

THE THIRD NIGHT AGAINST STUTTGART

The attack on war factories in Stuttgart, three nights running, has meant deep penetration into Germany. As the crow flies Stuttgart is 100 miles nearer to England than Rostock, but the journey to South Germany involves a much longer flight across heavily defended areas. Stuttgart itself was not particularly well protected on the first night of the attack, except by cloud, but on the way there and back, on all three nights, our bombers had to get past a great deal of flak and many patrolling fighters.

Last night - the third attack - the defences of Stuttgart had certainly been stiffened; crews reported many more searchlights, some more heavy guns, and light guns where none had been before. In spite of cloud, the objectives were found and fires left.

Last night two Lancasters showed how well they could fight. One of these met a Messerschmitt 109, and at first the pilot took evasive action. But the Messerschmitt still came on, and attacked from the port quarter. At 200 yards range, the rear gunner of the Lancaster gave one burst which only lasted for two seconds. In that two seconds the Messerschmitt broke in half and fell to the ground in two pieces, each of them burning. The rear gunner saw an explosion after the burning pieces had hit the ground.

The second Lancaster met a Messerschmitt 110 when over the sea on the way back. The Messerschmitt shadowed for about ten minutes; when it was about 1,000 yards away it fired and then closed in until it was more than 10 yards from the Lancaster's rear turret. From the turret, the rear gunner could see nothing of the sky; his window was filled by the nose of the Messerschmitt as it came up from directly below. It was not until the Messerschmitt broke away upwards that the rear gunner fired. A long burst set the enemy's starboard engine on fire. It dived towards the sea. No one saw it hit the water, but the crew chalked it up as "probably destroyed".

On the first night when Stuttgart was attacked, the three searchlights suddenly caught a Hampden in their cone. This was not far from the Belgian coast. Immediately there was a hail of heavy flak and the Hampden had a bad time. A cylinder was holed, among much other damage, and as a result the port engine caught fire. A shell fragment hit the pilot in the right side of the chest. Some of its force was broken when it hit a cigarette case and first aid box in his pocket, but he was in great pain. He kept control of the aircraft. "My crew," he said, "remained calm and did their jobs well and quickly, and so we got home". Despite his wound and damage to the Hampden, the pilot flew safely and well to the English coast and there landed on the nearest aerodrome.

Even after landing the port engine was still smoking. The Hampden was holed in 42 places, though in no way beyond repair. But, as the pilot pointed out, his first aid box would have to be replaced.

---