

Box 11793

25.2.44 - No.28

Air Ministry News Service

Air Ministry Bulletin No.13076

DOUBLE NIGHT ATTACK ON SCHWEINFURT

A few hours after the U.S. 8th Army Air Force had bombed the ball-bearing factories of Schweinfurt, and while the fires they had started were still burning, Bomber Command made a major attack, on this industrial town.

Hundreds of Lancasters and Halifaxes, by far the greater part of the force of well over 1,000 aircraft dispatched last night, made two separate attacks at an interval of two hours. In the force were many Canadian and Australian crews.

The enemy began to lay fighter flares during the first attack which began at five minutes past eleven, but not a single flare was seen during the second attack - zero hour for this was at five minutes past one.

Crews saw the fires caused by the U.S. attack before the first target indicators were dropped. Within a few minutes of zero hour an effective concentration of markers was laid. Great numbers of H.E. and incendiary bombs were dropped and clouds of black smoke began to rise.

The fires were still burning to guide the second force, but again the target indicators were laid; there was much smoke over the target and the markers were needed. The fires were rapidly extending, and smoke now rose to a great height.

Ground defences were strong initially, especially at the beginning of the first attack, but their efficiency decreased under the weight of bombing.

"The 50 or 60 searchlights around the town were standing aimlessly up on end", said a pilot in the first force. When the second attack began, the searchlights were again forming a ring and another strong barrage was put up, but once again bombing disorganised the ground crews, and prevented any effective co-operation.

Some crews reported that they saw fires still burning in Stuttgart, last attacked on Sunday night.

/There was

There was better weather last night over a great part of S.W. Germany than there has been in some weeks. The skies were clear and visibility very good. With the defences in this part of Germany not so strong as around Berlin, cloud cover is not so essential. "The sky was perfectly clear all the way to the target", said a Lancaster Squadron Commander in the first force. "Though there was no moon, there was brilliant starlight, and as we flew over the Continent we could see that the ground was snow-covered all the way. It was dazzlingly white round Schweinfurt."

Though a town of no more than 60,000 inhabitants, Schweinfurt is considered by the economic experts who advise in the choice of targets, as the most important industrial centre of its kind in Germany or German-Occupied Europe, and probably the most vital bottleneck in the whole of the enemy's armament industry.

This is because its main factories used to produce about 50 per cent of the total production of ball and roller bearings of all types available to the Axis. Every branch of industry supplying the armed forces requires a large supply of the bearings — aircraft, armoured vehicles, all mechanised transport, and in fact, all modern machines made for high performance would be useless without them.

Before the war, Germany made more than half of the bearings produced in the whole of Europe, including Sweden.

At the present time, Germany has access to the production of Occupied Countries, and can buy from Sweden. Supplies from these sources have not increased, but those from Schweinfurt have been completely stepped up. The several ball-bearing plants in Schweinfurt now have a pay roll of more than 20,000 one-third of the whole population in the town; in scarcely any one other industry in any other town in Germany is there a higher proportion of industrial workers to the whole population.

It is considered unlikely that the enemy has built up large reserves of stock. The aircraft industry probably takes rather more than a third of the whole output, and the motor industry rather less than a third.

It is an important factor that ball-bearings for aircraft are not interchangeable with those required for other machines. To restore the plants destroyed at Schweinfurt may prove difficult, because the highly-specialised machinery for making the bearings was also manufactured there.

Bombers setting out for the second attack flew close to German aircraft raiding in the South of England. One pilot said he saw a Lancaster caught by one of our searchlights. "I don't expect the crew felt too comfortable," he said. "Personally I have never seen a barrage over Germany anything like that which our gunners were putting up."

+++++

NOTES FOR NEWSREELS REGARDING THE ISSUE OF R.A.F. FILM MATERIAL.

R.A.F. Attack on Schweinfurt 24.2.44. Box 11793

This film, taken by a Flight Sergeant Cameraman of the R.A.F. Film Unit flying in a Lancaster of an R.A.A.F. Squadron, gives a unique picture of an R.A.F. night attack. Previous film records have never shown so clearly the progress of a raid. The camera aircraft arrives at the beginning of the attack and when the camera starts to turn there are only a few scattered fires visible: the camera runs without a break, and a minute or two later, by the time the film ends, fire covers almost the whole of the target area and continuous bomb flashes show through the thick, rising, columns of smoke. Londoners who have seen the glow of a few scattered fires during the recent sharp attacks by the Luftwaffe will be able to form some idea of the scale of this R.A.F. attack which followed the great American daylight attack.

The first fires seen were lighted by the first Pathfinders. As the hail of bombs begins to fall around these central markers, target indicators dropped by other Pathfinders can be seen falling to mark the whole of the target area.

At one point the camera swings away from the fires for a moment. This occurs immediately after the release of the bomb load of the camera aircraft, when the Lancaster breaks its "straight and level" bombing run with violent evasive action.

---

Chiefs of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces shown in the film are:-

Commander in Chief - Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory. Box 11793  
Deputy C.-in-C. - General Butler.  
Senior Air Staff Officer - Air Vice-Marshal Wigglesworth.  
Deputy S.A.S.O. - General Strickland.  
Air Officer Commanding - Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham.  
2nd Tactical Air Force  
General Commander 9th U.S. - General Lewis H. Brereton.  
Air Force.  
A.O.C., Air Defence of - Air Marshal Sir Roderick M. Hill.  
Great Britain.

---

Attacks on Pas de Calais area. Box 11795

The aircraft shown in the two daylight operational films are Mitchells (Square Double Fins) and Bostons (Single upswept fins and long noses). The bombers were escorted by Spitfires.

The attacks were on military objectives in the Pas de Calais area. For guidance for Newsreel commentaries, please see previous dope sheet issued with last batch of daylight operational material. Reference can also be made to the Prime Minister's statement.

On their way back from bombing the target the camera records a shot of a German airfield near the coast that has been severely ploughed up by Allied bombing; the airfield is not now serviceable.