

Air Ministry News Service

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THE ATTACK ON MAINZ

Specially picked crews circled over Mainz from start to finish of last night's attack, which lasted for forty-six minutes. It was their task to report on the whole progress of the attack and to watch the effective scourging of a German objective.

At 7 a.m. a reconnaissance aircraft was over Mainz to see the fires by daylight. The pilot reported dense black smoke rising to a height of 15,000 feet.

Hundreds of tons of bombs, including more than 50,000 incendiaries, were dropped in the attack.

Mainz is a commercial city, a railway centre and a river port. Situated where the River Main runs into the Rhine, it handles most of the grain traffic of the Rhine-Main area. There are sixty-four warehouses in the river port.

There are also important factories just outside the city and on the opposite bank of the Rhine.

Squadron Leader G.L.Cheshire, D.S.O., D.F.C., captain of a Halifax and of one of the picked crews who were over Mainz throughout the attack, has given his own account of what he saw.

"From the moment we left the English coast," he said, "until we reached the target the weather was excellent. There were a few clouds here and there but not enough to hide either the coast or the Rhine. There was no moon, but all the while among the bright stars we saw hundreds of falling meteors.

"The air was fantastically clear and consequently the searchlights were very active and powerful. But over the whole route from the French coast to the target, although frequently caught and held in the searchlights, we were never troubled by guns or fighters.

"As we came down the Rhine the night was black and cold. All around, we knew, there were dozens of aircraft hidden somewhere in the darkness, but to us the sky seemed empty, save for here and there a clump of searchlights or a few scattered flares from aircraft checking their position.

"The defences of Coblenz opened up on our aircraft while they were passing over.

"Somebody dropped a stick of flares across Mainz as we came in, and with that signal the attack started. Below us, outlined against the flares, we saw two Lancasters and a Halifax heading towards the target. We dropped our bombs, and at the same time a dozen or so other aircraft dropped theirs: then we circled round until the attack was over.

"Within four minutes of the first bomb dropping three large fires were raging, and by the end of the attack these had increased to more than we were able to count. For twenty minutes the pattern of bomb bursts flickered ceaselessly across the objective like the lights of a pin table. The blast of the explosions seemed literally to be rocking the ground beneath our eyes. It was indeed a memorable night."