

A THOUSAND-TON RAID ON ESSEN

Although the defences of Essen were greatly increased since the raid on the night of March 5, our bombers reached their important industrial objectives last night with an even heavier load of bombs.

Nearly a thousand tons of bombs were dropped on March 5, when aircraft of Bomber Command devastated 450 acres of the greatest industrial city in the Ruhr, and hit 53 buildings in the Krupps works:

Last night more than 1,000 tons of incendiaries and high explosives were dropped.

All the crews were confident about the results of their bombing, and large fires were reported to be burning in Krupps.

Those taking part in the later stages of the raid described the target area as a solid rectangular mass of fires with smoke rising up to 15,000 feet.

Krupps works alone occupy 800 acres in the centre of Essen, an area equal to one and a quarter square miles, which is larger than that of the City of London.

And besides Krupps there are many other targets in Essen, including large chemical works, hydrogenation plants, and general engineering factories.

It is also a great railway centre, with marshalling, shunting and sorting yards, handling most of the traffic between Northern Germany and the Ruhr.

There are many coal mines round the town - the pit head installations of three of them were hit in the previous attack.

WALL OF LIGHT

Searchlights, in several huge cones, made a wall of light through the north of Essen. Intense flak was being fired up right into the summit of the cone.

"We got the impression that the defences were being very intelligently directed", a Lancaster captain said. "They were certainly ready for us, and everywhere I looked I could see other bombers lit up by the searchlights."

Almost every crew described how they saw other bombers twisting and turning in the searchlight cone, or how they themselves were caught by the beam.

But the bombing was so rapid and heavy that as the attack progressed the flak began to die away and the searchlights nearest to the target were gradually doused.

Along the route many fighters were up, and there were several engagements. A Stirling shot down a Me.110 and a Wellington destroyed a Ju.88.

"TRULY BLITZED"

Visibility in the Ruhr, generally thick in mist and industrial haze, was unusually good last night. There were no clouds.

Precisely at zero hour the first flares and bombs were dropped. Very soon afterwards, as a Halifax captain said, "There were thousands of incendiaries thickly distributed over the target area."

"There is no doubt," a squadron commander said, "that Essen was well and truly blitzed. The bombing was concentrated and exceedingly accurate. The fires could still be seen as a vivid glow when we were at the Dutch coast.

"In the ten minutes after 9.30 I saw four terrific explosions. Waves of flame rose to 500 feet and billowed out over the sky."

/THE USUAL DUMMY FIRES