

ANOTHER U-BOAT BASE IN FLAMESHEAVY ATTACK ON ST. NAZAIRE

A quarter of an hour after the first flares had been dropped in last night's raid on St. Nazaire, the port was described by a pilot as looking like a burning torch which turned night into day over an area of 30 miles around.

In this further raid on one of Germany's chief U-boat bases more than 1,000 tons of bombs were dropped.

From then until the end of the attack - it began a few minutes before nine o'clock and lasted about three quarters of an hour - the fires spread rapidly. Two of these stood out particularly, one, which was in the dock area, appeared to be an oil depot, and a gigantic pall of smoke rolled up from it to a height of 16,000 feet. The second seemed to be burning fiercely in the marshalling yards.

Then, just as the raid was coming to an end, there was a huge explosion. A sheet of flame shot up, so big that it momentarily eclipsed all the other fires burning in the town.

A pilot who had just dropped his bombs, said that although he was flying at 15,000 feet he felt the force of the explosion even at that height. Smaller explosions followed.

By this time black smoke under which a 'bubbling mass of red flame' was beating furiously almost covered the port.

Well over a thousand tons of high explosive and incendiaries were dropped. The flak was quite heavy to begin with but before long it wavered and towards the end, died down to a few feeble puffs. "It looked to me," one pilot said, "as if the gunners had given it up and gone to earth."

The rear gunner of a Halifax, which had bombed towards the beginning of the attack said: "the whole of the dock area was ablaze, and I could pick out individual buildings burning away. "There was one warehouse well alight and another series of fires a little further off. The bomb aimer dropped our load in the dark patch between these fires.

"When we were near the port", said the pilot of a Stirling, "I could see a terrific fire in the centre of the target area and over half a dozen good ones round it. There wasn't much flak - we only got one burst near us as we made our bombing run - so we could take our time."

The bomb aimer of a Halifax which attacked towards the end of the raid said that when he arrived the fires were burning more fiercely and were more concentrated than any he had seen in 17 trips.

"As we came in," he said, "there was a certain amount of flak - tracer and heavy stuff - but while we were over the target it all died away. We made our bombing run across the target, circled and came round again so as to get a really good view of what was happening. I could see buildings in the dock area blazing away."

St. Nazaire is one of Germany's main U-boat bases. Submarine shelters, similar to those built at Lorient, have been constructed on the west side of the basin St. Nazaire, and the Nazis have massed large stocks of material for the maintenance of their fleet of U-boats. But the town is not wholly given up to working for the submarines.

Before the war it was primarily a shipbuilding and fitting out port and could accommodate the largest vessels. The Germans appear to be still using it for their minesweepers, torpedo boats and escort ships and large motor vessels have been taken there to be converted into armed auxiliaries.

The town does a certain amount of manufacturing. There are iron and steel works, a lead factory, large oil depots and an aircraft works. Before the war the aircraft factory was turning out about 100 bombers a year and had been re-equipped with the largest machinery.