

Air Ministry News ServiceAir Ministry Bulletin No. 7981DAYLIGHT RAID ON LE HAVRE AND ROUEN

Spitfire pilots saw bombs rain down on the targets when they escorted U.S. Army Air Force Bostons and Flying Fortresses which attacked Le Havre docks and Rouen marshalling yards this morning.

British, U.S. Army Air Force and Canadian pilots flew the Spitfires which escorted the Bostons. No sooner had they struck at Le Havre docks than a strong force of Fortresses, with British and Canadian fighter pilots in close attendance, were pounding at the important rail centre at Rouen.

Scores of Spitfires came over the French coast in diversionary sweeps, and for a time the sky over a triangular area between Le Havre, Rouen and Cayeux was dominated by Allied aircraft.

A large force of F.W.190s was sent up to attack the bombers, but they were beaten off and all the Bostons and Fortresses were brought safely home. In the numerous dog-fights between the fighters, two F.W.190s were destroyed, both by a Fighting French pilot operating with Fighter Command.

Six Spitfires are missing from these operations.

At one period of the attack on Rouen, ten F.W.190s tried to attack the Fortresses and at least one was damaged by a Spitfire, flown by a Belgian pilot.

"I watched them getting ready to attack," he said, "and I went for them with my No.2. After a chase I closed to within 80 yards of one of them and gave him a six-second burst. There were strikes and he rolled on his back and dived down. Just then I was attacked by an F.W. and had to break away."

Fighting French pilots, in a diversionary sweep between Cayeux and Le Treport, had a terrific battle with about 15 F.W.190s. The pilot of the Ile de France squadron who shot down two, said, "I chased four F.Ws. eventually picking out one. He went crashing in flames into the sea.

"I was then alone and was making for England when I saw an F.W.190 about 100 yards behind a damaged Spitfire. I attacked and the enemy burst into flames, spinning downwards from 3,000 feet."

Spitfire pilots who escorted the Fortresses saw sheets of flame leaping up through thick smoke.

"The bombers were able to take their time over the target," said one of the pilots afterwards. "We saw a hit on an engine shed and many other bomb bursts in the marshalling yards. Though we were flying pretty high the bombing looked very good.

"On the way home we saw a number of F.W.190s coming up to attack the bombers but they were driven off. Some of our chaps damaged two of the F.Ws., one of which had its wing tip shot off."

Pilots of a Polish wing which supported the Bostons reported that bombs burst on either side of the Bassin Bellot at Le Havre and several fires broke out.