of 262,213 tonnes damaged by the Fw 200s of I./KG 40.

Initially, and well into mid-1941, low-level attacks were applied and were highly successful, however when the increasingly effective Allied defences took their toll of the vulnerable attackers the Fw 200s were subsequently relegated to armed reconnaissance missions in support of the U-boats and had to stay at a distance from the convoys well into the spring of 1943. From November 1941 until January 1942 Condors of 2./KG 40 were diverted for urgent supply missions flying fuel for Rommel's Panzer Army across the Mediterranean from Lecce in Italy to North Africa, and this was repeated once again by Fw 200s of the enlarged 9./KG 40 from October 1942 until February 1943. A major effort was implemented in January 1943 when Kampfgeschwader zbV 200 was formed under the command of Major Hans-Jürgen Willers as a transport unit using Fw 200s of KG 40 for relief missions into a besieged Stalingrad. Following the German surrender the surviving Condors were briefly used for bombing Soviet railroad lines and evacuating troops from the embattled Kuban bridgehead, before returning to their bases in France and Norway by the end of February 1943.

With the U-boats suffering heavy losses in spring 1943, it was deemed necessary that the Fw 200s of III./KG 40 once again engage in anti-shipping missions against Allied convoys west of Portugal and Spain and in the Bay of Biscay. The tactics changed to high-level bombing made ex-



Between November 1943 and May 1944 a total of 85 Condors were modified as Fw 200 C-5/FK for carrying Henschel Hs 293 guided missiles. This new weapon was introduced with high expectations but yielded disappointing results.

tremely accurate by the use of the Lotfe 7 D precision bomb sight. From 15th August 1943, formations of up to 15 Fw 200 went on the offensive with quite some success. As a final improvement some Condors were modified to enable them to carry Henschel Hs 293 guided missiles. Between November 1943 and May 1944 a total of 85 Fw 200 C-4, C-5, C-6, C-7 and C8 were converted, with their general armament standardized to C-5 configuration. These Condors received the new type designation Fw 200 C-5/FK (FK standing for Flugkörper, i.e. missile). Two FK missions were undertaken by III./KG 40 in the Bay of Biscay, one each on 28th December 1943 and 12th February 1944, but both had to be aborted. Fortunately the unit was not employed in attacks on the Allied invasion fleet off the Normandy coast, but was transferred to Værnes in Norway where it joined 3./KG 40. This unit was mainly engaged in reconnaissance missions up to the Arctic regions, but was also equipped and trained for FK missions. The last of those missions was performed by two Fw 200 C-5/FKs against a Finnish vessel in the harbor of Pori on 6th October 1944, but no hit was registered. All Fw 200 Cs were subsequently gathered in Norway in a transport unit named Transportfliegerstaffel Condor, with two

of them on detachment to a Sonderkommando (Special Command) based in Austria for supply missions to the German garrison on the Greek Island of Rhodes through to 3rd May 1945.

During the war quite a number of Fw 200s were released to Lufthansa for future civil use, but only few of them became active as airliners. One of them was Fw 200 C-3, 0068, D-ASHH, Hessen, which was lost during a flight from Berlin to Munich at Piesenkofen in Bavaria on 21st April 1945.

Postwar activities were undertaken by the Danish Fw 200 KA-1, OY-DEM, Jutlandia, until 1946 and the Brazilian Fw 200 A-0s, PP-CBI, Abaitará and PP-CBJ, Arumani until 1950. Lastly a single Fw 200 C-4/U3 was used by the Spanish Air Force as a trainer until 1949 and three Fw 200 Cs were used by the Polarnaja Aviazija in the Soviet Union until the last one was retired in 1950 after having provided good service in supplying the scientific polar expedition 'Sever 4.'

Sadly, no example survived to be preserved, however the recovery and rebuild of Fw 200 C-3, W.Nr. 0063, from a Norwegian fjord for the Deutsches Technikmuseum, Berlin will address this situation somewhat (see Issue 100 for an extensive article on this epic project).

The Author:

Günther Ott had a management career with Lufthansa for more than 40 years and in 1972 became a founding member of Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsche Luftfahrthistorik (ADL), the German Aviation History Working Group. He has produced several books on the Fw200 - Focke Wulf Fw 200 Condor, Part I - Airline Service, Transport and Training, ISBN 978-3-935687-451 and Focke Wulf Fw 200 Condor - With Danish Airlines in War and Peace, 1938-1946 (together with Rob J.M. Mulder), ISBN 978-82-997371-7-3. A book covering the history of the Fw 200 with KG 40 is in preparation.

