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FIGHTER FLEET CLEARED PATH FOR U.S. BOMBERS

Three hundred aircraft of Fighter Command today co-operated with a large force of U.S.A.A.C. heavy bombers which bombed targets at Rouen.

For four and a half hours relays of fighter squadrons crossed and recrossed the Channel, clearing the path of the bombers of enemy fighters.

There were many combats and four F.W.190s were destroyed and several more damaged.

Polish pilots who took part in the operation need only three more enemy aircraft destroyed to top the 500 mark, but they were out of luck and could not get near enough to any to force a combat.

Meanwhile, a Belgian and an Australian squadron sought enemy fighters in the Dunkerque-Ypres-St. Omer-Sangatte area.

When recrossing the French coast near Sangatte the Belgians were attacked by 25 to 30 F.W.s. Although outnumbered, they damaged some of the enemy.

One F.W.190 attacked by a Belgian flight lieutenant disappeared into cloud on its back with smoke pouring from it. A flying officer became separated from the squadron and climbed to 28,000 feet. He saw two F.W.s below and attacked one, seeing large pieces of engine cowling fly off.

Diving to rejoin the squadron, he met six more F.W.s at 15,000 feet and dived to sea level. He had to fight on the way down and although his aircraft was hit in the engine, wings, ailerons and tail, he damaged one of his attackers and got home safely.

The rest of the squadron, outnumbered by three to one, formed a defensive circle at 25,000 to 27,000 feet, and drove off the remainder of the attackers.

/About

"About 30 Huns came at us", said a flight commander later. "While some F.W.s stayed above, others dived on us in pairs from both sides of our formation. We had a fight lasting ten minutes, and then broke away and, weaving like mad, we got out all right.

"The pilot who was separated from us had an exciting time. He fought for several thousand feet and although a cannon shell exploded behind his cockpit and his aircraft had many holes in the fuselage and wings, he was not hurt."

Two Canadian squadrons and a New Zealand squadron carried out a sweep in the Dunkirk-Gravelines area.

While these sweeps were in progress, the main force of bombers were speeding south on a course some miles to the west of Abbeville, covered by British, Polish, Norwegian, Fighting French and Canadian formations.

Supporting the bombers after their bombing, one squadron destroyed three enemy aircraft.

The squadron commander said: "We were flying several thousand feet above the bombers and were in a good position. Six F.W.190s came in, but we were able to prevent their attack and sent them off home.

"Then, some miles out to sea, on the way to England, we ran into another bunch. As the F.W.190s dived on to the bombers, we went after them and several of our combats finished practically at sea level.

"The Hun at which I fired, dived vertically through cloud at about 1,000 feet, but I did not see what happened to him. One of my flight commanders sent a F.W.190 on fire into the sea and the other flight commander attacked a F.W.190 which he saw go into the water.

"Another of the squadron pilots came across two F.W.190s low down. He went to attack one which took evasive action by half rolling and diving vertically. My pilot went after him. The Hun never pulled out of the dive and went straight into the sea. And my pilot had **not** fired a shot!"

Pilots of a Fighting French squadron who were also helping to escort the bombers back destroyed one F.W.190 and damaged two others without loss.

/A member

A member of the squadron said "We came across a number of F.W.190s which appeared to be trying to attack the bombers head-on. The F.Ws saw us and dived underneath the bombers. A fight began near Rouen where one of our pilots forced the pilot of an F.W.190 to bale out".

In addition to this big operation Fighter Command aircraft made small-scale raids over occupied territory. Two F.W.190s were destroyed by a crippled Spitfire off the Dutch coast.

A D.F.C. flying officer, 25-year-old native of Durban, South Africa, was the successful pilot and he owes his pair of victories to engine trouble which caused him to lag behind his three colleagues.

"We were returning after having attacked barges and gun emplacements in Holland", said the squadron leader afterwards. "As we were passing over an enemy convoy we saw about seven F.W.190s wheeling round. We had used almost all our ammunition in attacking our targets and consequently were beating it for home.

"Suddenly, one of the enemy swooped down on the Spitfire which unknown to us was straggling behind. He immediately got in a burst, however, which sent the F.W. into the sea. Then he made for cloud cover with his engine still missing and as he came out he saw another F.W.190. Although by now he had very little ammunition left he attacked and his accurate fire sent the second enemy fighter into the 'drink'.

"It was a grand job of work by our crippled straggler" added the squadron leader.

The Spitfires of this squadron were presented by Gold Coast people.

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