

THROUGH THE RHINELAND DEFENCES

A great force of British bombers attacked the Rhineland, particularly Cologne last night. Stirlings, Manchesters, Wellingtons and Hampdens took part in this attack. The number of aircraft missing is small, but this does not mean that the German defences were not up to their usual strength. Searchlights, anti-aircraft guns, and night fighters were as busy as always in the defence of one of the most highly industrialised areas of Germany.

A Wellington was followed right up to the target by a fighter. The rear gunner who kept his eye on it all the time, directed the captain's evasive action so successfully that there was no exchange of fire. When the bomber plunged into the barrage over Cologne, the night fighter refused to face the anti-aircraft fire and fell behind.

As the Wellington came away from the target after dropping its load it met two more night fighters. From these it also got away without an engagement.

Not all the bombers evaded the defences so easily. One Wellington made a good belly landing. When it arrived home the underside of the aircraft, the bomb-doors, the propeller of the port engine, and much else were found to have been damaged by 'flak'. A shell burst hit another Wellington and severely wounded the second pilot. There were one or two other reports of minor damage, which could be repaired within a few hours, but grim enough to the crews at the time. The words "intense flak", "aircraft hit after bombing" in the brief reports give little idea of what the crews must have gone through over Cologne, or of the relief they must have felt when at last they landed safely at base.

The weather over the Rhineland was variable, with shifting clouds. Large fires were described by many crews.

The aero-engine factory at Gennevilliers, on the outskirts of Paris, was attacked by a force of Whitleys.

The weather was better than that over the Rhineland. The factory, like the two other factories near Paris which Bomber Command attacked recently stands beside the river Seine in a position where it can be found without much difficulty. Crews report fires, and debris thrown high into the air.

One wireless operator had a narrow escape when over Gennevilliers. He was leaning over the flare chute launching a flare when a shell burst. The shell fragments holed the fuselage and one of the wings. A piece of metal struck the wireless operator's torch and knocked it out of his hand; but he was quite unhurt.

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