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THE HEAVIEST RAID ON BERLIN

Smoke Three Miles High

Last night's attack on Berlin was twice as heavy as any that the capital has ever had.

"There was a good deal of cloud along the route", said one pilot, "but it cleared before we reached Berlin, and visibility was first-rate over the target. We were not among the first to arrive and as we came out of the cloud, we could see the glow of the fires burning in the capital. Smoke was coming up quickly, and by the time we bombed, it must have reached a height of over 15,000 feet."

An experienced pilot, who has taken part in most of the big raids on the Ruhr as well as the attacks on Hamburg, said that what impressed him most was the comparative lightness of the flak.

"I don't quite know what we expected," he said. "We knew that the Germans would have to do everything they could to defend Berlin, and as we set off I thought to myself that there would be more guns around the place than we had even encountered before."

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"It wasn't until we were right over Berlin that I realised the reason. The Germans had put up swarms of fighters. I've never seen so many before. There were about 20 belts of searchlights inside the capital and around it, - and these were co-operating with the fighters. We streaked across the beams as fast as we could go and the searchlights came after us, chasing us across the sky. We got through them all right and, just as we were going to bomb, a fighter came for us and I had to take evasive action. Fights were going on all over the place."

The rear-gunner of a Halifax, whose aircraft was one of the first to attack, said that the guns did not open up until the bombing had actually begun.

"We did not see any flak at all until we had finished our bombing run," he said, "and even when the ground gunners did start, their fire was not particularly heavy. But there were numerous fighters, some of them flying with their navigation lights on."

The pilot of a Stirling spoke of a huge explosion that occurred as he was making his way out of the target area. "It seemed right in the centre of the city," he said, "and must have been something really big."