

BERLIN'S MOST CONCENTRATED RAID

At every station which sent bombers to Berlin last night crews displayed a quiet confidence as they came into the interrogation room. Everyone knew at once, from the expression on the men's faces, that the raid had been a success.

The operational orders for the heaviest and most concentrated raid that Berlin has yet had were that the bombing should take half an hour. From a few minutes after 10 p.m. onwards several tons of high explosives fell every minute on Berlin, and all the while incendiaries in tens of thousands were dropping in a continuous shower. Eight-thousand pounders and many 4,000 pounders were in the load carried by the Lancasters, Halifaxes and Stirlings taking part in the raid. "I saw 4,000 pounders exploding everywhere", said one pilot.

Under this intense bombing the fires began immediately the first flares had been dropped. A Halifax pilot estimated that there were over a hundred "first-class" fires, "The concentration of the attack was magnificent", he said.

Crews due to arrive towards the end of the attack saw the flames of Berlin 20 minutes before they got there, and on the way back they saw a deep glow in the sky from 200 miles away. Others watched Berlin burning as they skirted the barrage coming up from Bremen and Hanover. Thick smoke rose from the fires and by 10.30 it hung over the city in an ominous cloud, reddened by the flames below.

At first it looked as though the famous defences of Berlin were going to live up to their reputation. Squadron Leader W.H. Dixon, D.F.C., a Halifax captain, said in his report of the raid: "Even on the route all the defences of Germany seemed to be awake. All the time on the journey in and out I could see bursts of flak in the sky and cones of searchlights. There were searchlights all round Berlin itself and I could see aircraft twisting and diving through them as they made their way in to bomb. But over Berlin itself the flak was not so bad as I had known it before."

Other captains of aircraft described how the bombing swamped the defences. "There were two great cones to the north of the city," one pilot said. "As I approached the target, soon after the bombing had begun, I saw the cones split up into separate beams. It looked as though the attack was too much for them." Another captain described how there seemed to be "a distinct track out through the barrage as a result of the bombing".

Squadron Leader Dixon was over Berlin for half an hour. "A minute or two after ten o'clock", he said. "I saw the first flares drop. At that time the target was dead clear and I could pick out the streets in Berlin and the river Spree. Then we circled round the city watching the attack develop. We saw bomber after bomber drop its load, and we watched the fires break out and spread until they became a great concentrated mass.

/Over

"Just before half past ten we made our bombing run, but by that time there were too many fires and explosions below for us to be able to pick out just what our own particular bombs had done. A minute or two later we turned for home. At that time I could see a large area in the centre of Berlin thick with fires. So much black smoke was coming up from them that I could no longer pick out the ground detail. Around this main area of fire there were still other fires burning and spreading."

On the route - especially on the way back - night fighters were up in great numbers and there were several encounters. A Halifax rear-gunner sergeant, A. Wright of **Blackpool**, defeated a single engined fighter. "When I saw it I warned the pilot to begin weaving," he said. "Then, as the fighter closed in and opened fire I let him have a long burst. His fire went wide, and I saw his aircraft burst into flames and go down with a streak of smoke behind him."

A few hours before one Wing Commander's Lancaster set out for Berlin a corporal in the ground crew had painted on the fuselage a picture of the Prime Minister smoking a cigar. But nobody had known then that the Lancaster was due for Berlin so soon. It was the Wing Commander's fourth attack on Berlin, "and much the most destructive of the four," he said. The Lancaster was hit by flak over the target, a shell fragment going through the cockpit and whizzing over the captain's shoulder. Ten minutes later, when the bombs had just gone, sparks and flames came out of one of the engines, and then it stopped altogether. The Lancaster however came back all the way on three engines and made a safe landing. "Naturally the Lancaster is 'W for Winston' now," the Wing Commander said.

Squadron Leader Eric Fowler, D.F.C. who flew as a navigator in a Stirling, said, "when we arrived over Berlin we saw below us that the main concentration of flames was in the centre of the city.

"In the distance we had seen the immense and grotesque lattice work of searchlights which surround Berlin but as we flew through them - and occasionally their blue light flickered across us - little flak came up.

"We could now see below us a fantastic and unforgettable scene. Against a blackcloth of flame, sometimes white from new incendiaries but more often growing red as the flames took hold of buildings, we could see hanging in the sky our own flares. And then the Germans sent up a firework, an orange ball, which exploded at 15,000 feet, dripping slowly down in orange streaks. The whole scene was surrounded by the probing searchlights.

"As we flew home we saw behind us the searchlights slowly flicker out. The raid was over. But the fires were still growing, throwing what seemed from a distance an absurdly soft light on to the smoke clouds above them."

This was Squadron Leader Fowler's 41st war flight and he told his story tonight on the wireless.