

SEVEN SQUARE MILES OF DEVASTATION

Through storm and cloud, aircraft of Bomber Command last night went out to continue the Battle of Hamburg - a battle greater even in intensity and ferocity than the Battle of the Ruhr.

By this, the fourth shattering night attack within little more than a week, the Royal Air Force brought the great battle nearer to a decisive stage.

The large force of bombers flew last night to the port in which an area of seven square miles - nearly 4,500 acres - had already been devastated by the earlier R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. attacks - an area equal to almost seven times the area of the City of London.

Even before last night's attack the damage to Hamburg, Germany's largest port and second largest city and the building centre of nearly one-third of all the U-boats, was unparalleled in the history of air war.

The earlier raids caused great damage in the central part of the city and in the dock area - particularly in the Grasbrook, Billwader Ausschlag, and St. Georg districts.

The weight of the attack of 29/30 July fell on the north, east and south east areas of the city.

Fires were still burning in Hamburg last Sunday, 60 hours after the third heavy night attack. The great clouds of smoke had blown away and it was at last possible for the photographic interpretations departments to make a detailed assessment of damage. It will be a long time before this is finished and a full count made of all the industrial damage, but it is already known that many important factories, in addition to those already announced, have been hit and severely damaged.

A violent thunderstorm was going on in the upper air while our bombers were attacking Hamburg again last night. "It was impossible to tell which was flak and which was lightning," a pilot said. "Along the route almost all the way from the English coast to the target there had been clouds and rainstorms."

"We were met at the German coast by a heavy barrage from the guns," said a Lancaster pilot, Sgt. S. Hall, of Shrewsbury. "All the time blue electric flames were playing round the gun barrels and the propellor tips. Now and again there were blinding flashes of lightning, very near to the aircraft."

But there were gaps in the clouds over the target and through these our crews saw fires. Some of them came below the clouds to bomb. A Lancaster captain came right down, clearly identified the docks of Hamburg, and reported fires spreading in the area. Others saw smoke coming up from the target.

"After passing the enemy coast we met thunder clouds," said one pilot. "The anvil tops were 30,000 feet high. We found a valley between two of the tops and went on at a reasonable height. Then ice began to form on the aircraft, and we went down to less than 10,000 feet, below the base of the clouds. Heavy and light flak was coming up and we dropped our bombs on the fires we saw in the port."

Flak and searchlights were hampered by the weather, but night fighters drove through the storm to intercept the bombers over the target. One Halifax was attacked four times by a Me109 and twice by a Ju.88. The pilot outmanoeuvred both fighters, and after landing, the ground crew found very slight damage to the aircraft from flak.

While the battle of Hamburg was proceeding, Renscheid, a town less than a tenth of the size of Hamburg, was attacked on the night of July 30. Photographs of this important steel and engineering centre on the outskirts of the Ruhr now give a picture of great devastation. Industrial plants form a high proportion of the damage. Among those which have been hit are the Bergische Stahlindustrie, making special alloys for aircraft and aero engines; the main works of Alexander A. Von Der Nahmer, A.G., producing special machinery for the chemical industry and for agriculture; a branch of the Mannesmann Rohren-Werke; and the Lindenburg steel works. The main railway station and the main post office have been hit.

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